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The Making of Jordanian American National Identity in Michigan

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THE MAKING OF JORDANIAN AMERICAN
NATIONAL IDENTITY IN MICHIGAN

by

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This thesis explores the making of Jordanian American national identity in Michigan. Moreover, it examines the notion of national identity in transnational spaces in relation to what Brian Schiff has metaphorically referred to as "cultural currents," comprised of values, symbols, political philosophies, habits, etc. of social actors. How do various cultural currents influence the way in which people talk and think about themselves in national terms? Why is national identity a meaningful concept, and how is it influenced by culture and ethnicity? To what degree do entities such as the state hold influence over national identity, especially in the case of Jordan which was created by colonial powers as a Levantine buffer state in the mid-twentieth century? What role does history play in the construction of national identity on the transnational level? This paper argues that Jordanian American identity in Michigan is being made within conflicting American currents, some of which are inherently anti-Arab. National identity-making processes are examined in the context of southeast Michigan's concentrated Arab community, and in light of inconstant definitions of "Jordanian" and "Palestinian" in Jordan itself.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

My initial encounters with the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, Jordanians and indeed anthropology were both fortuitous and concurrent. I was an undergraduate student majoring in English looking to fill credits for a geography minor that became—during my tenure as an undergraduate student—defunct. I was offered an opportunity to study with an archaeology team in Jordan one summer and earn enough credits in anthropology to fulfill the minor's requirements. At the time, I knew nothing about Jordan but enough about archaeology to know that digging in the dirt was not for me. Øystein LaBianca, director of the archaeology project and himself an erudite ethnoarchaeologist, offered to set me up with an ideal ethnography project in a Jordanian village that would ultimately benefit both my own research and that of the archaeological expedition. I was allowed to live with the archaeologists (a minor thrill, I confess), but had the freedom to conduct participant observation in the village (Dhamraq) in what became a baptism-by-fire ethnographic field school of one (a surprisingly awesome experience). It was from these first ethnographic field experiences that I became immersed and profoundly interested in Jordanian, Palestinian and, moreover, Arab lifeways.

When I returned to Michigan, I was much more attuned to any media reports about Jordan, the Middle East and Arabs. Before my first experience in Jordan, I

scarcely realized that I was living just across the state from the largest concentration of people of Arab descent in North America (in the Greater Detroit region, i.e. Dearborn). It took a chance trip to the Middle East to raise my awareness about Arabs and Arab Americans. Up to then, I had naively relied on stereotypes and the Western media's interpretation of Arabs and the Middle East to form my own conclusions about sensitive regional issues involving Arabs such as the Israeli-Palestinian crisis, oil economies, the Persian Gulf war, and so forth. Due in no small part to the negative reactions I encountered when talking about my experiences with friends and family, I suddenly realized that most Americans were similar to me in their understandings of Arabs and Arab Americans.

"Why would you want to study Arabs?" "Muslims hate Christians, right?" "Aren't you afraid for your safety?" "Don't they chop off your hand if you steal something?" "Arabs are strange, aren't they?" were all common questions I faced when people discovered my newfound interest in cultures of the Middle East. It is to these widespread misconceptions that I answer, in part, with this work. I will examine national identity in the context of both Jordan and southeast Michigan. Theoretically, I will discuss how we may begin to look at national identity in transnational spaces.

Why Jordanians? Why Arab Americans? Why National Identity?

Jordanians in general are arguably the least understood Arabs in the Middle East and the wider world. Only two American cultural anthropologists of significance, Richard Antoun and Andrew Shryock, have published and continue to publish their work on and about Jordanian peoples. Linda Layne has published a short but erudite

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study of national and tribal identities in Jordan (1994), though she no longer works on Jordanian or identity issues. Thus, there is a wide gap in the anthropological literature about Jordanians and Jordanian society in general. In the transnational context, virtually nothing has been published regarding statistical, political, economic or cultural nuances in Jordanian American communities. Antoun (1999) and Shyrock have only recently begun to publish their work in that regard, and it has yet to reach genuine fruition.

Given the world's attention on the United States' policy and interventions in the Arab Middle East, and the foundational and growing misconceptions about Arabs among large sectors of American society, there is a need for better understandings of often misrepresented and misunderstood Arab American communities. I believe that by thinking about our own neighbors in a more productive and enlightened way (that is, by not lending credence to deeply embedded stereotypes and ethnic archetypes propagated by lazy, racist, biased Western media), we may better understand the places, people and cultures that are the Arabs and the Middle East.

While there has been a multitude of studies about Arab Americans, most of these studies have focused on religion (Elkholy 1966), assimilation and cultural adaptation (Abraham and Abraham 1981; Naff 1985; Suleiman 1999), historical processions and early experiences (Mehdi 1978; Naff 1985; Hooglund 1987), and immigrant settlement (Aswad 1974; Abraham and Abraham 1983). One edited volume has been concerned with the development of Arab American identity

(McCarus 1994), though it focuses primarily on the aforementioned topics and does not tackle issues of national identity.

Only one significant if somewhat uneven edited volume, *Arab Detroit: From Margin to Mainstream*, has been published about the Arab American communities in southeast Michigan (Abraham and Shyrock 2000). This is the first work to address issues consequential to transnational processes among Arab communities outside of the Middle East, though the essays do not identify the processes as such and few are argued critically. The significance of this work lies in its adherence to a theme—the processes involved as Arab Americans in the Detroit area are moving from the margins of American culture into mainstream America—and how that theme manifests itself in everyday life in southeast Michigan. I build upon arguments raised by the books editors, Nabeel Abraham and Andrew Shryock.

Anthropologists have traditionally talked about national identity in terms of nationalism and the state, and not in terms of local culture. Nationalism in Jordan has been all but bypassed in anthropological studies, and even less has been written about national identity in Jordan (see Layne 1994; Shryock 1997 for exceptions). Most of the scholarship on national identity in and of Jordan has been authored by political scientists (Massad 2001; Lynch 1999), as seems to be the case with most studies on national identity in the Arab Middle East in general (see Khalidi 1997; Lesch 1998). Anthropologists are left, then, with very little in the way of literature about national identity in and of Arab countries by other anthropologists, and with nothing that examines Jordanian American national identity.

In light of the importance of transnational studies in anthropology and across the disciplines (see Glick Schiller, Basch and Blanc-Szanton 1992), research on national identities in expatriate and immigrant communities around the world serves to demonstrate how people on the move continue to think of themselves in terms of their national origin and the place(s) to which they migrate and live. Such studies need not focus exclusively on immigrants themselves; indeed, my study refers in general to how transnational processes might affect first, second and even third generations of Arabs in Michigan.

In writing about the making of Jordanian American national identity, I have specifically sought not to essentialize a group of people or to demean the viability of distinctness and self-identity claimed by Jordanian Americans. My intention has not been to write about people from a distance in order to encapsulate them so as to make assumptions and judgments about their character or culture. I recognize the history of anthropology, such as the national character studies of the mid-twentieth century, that might lead one to such a conclusion about the present work, and it is in recognizing the discipline's own history that I offer this caveat. The ethnographic distance one may feel in reading this is a result of methodological constraints as described below, and not derivative of adverse intentions on my part.

Methodological Constrictions: Arabs at the Margins in America

What I call the "new September 11 narrative" (see chapter three)—involving deeply embedded anti-Arab racism and a fervent American jingoism—to some degree ordained the way in which research for this project was conducted. I did not enjoy the

kind of access one would hope for in a study of this nature. My Arab American contacts in southeastern Michigan advised me that heightened tensions surrounding America's "war on terrorism" and the 2003 war in Iraq precluded many otherwise willing Arab American participants from speaking with me. The nature of the fieldwork I conducted was very much touch-and-go according to the happenings on any given day with respect to the overall American "war on terrorism."

It is important to note that while my access was limited, I was able to conduct several in-depth interviews with both prominent and other Jordanian Americans in Michigan. In chapter four, for instance, I describe my experiences on an Arabic call-in radio talk show and in an interview with the show's host, which are illustrative of the tangible, negative effects that the new September 11 narrative has had in Michigan. Due in part to the reaction (or lack thereof) to this show, I became aware fairly early in my research that participant-observation was not going to be an adequate methodology. I needed to employ an ethnographic methodology that allowed me to still emphasize the importance of social actors and circumstances as they are played out "on the ground" while considering the inherent difficulties of conducting field research during times of large-scale crises for Arab Americans, and the world in general.

Concerning my overall methodology, then, I have employed a type of historical ethnography that involves encounters with only a few individuals, and thus provides few ethnographic details about happenings in specific places as is consistent with classic anthropological monographs. Instead, I have offered a critical analysis of the

history involved and how it is engaged in the contexts in which Jordanian American national identity is made. I have interspersed this analysis with some ethnographic accounts from Jordan and the United States.

I argue that such a methodology allows for a broader consideration of what it means to be of Arab descent in the United States—specifically in southeast Michigan—today. That is, by examining the specific narratives, institutions and events, for example, in which Jordanian American identity is created, we may begin to think about the people involved in these processes as dynamic, unique and creative. I believe it is more useful to offer a study of this kind at this time, than—say—a series of purely ethnographic anecdotes about immigration experiences or life histories of a few individuals, because it proposes a beginning framework for thinking about other national identities in transnational contexts, which I believe has heretofore been lacking in the discipline.

Other anthropologists have suggested that historical ethnography of this kind is a practical means to address wide-ranging effects of the activities of many people in many places "not readily discernible from any single location in either time or space" (Des Chene 1997). Mary Des Chene (1997: 80) is also careful to point out that criticism of this methodology is often leveled at its neglect of variations "knowable only through close study of particular cases, and thus its general claims are not well grounded." However, as I will argue, the variations of how, why and when social actors engage historical narratives in the making of national identity is inherent in the nuances of "culture" which lend themselves to solid critique. It is through these

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critiques that one comes to better understand individualized social and indeed national groups such as Jordanian Americans.

Indeed, the whole notion of what compromises "the field" in anthropology has recently undergone a significant critique within the discipline (see Gupta and Ferguson 1997a, 1997b). Thus, while I primarily focus upon the social context of Michigan as the *place* in which Jordanian Americans are engaged in national identity-making, I have drawn upon a variety of historical, ethnographic and popular sources in considering the "fieldwork" conducted for this project. My intention has not been to provide a comprehensive interpretation or ethnographic documentation of how Jordanian American national identity is made and maintained, but rather to provide some historical insight into Jordanian national identity in general and the context in which "Jordanian American" as a national identity is being formed and realized in Michigan today.

Future ethnographic work in this context might benefit from a methodology Brian Schiff (2003) employed in interviewing Arab students at Hebrew University, which involved extensive interviews of opportunity in a ethnopolitically-charged environment (Jerusalem) with a relatively small sample size (sixteen people). Schiff argues that (2003: 285):

> "The strength of this [methodology] lies in the ability to uncover patterns evident in particular lives and to describe a common pattern across numerous interviews…. Such an approach allows us to move beyond the limits of identity labels in survey data in order to consider the processes inherent in making

identity. The result is a complex interpretation of lives rather than the percentage of people who give themselves one-, two-, or three-word labels." This complex interpretation of lives, as Schiff puts it, is where the future of identity studies lies. Labels themselves are unimportant and impotent; it is in the discovery of what comprises those labels and how they are imbued with meaning by an individual and others, that is important. Following this route, the anthropologist is better equipped to determine changes in historical narratives in transnational environments, and how such changes might ultimately affect social processes, including the making of national identity.

CHAPTER II

NATIONAL IDENTITY IN TRANSNATIONAL SPACES

National identity, as Akhil Gupta put it, appears to be a "'natural'" marker of cultural and social difference—"firmly spatialized and seemingly immutable" (1997: 180). National identity, he argues, becomes particularly problematic in the face of transnational processes. In a transnational world, who is associated with a particular nationality at any given time, and what are the processes that render and augment this association in a transnational context? When are individual relationships with national identity fomented? Who does the associating and for what purposes?

The notion of an "immutable link between cultures, people or identities and specific places" is arguably hard for anthropologists to overcome, since matching seemingly unambiguous national borders with identities has been a customary anthropological endeavor (Lavie and Swedenburg 1996: 1). In reality, though, identities *are* ambiguous; they're overlapping, contradictory, and difficult to conceptualize and articulate. Political boundaries cannot be assumed to correlate naturally with those that live inside those borders. And yet, while scholars may agree that national identity is malleable, it must also, to some degree, be fixed since national identity has meaningful implications in people's lives.

Most scholars seem to agree, quite correctly, that identity in general is a multivocal concept (Wertsch 1991). That is, identity is comprised of various voices

that are dissimilar from one another but yet concurrently work together to form how and why people talk about themselves, and how others talk about them. Initially, this raises an uncertainty as to how the various voices of a given identity work together. Perhaps they are braided together in the same manner Arjun Appadurai proposes for his "-scapes," with ethnoscapes and ideoscapes and so on all intermetshing to form, finally, a cultural system (Appadurai 1991). Here I am not offering a direct comparison of the "-scapes" with aspects of identity, but rather am proposing a model of actual mechanics through which transnational processes may be understood in the course of identity making and maintenance (see Blanc-Szanton, Basch and Glick Schiller 1995).

Identity is ascribed and subscribed to, created and maintained, based on individual understandings of history and the self. These understandings are deciphered through various cultural institutions such as marriage, economics, religion, law and so forth—institutions that locate the self in a finite—but broader than individual—context. Therefore, if identity can be thought of as being "made"—that is, involving active social agency whether by the individual or through a hierarchy such as the state, in its making—then we may begin thinking about identity itself as a cultural construction, involving flexile but systematic processes. National identity on the transnational level, then, necessarily involves more cultural systems in its making than national identity in one particular place, as I argue later.

Thinking of national identities as multivocal creations raises a few uncertainties: Are the voices that comprise identities variable or fixed? Should they be

seen as markers of a cohesive unity or as makers of difference? According to Stuart

Hall, identities are "more the product of the marking of difference and exclusion, than

they are the sign of an identical, naturally-constituted unity" because they are fomented

in specific historical and institutional circumstances and through particular discursive

formations and practices (1996: 4). These historical and institutional circumstances

are the cultural influences that fix identities in narratives that are recognized and

regularly modeled by social actors in any context. As I will argue in chapter three, for

example, the American narrative in which Jordanian American identity is made—in

light of recent events—has greatly influenced the national identity-making process for

Jordanian Americans in Michigan.

The State and the Nation

"Culture" and "nation" are two dominant and important voices (or concepts)

for those concerned with national identity theory, though the relationship between

these concepts has not been adequately addressed, especially in light of transnational

processes. National labels such as "Jordan" or "Mauritius," for example, are used by

actors in a transnational context as signifiers of culture, of which national sentiment

may or may not be a part, and if such sentiment is present it is not necessarily related

to the national label invoked. It is one mode of survival in the world system, in terms

of both inter-state relations (think France and French nationalism in the European

Union), and of individuals competing for resources in a transnational context.

Self-declarations in the name of a state (such as "I am a Jordanian") also do

not reflect the ethnic and cultural tensions that exist within that state, nor do they

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attest to the implications of subscribing to an all-encompassing identity. Western conceptions of national identity often conflate citizenship and national sentiment. In Jordan, citizenship is often the only means of mobility for the majority population of Palestinians (see chapter five for a discussion of this). As we shall see, the consequences of just who is "Jordanian" and who is "Palestinian" are significant in Jordan and may not be evident on the transnational level. Similarly, non-immigrant Arab Americans (those that are second and third generations born in the United States) who self-identify as Jordanian Americans may only do so because of cultural and ethnic sentiments toward a larger kinship network whose members live in many different countries. Thus, the "Jordanian" voice in their self-identity is evocative of a cultural sentiment, while their national sentiment may be "American," yet together they form a composite national identity.

In his fieldwork on Mauritius, Thomas Eriksen describes this as an "us" and "we" predicament: "Mauritians are... Mauritian in relation to what others see ["us-hood"]. Seen from the perspective of the collectivity of we (that is, the system view from within), Mauritians tend to experience... daily multiethnicity as a perpetual cause of anxiety and frustration" (1994: 566). Indeed, daily multi*culturalism* is a perpetual cause of frustration and anxiety in Jordan, as I will discuss later. The issue at hand is how these frustrations and anxieties manifest themselves in transnational communities. Are Jordanian Americans and Palestinian Americans in a similar competition for recognition and resources in Michigan as they are in the Levant? Or is "Arab

American" the primary community in which people of Arab descent form their national identities in Michigan? If the latter was true, would it render state identities irrelevant?

Gupta calls attention to the "structures of feelings that bind people together" in systems that supercede nations and/or crosscut national boundaries such as the Nonaligned Movement and the European Union (1997: 181). These entities, Gupta argues, are good examples of transnational communities. His argument should be extended to include those strongest of transnational feelings which are informally structured around ethnicity. Such informal ethnic structures predicate nationalist movements like pan-Arabism.

Pan-Arabism suggests a unification of Arabs as a people who share multiple ethnic and cultural similarities. Today it is the idea that sustains ethnic patriotism not to just a particular state, or a unified Arab nation as in Nasser's time, but to Arabism writ large. It is the driving force behind Arab unity, and implies that Arabs share a common ethnicity, whether or not that is actually the case. For instance, Djiboutians and Comorese are all considered Arabs under the umbrella of pan-Arabism, despite the fact that they are not included in most representations of "the Arab Middle East." Of course, citizenship in a particular state does not automatically make one Arab, and so a widely-held belief in certain parts of the Middle East (namely the Arabian Gulf states) assumes importance in determining Arab ethnicity. It holds that "true Arabs" can trace their genealogy to one of several tribes originating in the Arabian peninsula, the "true Arabia," even though large portions of the modern Arab world are unequivocally non-tribal. Thus, the defining feature of pan-Arabism today seems to be the common

language of Arabic, not membership in a particular state or adherence to particular religion or even genealogy. States themselves are not rendered irrelevant in this development of Arab identity, as many of the Arab states were formed in conjunction with the development of a pan-Arab identity, especially in the case of Jordan as discussed below.

The identity marker "Arab," then—while a vital voice in Jordanian or Iraqi or Djiboutian identity—is an intrinsically transnational national identity, referring to a greater Arab nation that is not regionally specific but has members across the globe. Yet pan-Arabism does not sequester specific national identities within Arab states or on the transnational level, as in Arab Detroit. Indeed, Abraham and Shryock argue that individual national identities are important for actors to become part of American culture: "Learning to speak about and for themselves is how Arab Detroiters, *as individuals*, enter the American mainstream" (Abraham and Shryock 2000: 28). Thus, self-identity as "Jordanian American" appears to be crucial in order for people of Jordanian nationality or descent to enter mainstream America. The state identity of "Jordan" is important; however, the context in which such an identity is invoked is of more importance than the actual sentiment connected with the state, in examining the processes involved in the making of national identity.

How people talk about themselves (self-identity) is of supreme interest to anthropologists because such talk necessarily involves social agency and the negotiation of multiple cultural influences. In other words, national identity cannot be assumed to be naturally occurring or endowed at birth. Rather, it is actively made by

individuals in given contexts. Brian Schiff has coined the expression, "identity-talk" to refer to the "articulation of a sense of collected selfhood in words" (2003: 279). In his work with Arab students at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, Schiff argues that identity-talk among the Arab students was and is strongly influenced by social relationships, as it is these relationships that manage the cultural meanings that one may "attribute to the self and articulate in narrative" (2003: 280). This highlights the importance of examining diasporic communities such as Jordanians in Michigan in the context of concentrated transnational ethnic communities, in this case communities of Arabs in America (Abraham, Abraham and Aswad 1983) and Arab American communities, and in the context of an even greater multicultural community (Detroit, Michigan, the United States), by shedding light on the consequences of the social relationships that are formed within these environments.

When I began to look at Jordanian American national identity in Michigan, I was told by one prominent scholar on Arab Americans, Frank, that my efforts would be futile... that there are not "enough" Jordanians in Michigan, or more importantly, that they are not well-established, that Jordanian Americans do not exhibit cultural structures and systems that are readily identifiable as they are among, for instance, Lebanese American communities in southeast Michigan. What Frank was telling me was that Jordanian clubs, businesses and social-political and economic networks do not exist as they do for Lebanese and Palestinian communities, and because Jordanian Americans do not exhibit recognizable or publicly cohesive social structures, making such a distinction was at best futile. This quick dismissal on Frank's part fueled my

interest in Jordanian American identity and also provided me with a side objective, which was to prove him wrong.

Ahmed in America

Ahmed came to the United States twenty-five years ago from Jordan as a student. I know some of Ahmed's family back in Dhamraq, Jordan—the rural village from which he came; I was able to meet him in Michigan through our mutual acquaintances in Jordan. Ahmed hails from one of three prominent families that have traditionally settled in Dhamraq. After earning his degree in engineering from the University of Detroit, Ahmed went back to Jordan briefly to marry his wife. He moved her back to the US, and in the process gained American citizenship. He now has five children—all boys—ranging in ages from one to twelve. Ahmed has lived in Michigan longer than he lived in Jordan.

Now living in Dearborn, an immediate suburb of Detroit which is also home to the largest concentration of people of Arab descent in North America, Ahmed recently sold his gas station business in a northern suburb to pursue real estate. Having been in the US for twenty-five years, he is well-connected in the Arab American and Jordanian American communities. Indeed, he can be considered a community leader among Jordanian Americans in Dearborn (there are other concentrations of Jordanians living around Livonia and Lathrup Village—also cities in suburban Detroit).

Ahmed has returned to Jordan for visits twice since he had children. He hasn't gone more often—he laments—because of the high price of airline tickets and trip expenses (hotel, food, etc.), which for a family of seven can total more than $30,000.

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On those trips back to the "homeland," as he calls it, Ahmed has enjoyed staying with his family, and marveled but at the same time mourned the development that has taken place since he lived there.

"I remember Jordan as I left it 1979. There was no electricity in [Dhamraq]. Once, the last time I was there, the electricity went out for ten minutes. My family was scrambling to find the gas lamps and candles to brighten the room—I was in no rush for light. It was the still, calm blackness that I remembered about living there. That brief lapse in power triggered so many memories of the old country," Ahmed recounted for me. His memory of Jordan is fixed in a particular time in history, before phones and electricity had reached Dhamraq. Moreover, his remembrances of people are also fixed in a particular time. For instance, he could not believe that I was friends with the sons of his former schoolteacher, who today, after becoming a school principal, is on the brink of retirement. "He was my teacher when I was younger! Just starting out!" Ahmed recalled.

Memories of the homeland are indicative of how transmigrants fix part of their national identity in the historical past from which they came. Ahmed is not naïve of the fact that Jordan has changed, and is changing, since he left. Indeed, he keeps abreast on the news through two Arab satellite signals, the Internet and news from relatives in Dhamraq. Yet Jordan for Ahmed is what he left behind in 1979, and it is what he thinks of when he thinks of himself as a Jordanian in Michigan. Below, I examine Brian Schiff's use of the term "cultural currents" to examine in greater depth

how Jordanian Americans incorporate notions of the homeland, Jordan, into their transnational identities.

National Identity and Cultural Influences

According to Brian Schiff, the Arab students at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem are concurrently influenced by social relationships and what Schiff terms "metaphorical *streams* or *currents* of thoughts" that are derived from cultural and social groups comprised of both Palestinian and Israeli "values, symbols, cultural practices, political philosophies, styles of social interaction, habits and fashions" (Schiff 2003: 279), in addition to other influential currents such as pan-Arabism, nationalism, "modernism" and Islamism. I make a similar case for Jordanians in Michigan by arguing that the formation of Jordanian American national identity is influenced through negotiations of three such currents: An American current, a Jordanian current, and an Arab current, which I will describe in detail in later chapters.[1]

As I argued above, cultural sentiment vis-à-vis Jordan comprises a large part of "Jordanian American" as a national identity. However, individual actors selectively negotiate and modify the Jordanian cultural practices, values, habits et cetera that they express in Michigan. Similarly, they also selectively negotiate American political philosophies, fashions, and social interactions in concert with the Jordanian current. Finally, Jordanian Americans also negotiate national identity through pan-Arabism writ large in addition to Michigan's Arab communities, which was discussed above.

These decisions and negotiations by social actors must not be understood as arbitrary, as if selecting foodstuffs from a smorgasbord; rather, I reemphasize Stuart Hall's point that identities are historically and institutionally situated (1996). Thus, national identities must be thought of as malleable to the extent that they are a outgrowth of, a sentiment toward, and a set of feelings about the time and place in which one is living. Sentiment is generally depreciated in national identity studies because it initially seems superficial and capricious, but I argue that it is central to an understanding of the ways in which people make sense out of who and what they are. The fourth edition of *Webster's New World College Dictionary* (2001) defines sentiment as "a complex combination of feelings and opinions as a basis for action or judgment; general emotionalized attitude." Webster's definition suggests that sentiment is *not* frivolous or arbitrary and that it is the predicate for action. Sentiment, then, is essential to the making of national identity; the context in which sentiments themselves are influenced directly modifies the way in which national identity is conceived by social actors.

It seems convenient to neglect the fact that most studies about identity are written from the top down. That is, even the most scholarly notions about identity in general tend to be nested in Western archetypes and ethnic ideals, imposed and inscribed from above. Jordan, for instance, was created by the British as a buffer state with—fairly arbitrary—borders between Palestine and Iraq, and Syria and the Arabian Peninsula, after World War I. It had been characterized by British explorers as "unruly" and "ungovernable" until the arrival of and establishment of power by King

Abdullah in the early 1920s (Salibi 1993). Jordanian as a national identity, then, was conceived in conjunction with this newly created emirate in the desert. Pan-Arabism *was* the driving force behind identity-making in the Levant, as originally King Abdullah (himself an alien to the Transjordanian territory, a Meccan hailing from the Hijaz)—in concert with pan-Arab idealism—sought to make the new country of Jordan the home of every Arab. Consider the following statement by King Abdullah, quoted in Salibi (1993: 93):

> I do not wish to see any among you identify themselves by geographical region. I wish to see everyone, rather, trace his descent to the Arabian peninsula, from which we all originate. All the Arab countries are the country of every Arab.

It is within this pan-Arab environment, then, that the beginnings of Jordanian identity may be better understood. That is, King Abdullah's rhetorical vision of Jordan was, at its inception, a country less concerned about its geographical identity and more concerned about its ethnic makeup.

Initially, the British were the ones occupied with national identity in Jordan. The development of the world system of inter-state relations and the rise of states in the Arab Middle East contributed to the evolution of a Jordanian nationalism based on the inclusion of some and the exclusion of others. This inevitably leads to the question: If all Arabs were truly one under the ideals of pan-Arabism, even according to Jordan's first king, how did Arab states come to be exclusionary and those living within their boundaries develop national identities with political-geographic

significance? Most probably due to the colonial effects of not only the British but the Ottomans and those before them, that served to divide Semitic land and parcel it out based on naturalized notions of place in colonialist narratives that were continuously propagated by monarchs that colonialists installed.

This leads me to a discussion of the importance of Jordanian history, vis-à-vis tribalism, in the making of national identity on both the national and transnational levels, and how such histories may be understood as relevant and significant in the processes whereby social actors make and maintain national identity.

CHAPTER III

"IN JORDAN WE HAVE MANY TRIBES"

In Jordan, representations of what I call "Jordanianess" have typically been couched in terms of tribal culture, particularly of traditional Bedouin lifesways. Linda Layne (1994) discusses this extensively in her book about national identities in Jordan and sees it as a major contributing factor to Jordanian nationalism. While many or most self-identified Jordanians would posit themselves as members of a tribe, they might only appeal to this membership publicly at politically advantageous times. In close social relationships, fictive kinship may be based on membership in a tribe. This is frequently the case with urban Jordanians, though invoking tribal affiliations for advantageous purposes is also characteristic of the younger population in more rural villages. According to Øystein LaBianca (1994: 207), tribalism in Jordan is characterized by "strong in-group loyalty among members based on variously fluid notions of common descent."

Tribal affiliations are most frequently invoked to authenticate one's Jordanianess in the face of a contested identity. The contesting identity in Jordan is almost always perceived to be "Palestinian." According to Karen Fog Olwig (1999: 370):

> The authority a group may gain from establishing a particular heritage for itself
> derives not just from the group's demonstration of a common origin and

historical continuances, but more importantly from its successful exclusion of

others from this heritage and the privileges associated with it…

This echoes Stuart Hall's (1996) earlier point that identities are the marking of

difference and exclusion. While all other national identities are excluded by definition

from identifying with Jordanian nationality, it is Palestinians as a whole that must

absolutely be excluded because they present, as seems to be perceived by "authentic

Jordanians," the gravest threat to Jordanian viability within the Hashemite Kingdom of

Jordan. Perhaps this is become some estimates say that Arabs of Palestinian descent

outnumber Jordanians within the kingdom at a ratio of two-to-one. Many Jordanians

believe that Palestinians desire to overthrow the Monarch and assume Jordan for

themselves. Whatever the reason, a clear multinational tension is present in Jordan

that is exacerbated by the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, and by the fact that King

Abdullah II is married to a woman of Palestinian descent.

On one occasion during my 2001 fieldwork in the Jordanian village of

Dhamraq, I happened to bring along a copy of Andrew Shyrock's book entitled,

*Nationalism and the Genealogical Imagination: Oral History and Textual Authority

in Tribal Jordan* (1997) in my briefcase.[2] The book's cover shows two Arab men

wearing traditional white *dishdashas* signing documents. There are also several

photographs of Arab tribes in the text itself. One of my primary informants and closest

friends, Majid, a Jordanian, noticed the cover and asked to look at it. He was unaware

until seeing Shyrock's book that any such literature existed about Jordanians, and he

was even more impressed when he recognized a photo of Sheikh Sultan al-Adwan

(Shryock 1997, 231), a very famous Jordanian tribal leader, in the text. Fluent in English, he skimmed the book quickly and we had the following exchange:

MAJID: Ahh, this is a book about Jordan? Very good. Where did you get this book?

DAVID: It is a book about the tribes in Jordan. It's available in the United States.

MAJID: Really? [He thumbs through the pages, stopping at the pictures and examining them.] It this what *you* want to do? To write a book about the history of our tribes in Jordan.

DAVID: Not exactly, but sort of. I would like to know more about the history of the tribes in Dhamraq, of the Adwan, of the Bani Sakr. But I am interested in learning about Jordanians and Jordanian history.

MAJID: Very good, this is very good. I can help you learn about Jordan's tribes. In Jordan we have many tribes. I am... [And he proceeded to list his tribe along with a number of tribes in Jordan and their approximate locality within Jordanian territory.]

In his fascination with Shryock's book, Majid was equally pleased to teach me about true Jordanianess vis-à-vis the tribes of Jordan. If I was to find out what comprised Jordanianess, I need not look further than tribal histories. Equating Jordanianess with tribal lineage is certainly not a new idea, and one that has been discussed at length elsewhere (Layne 1994; Shyrock 1997; Abu-Odeh 1999), though it

certainly presents a strong case for unilineal descent and thus kinship (or fictive kinship) as necessary for inclusion into an "authentic" Jordanian identity.

Jordan: A Brief Background

Jordan as a political-geographical nation was created under and as a result of colonialism. Adnan Abu-Odeh's excellent book, *Jordanians, Palestinians, and the Hashemite Kingdom in the Middle East Peace Process* (1999) is highly recommended as a study in the nationalist history of Jordan and Palestine. In order to give a very brief background to my own work, I borrow extensively from Abu-Odeh's account of the birth of Jordan (1999: 7):

> Right after the end of World War I, the victorious Allies, now the heirs of the Ottoman Empire, introduced two systems into the eastern Mediterranean region. The first was the nation-state system, and the second was a new international regime that gave some of the wartime allies a 'mandate' to administer the former Ottoman colonies until they became full-fledged nation-states... The new Arab entity that was to become Jordan was carved out of a Palestine that had been enlarged to eastward and beyond the River Jordan by the British government and the Zionist leaders with the goal of building a national home for the Jews... With the new map, the old parochial loyalties—to a tribe or a region, to a village, a town, or a district—were made even more complicated by a new loyalty to the centralized political authority the map now defined as a nascent nation-state... New regional map-defined identities began to materialize.

Jordan and Palestine were administered under the same mandate, and as such were treated as complementary entities by the British. The two entities shared the same currency and security command, in addition to intense commercial interaction. "The social organization of Transjordan during this time was largely tribal, with marriage, discipline, local defense, and the individual's sense of social identity determined by tribal affiliation" (Abu-Odeh 1999: 13). Jordan eventually became an independent nation-state, as a Kingdom (based on the Hashemite authority since the installation of Abdullah I, part of the Hashemite dynasty of Mecca that traces its genealogy to the Prophet Muhammad, the founder of Islam), in 1946.

The point of this background is to establish that Jordanian nationalist narratives were created within and because of those geographic boundaries established by the British after the fall of the Ottoman Empire. They did not pirouette intrinsically from Bedouin tribes, but rather in response to dictated boundaries. "Transjordan had never been identified as a distinct entity before Britain and France became the dominant imperialistic powers in the area" (Abu-Odeh 2000: 13). However, mythmaking in Jordan has been successful. Norma Khouri, in her very recent book about honor killings in Jordan, speaks of "customs, morals, and values Jordanian society [has] upheld for thousands of years" (2003: 26). This is actually an impossibility, for "Jordanian society," as it were, has only existed since formation of Jordan less than one hundred years ago: There was literally nothing nationalistic *there* before Jordan's creation.

Jordanians, Palestinians and the Predicaments of Classification

It is somewhat futile to establish succinct definitions of "Jordanian" and "Palestinian," not because such distinctions are lacking among individuals, but because the definitions of each vary according to virtually every individual who would self-identify with either group, and also because national identities in Jordan and Palestine are not confined to just these groups. Adnan Abu-Odeh's 1999 book, mentioned earlier, dealt in part with Jordanian national identity. In the book, Abu-Odeh (1999: xv) employed the following classifying terms:

Transjordanians: Jordanian nationals of Transjordanian origin.

Palestinians: The Arab people of Mandatory Palestine.

Palestinian-Jordanians: Palestinians who became Jordanian nationals after the unity of the West and East Banks in 1950.

Jordanians: Jordanian nationals irrespective of their origin.

Clearly, these categorizations fall short of accounting for all segments of Jordan's society. For example, in Jordan there is a young but sizable generation that was born in Kuwait, of Palestinian families, and who now hold Jordanian citizenship (passports) after Operation Desert Storm forced them to leave the Gulf. What, then, are their national identities or national classifications, since they self-identify as Palestinians but are hardly *of* Mandatory Palestine and would certainly not think of themselves as Jordanians in the sense that *Jordanians* think of themselves. A better question might be, What processes have led to the construction of these identities? Indeed, I know many self-identified Palestinians who have never even been to the West Bank. This

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reinforces an aspect of identity addressed earlier, which is that "nationality" (or citizenship of a state) does not equal "culture."

Highlighting the voices and complexities of national identities in Jordan runs the risk of distorting the predominant sentiments of society in Jordan, which distinctly fall along one of two lines: Jordanian or Palestinian. This division permeates all sectors of community and political life (including the Royal Family—King Abdullah II married a Palestinian woman), and while it is important to note that within these two groups exist many sub-layers, the two divisions are clearly the most important for purposes of social mobility in Jordan.

"Real" Jordanians, as I have mentioned above, can ostensibly trace their heritage through tribal roots that are specific to contemporary Jordanian territory and ultimately to the Arabian peninsula. "Real" in this context is still an invention in light of the formation of Jordan as a kingdom; however, "real" is defined here in opposition to those that might otherwise lay claims to Jordanian identity, the Palestinians. Citizens in the Kingdom who are not Palestinians are eligible to be "real" Jordanians. Or, as Jordanians themselves say, "We are *Jordanian* Jordanians," as opposed to the widely invoked "Palestinian-Jordanian" as Abu-Odeh noted above.

"Palestinians," according to many of these so-called "real Jordanians," should not be able to achieve the same military or diplomatic ranks as Jordanians, nor should Palestinians be afforded the same public benefits that might be accorded to a Jordanian (an educational scholarship from the King, for instance). These real Jordanians would likely invoke "Jordanian" as both a national identity and as an ethnocultural marker.

On the other hand, some Palestinians living in Jordan believe that while their homeland may be Palestine, Jordan is their home (for now). They have established a livelihood and family in Jordan and have established social networks there moreso than Palestine. Many Palestinians believe that they helped build Amman (the Jordanian capital) into a thriving metropolis of innovation, science and technology with the emigration of several hundred thousand educated Palestinians to Jordan from Kuwait and other Arabian Gulf states during and after the 1991 Operation Desert Storm. Their history is made amongst and with other Palestinians in Jordan and Jordanians. Therefore, their national identity is more fluid—at times it may be Palestinian, at other times it may be Jordanian, but their ethnic identity is staunchly Palestinian.

<u>Palestinians and the National Past</u>

Palestinians have formed the majority of the population in Jordan since 1949. Rashid Khalidi, a leading authority on Palestinian identity, calls the process of Israel's state formation, 1947-49, "lost years" for Palestinian identity, as "…it was difficult for outsiders to pick up on the strands of a single narrative, and to identify where the focus of Palestinian identity was, or whether in fact it had survived the debacles of 1947-49" (Khalidi 1997: 179). Edward Said thinks it almost impossible to imagine a single narrative of Palestinian history because of the diversity of Palestinian experiences in emigrant and refugee communities after the Israeli state's creation. It is to this void of a masterwork of Palestinian history that he attributes the discontinuity in Palestinian identity (Rushdie 1991).

But, there is no masterwork of Jordanian history either... at least in the manner there is for Egyptian, Syrian or Tunisian history, for example. There is no great leader of the national past save for a handful of venerable tribal sheikhs who stood up to Ottoman and/or British authorities, though the veracity of these stories is somewhat lacking (Abu-Odeh 1999). There is no George Washington or Christopher Columbus. The difference between the Palestinian and Jordanian variances in history is that the Jordanians began their mythmaking at roughly the same time the Palestinians were encountering the formation of Israel and the dissolution of their territory. Whereas the Palestinians had to become freedom fighters in a national struggle, colonialism in Jordan was largely acquiescent, peaceful and relatively brief.

The Jordanians had a tangible territory to which they could attribute and invent stories and folklore; the population was comprised of people who were there indigenously. Jordan also had a monarchy with direct descent from 'Ali, the Prophet's cousin, which called themselves the Hashemite dynasty. Both of these factors contributed to the nation-building and creation of a national past, so that by the beginning of the twenty-first century, Jordan had a veritable history and territory from which a distinct national identity has emerged. Palestinians, who did have a distinct national identity before Israel's formation, experienced an exodus of people to other parts of the Arab world and beyond, creating an early but coerced transnational community that exists to this day. This exodus, if we follow Khalidi's and Said's arguments, contributed to the breakup of a national narrative upon which Palestinians could build their national identity.

Yet if we truly consider the implications of their arguments, then the same arguments could be made for every national identity in the world. The difference, of course, is that Palestinians do not have internationally recognized statehood and therefore are not seen as coeval members of the world political system. However, the absence of international legal recognition of statehood does not erase the national narrative of a given nation; after all, why is there a distinct Palestinian national identity? The way in which the national narrative of Palestine, and of all nations, has been and is being formed has changed. Narratives that people can identify with are not always being created in geographically specific locations; rather, they are being created as and within communities and other cultures across the globe. The multitudinous experiences of Palestinians or Jordanians in refugee and expatriate communities all contribute to what it means to be a Palestinian or Jordanian.

I am not arguing the fact that territory and land is important; it most definitely is. However, the *land* upon which Palestinians have attached a nation is only partially theirs through international regulations. The same is true, to a greater or lesser extent, for other nations that do not have political states, such as Chechnya, Western Sahara, Kurdistan, and so on. This does not mean that land is unimportant to national narratives, but rather that the act of achieving statehood (by whatever means) is part of the narrative for some nations.

If Jordanians immigrate to Detroit, Michigan or anywhere, does the act of immigration make them less a part of the Jordanian nation than if they were still living in Jordan? Or does it simply change/transform their position within the nation? Do

Jordanians that immigrate to Michigan (and their subsequent generations) automatically become part of the American nation, or can only those actually born in America be considered part of the American national narrative? The answers to these questions are not fixed and indeed have controversial, politically-charged consequences depending on who is answering them in what context and for what purposes. Yet these are the very questions that need to be asked and thought about in light of transnational processes.

The lives of transmigrants intersect political boundaries and bring multiple societies into a single social field (Glick Schiller, Basch and Blanc-Szanton 1992). The bounded notion of a tribe, then, should not be understood to constrict the socioeconomic mobility of its members; one does not lose tribal affiliation, affinity or membership by virtue of transnational migration. There are certainly social and economic implications of such movement, but none of them serve to disjoin tribal identity. Rather, tribalism is but one concept that maintains transnational attachments between places, societies, families and people. Tribalism contributes both to the national identity of Jordanians in Jordan, as I have argued, and to Jordanians in Michigan and in communities around the world.

Tribalism as Jordanianess in Michigan

Thinking again about what Frank, the scholar on Arab Americans, told me as I embarked on my research with Jordanian Americans in Michigan, I decided to pose the question in its raw form to Ahmed and one of his good Jordanian friends, Yousef, from Madaba, who has only been living in Dearborn with his family for four years.

DAVID: Ahmed, tell me, what is it that makes Jordanians distinct as a group, a national identity, in Michigan? The Lebanese have their stores and social and economic networks, the Palestinians and Iraqis have their social clubs. What make Jordanians unique?

AHMED: [thinking sternly for a moment] I would have to say it is our tribal identities that make us unique. No matter our family affiliations and our associations with towns and villages in Jordan, you will not find the kind of tribes in the Middle East that you find in Jordan. Yousef, you agree?

YOUSEF: Ahmed is right. We are very much…

AHMED: I don't mean to say that tribalism hasn't changed over the years. It used to be much stronger than it is now. But it still means something. Our children don't know about it, they aren't trained in it. But they will know when they study history. I am also an American, but I don't lose my 'Jordanian.'

DAVID: So do you mean that your children here in Michigan—for them, the tribe will not be as important as it was for you? How will they learn about your tribe?

AHMED: No, no. It will be important. I will teach them. They will know when they return to Jordan to visit. When I took my son there [on our second visit] I told him he could go and play and run around the roads as far as we could see and he didn't have to ask my permission to go anywhere. Here in

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Dearborn I am always checking on them [the children]: On the street, in the

backyard, because things happen here. In Jordan, I let them run.

For Ahmed, tribalism is not only a deeply embedded part of his Jordanian identity, it is

the structure that in part defines social life in Jordan. In his example, tribalism was

equated with what he perceived to be the security and safety of his family. In

Dearborn, while Ahmed feels that tribalism is the essential voice in the making of

distinct Jordanian national identity, it assumes meanings that locate it in a specific time

and place in Jordan. Thus, tribalism as exhibited in Jordan and tribalism as expressed

in Michigan are different and have different consequences.

Tribalism in Michigan is more an appeal to the past, to the once was and to the

specific in location and time. In Jordan, tribalism is an institution that governs in many

respects the social processes one experiences in daily life, in addition to being an

appeal to the "real" as discussed above. In Michigan, the kinship and fictive kinship

networks that maintain tribal structures and allegiances are often far away in the

homeland (it is rare to find multiple members of the same Jordanian tribe in Michigan)

and thus, tribalism is not so much a lived experience as a remembered one. Of course

this is a generalization and is subject to the situations of individual actors, though for

Jordanian transmigrants such as Ahmed, tribal affiliation—while very much real and

important—is not a daily reality or concern unless he is being asked to assert his

identity as a response to a question or contention. In this manner, tribalism is very

much important as an invocation of the "real" in a wider community of Arab

Americans, in which Jordanian Americans may struggle (as a demographic minority) to

maintain their public national identities among free associations with Palestinians made by others in Greater Detroit.

CHAPTER IV

THE NEW SEPTEMBER 11 NARRATIVE AND ANTI-ARAB JINGOISM

It is important to situate any discussion of Arab American identity in an understanding of the sociopolitical climate toward Arabs in the United States post-September 11, 2001. My first ethnographic fieldwork with Arab Americans in suburban Detroit took place in November 2002, a solid year after the September 11 terrorist attacks. At the time, inklings of the United States government's intentions in the Middle East, specifically in relation to Iraq, were beginning to coagulate. Already, policies wrought of the Patriot Act—enacted "to deter and punish terrorist acts in the United States and around the world, to enhance law enforcement investigatory tools, and for other purposes" (United States Government 2001: 1)—had become manifest in the very communities of suburban Detroit in which I hoped to work and where I indeed conducted my first interviews.

An already ethnically and politically-taught environment was heightened during this time period, when the White House promised to make good on its threats of deposing Saddam Hussein's regime from power in Iraq. Finally, on March 20, 2003, the United States launched what was to be the first of many air strikes on Iraq. The attacks and ensuing battles ended with the taking of Baghdad and the occupation of the country by US military forces which continues at the time of this writing. The implications of the war in Iraq for Iraqi Americans and Iraqis in America were

tremendous as the Federal Bureau of Investigation moved to question thousands of

Iraqis. According to the Associated Press, 6,700 Iraqis had been questioned by the

end of March. It is unclear if the FBI stopped the questioning as military operations

drew to an end by mid-April.[3]

These observations raise broad concerns for Arab Americans, and hold

meaningful implications for the making of Jordanian American identity. Those

concerns entail what seems to be an ongoing, tolerated anti-Arab racism in America

coupled with an en vogue, widespread jingoistic discourse, creating a sociopolitical

American climate that is inhospitable to both established, and new entrées into, Arab

American communities.

The context in which Arab Americans are engaged in identity-making has been

altered in light of active September 11 discourse in the United States and around the

world. While the perpetrators of September 11 were allegedly all non-immigrant

Arabs, the United States government was quick to correlate these specific acts of

terrorism with a new order of "terrorpolitik" having conception in the Arab Muslim

Middle East. Previously unknown to the general public, terror organizations (most

notably al-Qaeda and its association with Osama bin Laden, a Saudi Arabian national)

were characterized as global networks of terror capable of perpetrating mass

destruction by way of infiltration into mainstream society. Thus, September 11

discourse, while initially stemming from widespread emotional identification with the

loss of nearly three thousand lives on American soil, has been transformed by many—

including prevalent segments of American policymaking like the White House—into a

vengeful jingoism searching for a scapegoat. It was through this process that the White House was able to convince much of the American public that Saddam Hussein and the Ba'ath regime in Iraq was connected to the September 11 attacks, despite a complete absence of credible evidence.

The new September 11 discourse goes something like this: The threat of an attack on the American homeland is no longer imminent; it has arrived. If such a catastrophe could occur within a context of ostensible mundanity (would September 11, 2001 be historically remarkable under different conditions?), the probability of it happening again is certain. Thus, national security vis-à-vis Arab/Muslim terrorism is once again thrust to the forefront of government (and civil) concerns, only this time it is expressed in terms and feelings unknown to a large American demographic.

As quickly as America laid the blame for September 11 on Osama bin Laden and his conspirators in terror (which could be anywhere), the White House and scores of prominent officials, scholars and celebrities appeared in popular media to disassociate the bin Ladens of the world (along with other so-called fundamentalists) with the "real" Islam (despite the ambiguity of what, exactly, "real Islam" is, and ignorant of the resurgence of conservatism throughout the Arab world). President George W. Bush on more than one occasion urged the American public not to take out understandable frustrations with terrorists on their fellow countrymen of Arab descent. He took meetings with Arab American leaders and reiterated that America's new war on terrorism was not based on religiosity or ethnicity, but rather on making "the world" (read: America) secure. Michigan's governor at the time, John Engler,

met with Arab American and Muslim leaders in late September 2001 at state offices in Detroit. "Any actions that unfairly target the Arab-American community are wrong," Engler said after the meetings.[4] Yet there were many instances of violence and racism directed at Arab Americans and Arab interests in Michigan and throughout the United States.

A group of victims' families and survivors of the attacks launched a multibillion-dollar lawsuit against Saudi Arabia. People who even looked "Middle Eastern" were asked and sometimes forced to disembark commercial airline flights. On September 12, a California man sent ethnically intimidating e-mails to employees of the Arab American Community Center for Economic and Social Services (ACCESS) in Dearborn.[5] Six thousand men of Arab descent were targeted for deportation, out of 314,000 people of all ethnic backgrounds who were allegedly in the United States illegally.[6]

One particularly troubling episode involving a Yemeni man and his Michigan boss was recounted in the September 22, 2001 edition of the *Detroit Free Press*. Ahmed Esa, a resident of Dearborn's South End—a concentrated Arab population area (Abraham, Abraham and Aswad 1983)—was harassed by his boss and dismissed from his workplace of fifteen years. The boss, Paul, told the *Free Press* reporter:

> When these guys ran their plane in there like that and hurt all those people, that was the end of it right there. That made their religion—you might as well write it as I say it—the scum of the earth… I'm definitely a nonbeliever, so I'd be his enemy. I've read the Koran. It says all non-Muslims are enemies.[7]

Paul's attitude toward Esa is representative of many uninformed Americans who base

their understandings of Arabs and Muslims on ethnic archetypes continuously

propagated by so-called experts on cable news programs, and on syndicated radio and

in newspaper columns. This anti-Arab attitude continues to pervade American

sentiments about September 11, drawing undeniable associations between sheer

demoniac men and an entire ethnicity (Arab) and religion (Islam). And yet these

American attitudes are not new.

Anti-Arab Racism in America

Parallels between pre-September 11 instances of anti-Arab racism in the United

States and the current anti-Arab racism in America can be drawn, thereby illustrating

the way in which historical anti-Arab racism is contemporarily realized through a new

narrative in Arab American communities. In addition to its inherently harmful effects,

I argue that such racism intersects (and intercepts) both ethnographic methodology

and the identity-making processes among Arab Americans in Michigan. It becomes, as

I will illustrate later, part of the American cultural current in which they're making

identity.

Nabeel Abraham (1992, 1994) has extensively examined anti-Arab racism and

violence in the United States, especially during times of American military intervention

in the Middle East. His general argument is based on the premise that anti-Arab

racism is really the last shade of tolerable racism in the United States writ large, and

therefore attacks on people who even "look Arab" occur with greater proportional

frequency than they do with other minority ethnic groups, especially when Arabs and

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Arab Americans are reified in the media during times of military conflict in the Middle East (Abraham 1994). He found the 1980s to be a decade in which Arab Americans "lived in an increasing state of apprehension as the Reagan administration wages its 'international war on terrorism'" (Abraham 1994: 161). A decade after Abraham's essay, it seems the international war on terrorism has intensified and become even more intrusive into the lives of Arab Americans, and that their attitudes have moved from concerned apprehension to legitimate fear.

Abraham's 1992 work, "The Gulf Crisis and Anti-Arab Racism in America" is proof positive that the current state of American-Arab relations are evocative of the past. The manifestation of tension among Arab Americans after September 11 serves to demonstrate that United States attitudes toward people of Arab descent has not changed much over the decades. Abraham notes that particular instances of jingoism and blind-patriotism during Operation Desert Storm included backlashes against celebrities that protested against the war and physical and verbal attacks aimed at anyone "who fit the American stereotype of 'Arab'" (Abraham 1992: 257). Post-September 11 attacks included many against Indian Sikhs because of the traditional turbans and facial hair that make Sikh men so identifiable, in addition to the types of incidents described above. And recent statements by politicians or celebrities who did not agree with the White House position on the war in Iraq were met with great hostility and, in the case of the popular music group the Dixie Chicks, an all-out boycott by overly patriotic Americans.

The issue here is not to discover what informs such bigotry (the reader can make their own assumptions). Rather, I propose that we begin thinking about the ways in which the making of Arab American identity is affected by such anti-Arab American attitudes. Most of the anti-Arab racism and violence falls under the categorization of jingoistic racism, according to Abraham, which is a "curious blend of knee-jerk patriotism and homegrown white racism toward non-European, non-Christian dark skinned peoples... spawned by political ignorance, false patriotism, and hyper ethnocentrism" (1994: 193).

This racism, combined with what Abraham calls "nativistic xenophobia," is what largely informs the new September 11 narrative currently being played out in and by the United States and many of its citizens. The xenophobia is based on "perceived differences of race, culture, ethnicity and religion...[whose] source is rooted in racist nativistic attitudes... deeply embedded in U.S. culture" (Abraham 1994: 188-189). When nativistic xenophobia—which appears to be ideologically motivated and infrequent—is combined with jingoistic racism—which seems to be reactive and episodic in relation to U.S. involvement in the Middle East—the American environment in which Arab national identities are fomented becomes acrimonious at best. Moreover, if Abraham's idea of nativistic xenophobia is taken to its extreme conclusion, America has historically not been and is not likely to become a permissible environment for Arab American identity to take shape. Arab Americans are left to negotiate this hostile environment within the new September 11 narrative, influenced

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by an antagonistic American current in the formation of a Jordanian American national identity.

It is especially troublesome that anti-Arab racism thrives in America's postmodernist society that has supposedly undergone heavy and important lessons of multiculturalism, through entertainment, elementary and secondary schooling, cultural festivals, international scholar and student exchange programs and so on. Yet the effects of cultural diversity programs, whatever their incarnation and benefits, have not necessarily been altruistic. As I argued in chapter one, daily mulitculturalism is often the perpetual cause of frustration and anxiety in a nation, as different cultures or ethnic groups lay claims to what comprises national identities. Americans are not influenced by the same cultural currents that influence Jordanians in the making of national identities in Michigan, nor do Americans necessarily feel that Jordanians are entitled to access cultural currents that might resemble their own. Racism and violence in this context serve as goaltenders to the American way of life, the American Dream, whatever that is perceived to be.

"Go Back To Where You Came From!"

I was invited to Ahmed's home one evening. He introduced me to his children, naming each one, and when he reached his middle son, he said "This is Osama." Osama's brothers who were standing next to him began to laugh at him teasingly. I smiled to ease the tension as Osama smirked and looked up at his dad, who patted him on the head. Ahmed said, "Yes, he's our little terrorist. After September 11, he came

home from school crying. The kids were teasing him, they called him a terrorist. He was very upset."

"But Osama is a very common name in the Middle East, isn't it?" I asked.

"Yes, it is. Osama was an early figure in Islam. So this is what I told the teacher. But you know, they don't know. And now at home I tease him about it, call him a terrorist with a laugh, so he became less sensitive to it. It doesn't upset him as much, it is kind of a joke now. It makes it easier for him."

While it is generally recognized that children can be delightfully cruel to one another, it is another thing altogether when such anti-Arab racism is expressed among adults. Ahmed sees a difference in the degree of racism present between urban centers such as Dearborn, and more rural or outlying villages and cities in Michigan. Dearborn, as previously mentioned, is the city with the highest concentration of Arab peoples in North America, so anti-Arab racism—while still present—is not as intense or as likely to be expressed there as it might be in cities or villages with less or no Arab American residents.

Ahmed, who recently sold his gas station which was located in an outlying area, said people used to say to him, "Why don't you just go back to where you came from!?" Ahmed, a pensive man, would retort: "Where did you come from? Why don't you go back there?" He compares his experience of living in Dearborn and doing business in a more rural city.

Ahmed truly sees America as a nation of immigrants, and that he just happens to be a newer arrival than the Caucasian majority. "It's ridiculous, this 'back to where

you came from.' I've been here twenty-five years... I'm an American too! These guys that say these things to me, they've been here for longer, they're families came over on the boat, I came over on a plane. Other than the Native Americans, we all came from 'over there," Ahmed said.

"But do you take it to heart? How does it affect you?" I asked.

"Yes, it does hurt, but it doesn't affect who I am. It may change the way I do things, it may change if I speak out. I always have the Jordanian in me, it is who I am, you cannot deny history. I am proud of it, people should be proud of where they came from."

"How have things been recently, after September 11, with the war in Iraq?" I was curious to know.

"Oh it's really bad. You see we don't know, it's rough. We don't know what is the government doing. We know they are watching us, we know it is difficult to get through airports because of the way we look. We didn't do anything. [President] Bush was here in Dearborn twice, but it is a small amount that support him."

"Really? On TV they showed rallies of Arab Americans dancing in the streets here in Dearborn after Baghdad fell recently," I said.

"That was small group, very small... for the TV. Most of us don't go out. Most of us are against it. Look what's happening now! We keep quiet," said Ahmed.

Anti-Arab racism and the threat of government surveillance does produce an anxious and hostile American environment for Arab Americans. As I have argued, the racism and tension have only multiplied since September 11; they have historical

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antecedents. Such acts of racism may be subtle, not apparent to the outside observer, and thus are hard to gauge or quantify. But the fact that they are real to someone like Ahmed implies that they must also produce very real consequences, whatever form those consequences may take (physical emotional, psychological, legal, etc.).

Whether it was the taunting faced by Ahmed's son, Osama, in school, or the people who yelled at him to "go back where you came from" in his gas station, anti-Arab racism *does* exist, and it does influence the American cultural current which is negotiated by Jordanian Americans in the identity-making process. Ahmed clearly considers himself an American, but in the context of a nation of immigrant Americans. The racism that he faces, intensified by the new September 11 narrative, has undeniably become part of the American cultural current and national label that Ahmed also invokes to identify himself.

CHAPTER V

ON THE AIR IN ARAB DETROIT POST-SEPTEMBER 11

Southeast Michigan is home to the largest concentration of Arab immigrants and Arab Americans (Americans of Arab descent) in North America, more than 200,000 strong (Abraham and Shryock 2000), though southern California actually has a higher number of people of Arab descent. Jordanians comprise only a fraction of this number, though they are present and exist as a distinct cultural group. Kim Schopmeyer, in an analysis of the demographics of metro Detroit's Arab American communities, lumps Jordanians and Palestinians into a mono-category defined as "Palestinians from the East and West Banks" (2000: 69). Using the 1990 US Census, Schopmeyer found "Palestinian-Jordanians" claim 7.6% (4,761 members) of the total self-reporting population of 62,699 Arab Americans in Michigan. Of that, Jordanians comprise 3.3%, or just over 2,000 individuals (Schopmeyer 2000: 71). However, in the text of the demographic analysis, Schopmeyer always refers to Palestinians and Jordanians as a unified group, while careful to separate other closely associated Arab groups such as the Lebanese and the Syrians. Such demographic glossing authoritatively denies the viability of both Jordanians and Palestinians as unique national identities in Michigan and within Arabism writ large. This stems, I argue, from a greater unawareness of the intricacies of cultural and national identity in Jordan and Palestine, which I will discuss later.

Jordanians began moving to Michigan in the middle to late part of the twentieth century, though they were not the first Arabs to settle in Michigan. People of Arab descent—mostly Syrians, Lebanese and Yemenis—arrived to work at Henry Ford's automobile plants in Greater Detroit. Jordanians may have initially moved to other cities—such as Dallas, in Ahmed's case—before moving to the Dearborn area. Dearborn and Greater Detroit became preferable for many Jordanian transmigrants, for there they could benefit from rapidly developing pan-Arab culture and political economy that was and has been developing in southeast Michigan since the dawn of the Motor City industry.

Many Jordanians came to the United States to study at American universities, and then ended up applying for citizenship and staying. Some that I was interviewed studied at the University of Detroit, Wayne State University, and one of the branches of the University of Michigan, all of which are located in southeast Michigan. Jordanian Americans themselves have not traditionally worked in Detroit's auto industry as laborers, though some have worked for Ford Motor Company as engineers and resource managers. There are Jordanian American communities in many major cities such as Los Angeles and New York, though the largest one is in Chicago.

In the case of Michigan's Arab communities, I take up Katherine Pratt Ewing's call to focus on legal and political consciousness which "…offers a source of more nuanced models for how immigrants negotiate identity" (Ewing 2002: 97). If we are to believe Ewing, authorities such as politics, religion and personal relationships operate similarly to create understandings and imaginings that locate the self. They

compel people to act and react in certain ways by intersecting the individual's lives in multiple arenas (school, work, entertainment, etc). The authorities are given varying degrees of value by the individual in the identity-making process at particular times in history. Thus, "national identities are malleable constructions generally open to dispute in reaction to shifting political and historical circumstances" (Ulin 2001: 208).

Post-September 11 Life in Arab Detroit

In the wake of September 11 and procedures wrought of the Patriot Act of 2001, undulations of Ewing's legal and political consciousness have literal consequences for Arab American societies in Michigan. That is, the general anti-Arab atmosphere in the United States today has changed the way in which Arab Americans talk and think about themselves and others as individuals. Institutionally, realities are changing for Arab social welfare agencies in southeast Michigan. More and more resources are consumed informing the Arab American and Chaldean communities of changing regulations and expectations of them by federal agencies as varied as the Departments of State and Treasury to the FBI, INS and Border Patrol. Federal funding for these agencies is waning just as immigration procedures—something on which most agencies spend a majority of their time and resources—are becoming more difficult. Even the slightest error on an immigration and naturalization form (or any federal document for that matter) is cause for total dismissal of a case, or a grant, for instance. So scrupulous attention is give to each specific case.

A decrease in funding for these agencies translates as a decline in employees and the amount of people that can be served. Some agencies will close a few of their

branch offices and lay off employees, thereby overburdening the agencies' directors.[8]
As such, community outreach programs in culture, medicine and language—while a
vital part of the missions of these agencies—have sunk to lower priority so staff can
keep up with ever-changing government policies that have become central to their
patrons' needs.

Here, September 11 provides a prime example of how "American political
culture insists that Arabs have integrity as a group" (Abraham and Shyrock 2000: 29)
by positing Arabs in a general category that can be manipulated by outsiders and
mobilized from within. It also allows us to reconsider Arab Detroit as a transnational
community in which the rules of inclusion are dichotomously unclear but present. It is
an imagined community in two realms: By those that would consider themselves part
of Arab Detroit (what Thomas Eriksen describes as the view from within, as discussed
in chapter one) and by those who look at it from the outside. In other words, what are
the structures of feelings that have maintained "Arab Detroit" as a discrete entity that
can be talked about? Political policies post-September 11 suggest that the American
government, at least, does not know how to deal with Arabs at any other level than as
a monolithic whole (consider the Homeland Security measures to register non-citizen
Arab males from predominantly Arab and Muslim states), despite the nuances of
national identity present in the Arab American communities of southeast Michigan.
The sense of power through which national identities are fomented by individuals
within this context, are self-experiences with "affective, historical and bodily
relationships to such identities" (Ewing 2002: 95).

In November 2002, I was invited to participate in a call-in Arabic radio talk show, of which there are several in the greater Detroit area. These programs are very popular among the Arabic-speaking communities and estimated listeners number in the tens of thousands every week for the particular program of which I was a part. Of the two-hour airtime of the show, I was allotted the second hour to explain my ethnographic presence to the Arab American community. Both the host, Robert and myself thought that this would benefit my research as it would show the community that I was both a) a serious academic researcher, and more importantly, b) did not work for the FBI or the federal government in any way.[9]

In the hour preceding my spot, as ethnographic luck would have it, agents from the US Border Patrol were the guests. Under new laws, Border Patrol agents can search cars and personal property within a certain distance of the (in this case) Canadian border. The host asked the agents to explain the procedures a person might expect if they were to be stopped or searched by a Border Patrol agent. This interview solicited a high volume of call-ins from listeners, who questioned everything from the legality of the searches to discriminating procedures to how one could get a job working for the border patrol. Finally, the first hour was over and it was time for me to take a position at the microphone.

I was uncomfortable with the association of being on the radio show the same day as these government officials, for our very presence on the same broadcast arguably connected—in the listeners' minds—my research with the government's

meddlesome surveillance of Arabs in the United States so widely reported in local media (see Stoller 1997). For my interview, the host invited the leaders of the Jordanian American community leader to chat along with us… to "keep the conversation going," he told me, and ultimately, I believe, to lend legitimacy to my intentions. The interview went smoothly. I began by explaining anthropology and fieldwork, and then talked about my rationale for studying Jordanian and Palestinian communities in Michigan. Robert and the hosts reiterated to the audience that they thought it was great that someone was finally attempting to study cultural groups—particularly Jordanians and Palestinians—as individual entities, outside the monolithic whole of "Arab Detroit," as they are so commonly lumped. This challenges the notion of a singular imagined community, clearly showing that these Jordanian Americans at least consider themselves to be a very viable and distinct community unto themselves.

Despite the enthusiasm present in the interview, we elicited just one caller, an older gentleman who—in a very small but determined voice—wanted to make absolutely sure that I recorded in my "book" the wonderful hospitality and warmness I received from the Jordanians in Jordan, and to note that it was *Jordanians* specifically that were so kind to me, as an American. Hospitality and friendliness, noted the caller, were Jordanian hallmarks.[10]

After the interview, I asked the host why we elicited almost no response to the community. He said that, quite frankly, times have changed. The Arabs in Michigan have endured extreme scrutiny by both government authorities and the general public as represented through mass media, directly as a result of the events of September 11.

Interest in Arab Detroit as a whole has increased in nearly all realms. That I, as a researcher, came to the community with the intention of learning about individual cultural and national identities, particularly of Jordanians, perhaps—Robert suggested—may have elicited a reactionary warning against my intentions (despite their purity), to those who might otherwise have participated. Despite my credentials, the question became: Why would anyone be interested in the interstices of Arab Detroit *now* for any purpose but to nefariously infiltrate? This legal and political consciousness on the part of Jordanians in Michigan has relocated their public identity away from "Jordanian" and moved it toward the greater mass of "Arab American." A large, cohesive group is—in theory—harder to infiltrate. Their national identities in private, as is evident through my ethnographic interviews with Ahmed, for instance, suggest that such identities are very much expressed in more private domains.

Yet whatever the protection this ethnic aggregation provides concurrently and increasingly disallows individuals to speak for themselves as Jordanian Americans—it is not that they *don't* speak in terms of being a Jordanian American, is that the sociopolitical environment in which such expressions may be made is more hostile to them. I argue that this has changed the discourse about Jordanian American national identity in Michigan, to maintain integrity as Arab Americans which, if we follow Abraham and Shryock, disallows them to enter mainstream America. It is also illustrative of how the new September 11 narrative has affected the local Arab American communities' interaction with outsiders.

Arab American News is a weekly paper that is published in southeast Michigan and has a global presence on the Internet (www.arabamericannews.com). Some permanent articles on the Internet site, when accessed in late March 2003, included "Tips for being Arab in America" and "Anti-Muslim incidents on the rise." A particularly telling and interesting (albeit sarcastically disquieting) commentary piece on the site is by Muhannad F. Haimour and titled, "Survival Guide for Arabs and Muslims." It reads, in part:

> Many of us have the American flag in front of our homes and businesses. That's not enough. Consider having the American flag be the curtains and blinds in your home. Visit the nearest department store for some really neat ideas that will surely get your patriotic message across. Don't put any yard signs in front of your home that are not in full support of everything our President says... Consider some new and creative yard signs and bumper stickers such as 'I love my President UNCONDITIONALLY' or 'I will gladly and enthusiastically give up all my civil liberties, if it makes you feel better.'[11]

This type of editorial material is offered in sharp contrast to media images of celebrating Arab Americans in the streets of Dearborn after the U.S. military occupation of Iraq, for instance. It is a confirmation of the inherent jingoism of American society in which Arab Americans find themselves making and maintaining their national identity in Michigan.

The historical circumstances that inform the cultural currents which influence Jordanian Americans must be accounted for in any ethnographic interpretation of the

national identity-making process. In chapter five I examine how we might begin

ethnographically engaging histories which themselves are dynamically interacted with

by the social actor. In the course of this discussion I will question whether national

identity can truly be seen, as James Clifford (1988: 34) has proposed, as a "nexus of

relations and transactions actively engaging a subject."

CHAPTER VI

ETHNOGRAPHICALLY ENGAGING DYNAMICALLY ENGAGED HISTORIES

Prevailing definitions of national identity suggest that one of the most important aspects in the process of identity-making is that its members share a collective heritage and base their understandings of identity on a collective national history. "History, then, is very much a mythical construction, in the sense that it is a representation of the past linked to the establishment of an identity in the present" (Friedman 1992a: 195). In the case of Palestinians, Edward Said argues that the heritage and history of Palestine is so varied, so inconstant and conditional, that any core upon which Palestinians could build a firm national identity (namely a state) must contain *multiple* histories (Rushdie 1991). Indeed, multiple histories lead, literally and figuratively, to multiple identities. Jordan's leaders, the Hashemite Kings, worked very hard at the creation and promotion of Jordanian identity during the Kingdom's fledgling years. Still, Jordanian identity has been defined in relation to Palestinians since Jordan's inception, as is evidenced with the various engagements and disengagements Jordan has had with the Palestinians over the decades, including the confederation of the East and West Banks for a period.

This leads me to a discussion of Liisa Malkki's (1997: 71) proposition that "identity is always mobile and processual, partly self-construction, partly categorization by others, partly a condition, a status, a label, a weapon, a fund of

memories." She follows Dick Hebdige (1987: 10) in arguing that while identity cannot be traced back to a "pure point of origin," history should not be ignored as a dominant factor in its making. I argue that history is vital to any active realization of national identity, keeping in mind that it is primarily the individual "fund or memories" that forms the basis of such identities.

Ted Swedenburg notes that much of the recent scholarship on history as a cultural construction "tends to conceive of memory as a collective project that is crucial to the consolidation or construction of group, community, or national identities" (1995: xxix). These works, he argues—such as those of Benedict Anderson (1983)—tend to neglect memory's transnational dimension; that is, the global dimensions of economy and culture that influence identity-making. Transnational communities, such as Arab Detroit, develop as cultural and economic brokers in relation to national identity. For instance, Ahmed tried to establish a store selling Jordanian imports such as kitchenware and foodstuffs in the early 1990s. He did not succeed in his business and was forced to dissolve it because the Lebanese American communities have a monopoly on retail stores, restaurants and other businesses catering to the public in southeast Michigan. Ahmed's only customers were primarily Jordanian Americans, of which there are admittedly few in Dearborn, as the Lebanese Americans continued to patronize shops owned by other Lebanese immigrants. Because the Lebanese are so highly concentrated in Dearborn, and they do own most of the businesses, minority Arab groups—such as the Jordanians—also end up shopping and doing business at Lebanese American establishments. So while

pan-Arabism may be part of the memory drawn upon in the making of Jordanian American national identity, it does not reappropriate Jordanian currents that would leave a vacuum to be filled by pan-Arabism: In Ahmed's instance, it was a matter of a small Jordanian American population and the organized power of the Lebanese American communities to edge him out, that forced the closure of his store. Indeed, for the Lebanese Americans, their Lebanese current(s) influenced them to shop at the Lebanese stores.

In light of Swedenburg's point, we may begin thinking about individuals' "funds of memories" in a broader context, realizing that history—in any setting—is not a nebulous conception. I argue that these global contexts, which influence the way in which social actors withdraw from the "funds" (vis-à-vis revision and interpretation), are what contributes to both their and our understandings of the past in relation to their definitions of self.

Engaging history in nationalist narratives is a way of creating identity to the degree that it yields a relation between that which "…supposedly occurred in the past and the present state of affairs" (Friedman 1992b: 837). History is an abstract nomenclature when referred to generally, so engaging distinctive aspects of and periods in history (i.e. tribal affiliation) is especially important in creating unique identities. Recorded and/or remembered history incites individuals to live—or at the very least talk about—their lives in definite ways that differentiate them from other individuals. More aptly stated, history leads people to do and say the things they do.

An informant's testimonies do lend credence to the past, even if their memory of the past seems skewered by the social elements of an oppressor, or if the strife of yearning toward a perceived normality has affected the way an informant relays the past to the ethnographer. Indeed, "identity politics have to be analyzed in terms of current regimes of power that aim to regulate... and discipline people" (Blanc-Szanton, Basch & Glick Shiller 1995: 686). The goal of anthropology, though, is not be the "referee" in a game of truth, as Michael Herzfeld puts it (2001: 57)—to determine authenticity and/or make judgments about rights and wrongs—but rather to distinguish how local actors perform in light of *and because of* their own memory (and forgetfulness) and their own histories. Social life is always processual, thus observable change cannot be based in a notion of static social systems. Such institutions do not exist. This "impermanence of the permanent" (Herzfeld 2001) is at the juncture of anthropology and history. Power and control, especially on the hegemonic level and in the incarnation of state-sponsored nationalism, follow as necessary contributors to identity making and maintenance in the sense that they intersect with the individual's experience of self through the "taken-for-granted background of everyday life" (Ewing 2002: 94).

Allan Hanson (1989) discusses this in some detail in his work on colonialism and the Maori of New Zealand. He says that politically dominant "inventors" of culture treat their invented cultures and traditions as if they were the actual state of affairs and, in a way, force it onto those under subjugation. This cultural imperialism, Hanson argues, is necessarily a product of colonialism and "tends to maintain the

asymmetrical relationship of power (Hanson 1989: 890). The point of just who does

the inventing is further explored by Robert Ulin (1995: 1996) who looks to historical

and political economic factors as influencing both who does the inventing and the

invention process itself, but warns not to neglect the agency of those who may not be

in power roles as still contributing to the invention. Even the seemingly non-powerful

hold some power in the making and maintenance of identity and aspects thereof, yet

those negotiating relationships of authority and power are also "negotiating the

resources to privileged discourses and, in so doing, the means for composing

alternative identities" (Schiff 2003: 281).

Colonialism has played an utterly important and effective role in the making of

Jordanian identity by initially determining whose representation of the past was

authentic so that a nationalist past could be invented and naturalized by the Jordanian

state. This allows us to recall the earlier point about history as a mythical

construction, especially for Norma Khouri (see chapter two), who imagines a long

history as representative of a certain past that, through cultural continuity, links it to

what she perceives to be the current unbalanced relationship of power between males

and females in Jordan.

Citizens in/of the State

The notion of Jordanian identity as a national identity attenuates this argument

into several more specific questions: 1) Who is defining it?; 2) Who is ascribing it?;

and 3) Who is subscribing to it?. These questions, raised in the context of Michigan's

Arab community, assume meanings from both the homeland, Jordan, from the United

States, and from the Arab American community. For example, given that Jordan is a monarchy, replete with royal hierarchy, it might be easy to say that the Royal Family has considerably shaped nationalist ideologies into a precisely rendered national and cultural identity. But this is only part of the story, as the Royal Family has been engaged in the making and maintenance of its own Hashemite cultural and religious identity with roots in the Hijaz. What, then, is the interplay between Jordanian national identity and this identity-making among the ultimate elite? In Michigan, where the Jordanian state is less involved in people's lives, how have structures of feeling within the Arab American community contributed to the essence of what it means to be a Jordanian and, moreover, a Jordanian American?

What Edward Said claims necessary for the establishment of a complete Palestinian identity, that is the authority of confederated, multiple histories, initially seems to be true for conceptualizing identity in any nationalistic or transnationalistic realm. These histories, however, need not be "master narratives" in the sense that he and Rashid Khalidi propose. Rather, the narratives themselves are created by those who are living through them. People's experiences and engagements with and of history is necessary for an understanding of just what is involved in the making and maintenance of national identity. Precisely how people engage history is at the core of the dynamic processes involved in identity formation and reformulation. Social forces, be they political, economic, religious, or otherwise, influence the manner in which history is dynamically engaged at any given time. Olwig (1999: 370) has noted the importance of this in anthropological studies of the past, saying such studies

…should include the processes whereby certain conceptualizations of the past become dominant over others in particular historical periods in response to specific social and economic realizations and the implications of these conceptualizations of the past for the creation of identity and community in the present.

While the processes and constitution of identity may always be mobile and processual, identity itself is not. That is, while the characteristics of Jordanian identity are constantly shifting, people are also moving along with those changes. While Jordanian can thought of as "Arab," as I discussed in chapter one, "Arab" is also subject to the same elasticity as any national identity—there are more actors involved in pan-Arabism. For our purposes, "Jordanian" is "Jordanian," regardless of what comprises it at any given time in history. I am not saying that national identity is a tautological concept, but rather that people adhere to a national identity because it somehow defines who they are. When someone invokes the identity "Jordanian," they may be drawing upon particular aspects of what they believe "Jordanian" comprises— such as pan-Arabism—whereas another person who would invoke the same national identity is referring to different aspects. Even as scholars continue to theorize nations as permeable and unbounded, have we really begun thinking about national identities as unbounded concepts and markers of those unbounded nations? Have we taken into consideration the effects that concepts and entities such as tribes serve to bound cultures and national identities to the extent that they serve as a meaningful bridge between multiple cultural currents?

We should begin thinking about people's identity in terms of being citizens *in* a state rather than citizens *of* a state.[12] The legal status of "citizen" has little to do with the personal sense of self: It tells a person *what* they are, not *who* they are (Donald 1996). National identity-making, then, in some sense is an intensely personal endeavor. Transnational processes suggest those involved in the making of national identity in transnational spaces are assuming new layers of identity while not necessarily shedding their other identities (assuming they were their to begin with). Identities are not necessarily transformed, as such, but added to. Whatever "Jordanian" means in Jordan also has meaning in Michigan. But by virtue of living in Michigan's Arab American community, new identities are added to "Jordanian." Thus, as Nabeel Abraham and Andrew Shryock have rightly asserted, "Arab American is a new identity that must be learned" (2000: 29). We may infer, then, that all transnational identities (such as "Jordanian American") cannot be assumed and must be learned. Though I must acknowledge that sociopolitical circumstances as they are provide many more tangible consequences for Arab Americans, and Jordanian Americans, than they would for say, Italian Americans or Dutch Americans.

At the risk of objectifying Jordanian national identity into a lifeless thing, I think it is important to reemphasize that it is a collective group of *human beings* and the sum of their sensibilities and cultural currents that comprise any national identity. National identity is not an imagining, feeling or sentiment conceived frivolously. Following Linda Layne (1994) and James Clifford (1988), I agree that national identity can adequately be viewed as "a series of cultural and political transactions, not all-or-

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nothing conversions or resistances... a series of ad hoc engagements... episodes, turns in the ongoing engagement" (Clifford 1988: 342).

Making Identity and History

Clifford has argued that distinctive identity-making processes can and should be thought of as deeply embedded in the diversity of local histories. When Clifford says that these engagements are ad hoc, he means they are adaptable and malleable, which leaves them generally open to dispute. If the identities are open to dispute, so are given interpretations of history. "Interpreting the direction or meaning of [history] always depends on present possibilities. When the future is open, so is the meaning of the past" (Clifford 1988: 343). Openness, in this respect, implies a sense of possibility and a reason for hope, and forces one to examine the diversity of the local histories involved in the making of Jordanian American national identity in Michigan

Nowhere does the future more seem more open than in the United States, especially for immigrants who often arrive with great hope. Young Americans themselves are taught from an early age, "Be all that you can be," "Believe in yourself!," "You can do it!." The United States has at the epicenter of its foreign policy discourse the promotion of freedom and democracy, building upon an American society of supposed openness and freedom of expression in whatever form that may take. Whether or not American society is "open" is debatable; however, hope and possibility are apparently infinite in American cultural narratives, especially those centering on creativity and cultural expression: "The possibilities are endless." In the American context, the burden seems to rely heavily on the individual in the making of

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their individual national identity. Yet, as I have argued previously, the nation must be somehow fixed within cultural currents that are shared and understood by other individuals in order for those individuals to talk about themselves in similar ways.

In Jordan, narratives stressing individuality have been largely nonexistent. Societies in Arab Middle East are comprised around social units that stress collective identities, whether they involve tribalism, the family or the state, built on honor and obligation. When one accomplishes something involving self-achievement—such as obtaining a university degree, for instance, or earning high salaries in professions abroad—it is rationalized by both the individual and the community as bettering the social environment of the collectivity of "we." Thus, identity-making processes in Jordan involve not only the invention of tradition, as it were, but also an adherence to collective understandings of the self.

Identity-making processes in any context are imbued with meaning through interactions with particular cultural currents and acted upon with purpose; they are also situated within narratives characteristic of the time and place in which they are played out. While the making of national identity does not occur with mere happenstance, it may be viewed as a cultural response to hegemonic influences of the present interpretation of the past. Clifford is correct in explicating identity as a series of cultural and political transactions that are dynamically moving but not total committals to any extreme. They are dynamic in the sense that they are adaptable to the changing situations of the present; however, they are fixed in engagements with history.

This approach holds an expectation for change (Layne 1994), and allows us to look at the making of national identity as a dynamic enterprise in which all members are involved at various (even disadvantageous) levels. Palestinians, then, play a vital role in the establishment of Jordanian identity not only because they comprise a majority of the population in Jordan, or because they attempt to claim Jordanian identity, but because they provide one catalyst through which the Jordanian identity is constructed. This means that Jordanians might have a definition of Palestinian identity that differs significantly from an identity Palestinians might claim for themselves, but it is nonetheless a real entity inasmuch as it is used to in defining Jordanian identity.

The opposite is also true, that Palestinians are actively engaged in establishing definitions of Jordanians that may also be different from what Jordanians themselves subscribe to. Of course, Palestinians are engaged in the making of national identity always in a transnational environment. Ariel Sharon, the current Israeli prime minister, in the 1980s popularized a right-wing assertion that Jordan indeed *is* the real, one, true Palestine, and thus all Palestinians should be moved east of the Jordan River (Khalidi 1997). The fact that Palestinians do not have internationally recognized statehood intensifies their desire to separate themselves further and further from Jordanian identity in response to such radical Israeli rhetoric, which—in the last several years—has been revived.

In Michigan, Jordanian Americans are engaged in national identity-making cognizant of the Jordanian cultural current which includes the Jordanian-Palestinian dichotomy. Yet also on the transnational level of Michigan, Jordanian Americans are

also influenced by an ever-changing and recently hostile American current and a pan-Arab current that serves to maintain a group integrity in the face of a contested minority in the United States.

I have argued that Jordanian identity in Michigan has been remade recently, appealing more to its Arab currents than to those individual national voices that would set it apart from the pan-Arab community. This does not imply that "Jordanian American" identity is missing, but that it has changed. Jordanian American as a national identity has not been erased, but rather publicly sequestered in certain arenas such as the media. Recognizing the nuances of national identity among Arab Americans in southeast Michigan allows us to consider Arab Detroit not as the monolithic whole that it is demanded to be, but rather as a complex ensemble of multiple identities that—for sociopolitical survival—is constantly reinventing itself.

The making of national identity is not a course with fixed beginning and endings. As I have discussed, it is an ongoing and dynamic process that necessarily engages history and social relationships in its construction, propagation and engagement. National identity-making also involves a legal and political consciousness on the part of the actor, who at various times in history may use such consciousness to locate themselves culturally, ethnically, and politically, especially—as I have argued—on the transnational level. By way of a brief conclusion, we may again turn to Clifford's quote, changing it slightly to say that national identity is best seen as a nexus of sociopolitical associations that are actively engaged, through a dynamic engagement of history and consciousness, by the actor.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

"Jordanian American" as a national identity has heretofore never been treated significantly by any anthropologist. Indeed, the whole notion of national identities as viable constructs—indeed as constructs at all—in transnational places has not been adequately examined. I have proposed that we begin thinking about global influences both in specific places and, moreover, how these influences crosscut and intersect the lives of transmigrants in the making of their own national identities.

National identities are not simply mandates by a state, sentiments by an individual, recollections of history, or assimilation behaviors. These may all be definitive voices that influence the making of national identities, but none of them individually constitutes a total composition therein. The making of national identities is not subject to whimsy or temper, yet it is a process that is somewhat malleable, as I have argued, and open to dispute in certain contexts and in relation to current events. While national sentiment and state allegiances may be a part of national identity, cultural institutions and the construction of cultural institutions also greatly influences the making of such identities.

The making of Jordanian American national identity is especially complicated because of the intricacies of both Jordanian identity at home in Jordan, and within the transnational communities of "Arab Detroit" in Michigan. Just as we can no longer

think of "Arab Detroit" as a monolithic whole in light of the variability and multitudinous differences (even if just in sentiment) within concentrated Arab population centers in southeast Michigan, such as Dearborn, we should also not think of the Middle East and even specific countries and nations like Jordan in terms of a singular narrative.

This is not to say that institutions that bind regions or peoples together—such as a state or pan-Arabism, for instance—are unimportant. But rather that these authorities ought to be placed in context within the greater realm of social agency by individuals and groups of individuals. Thinking about national identity in this way allows us to realize that it is not naturally occurring or spontaneously invented, but that it is socially, indeed culturally, constructed by individuals.

The implications for this kind of thinking are important, especially, for understanding the making of Arab American national identities within the American context of the new September 11 narrative. We realize now that Federal policies such as the Patriot Act have influences that extend far beyond our already present-day fears and contemporary inconveniences; they have long-term consequences for Jordanian Americans in that they serve to stifle and constrict the distinctness of culturally-defined notions of national identity... not based on anything they or even another Jordanian American perpetrated on September 11, but because of their historical interconnections as Arabs. Pan-Arabism has served as somewhat of a homogenizing factor in identity-making post-September 11, as opposed to the heterogeneity implicitly encouraged in the American cultural currents. The tensions between the

homogeneity and heterogeneity of national identity-making are still being played out in southeast Michigan's Arab American communities today.

I have argued, too, that Jordanian Americans in general are a minority within the larger Arab American communities of southeast Michigan; however, Jordanian Americans still think of themselves as "Jordanians," especially in terms of tribal affiliations. Perhaps, then, we can postulate that it is affiliation to some tribe—any tribe—as a whole (not necessarily an individual tribe, such as the 'Adwan) that serves as one structure of national identity-making (if tribalism equals Jordanianess) among Jordanians both in Jordan and on the transnational level. Is Jordanian, then, defined solely by ethnicity? Not necessarily, because there are other social and political structures that are encompassed in the Jordanian current that influence the making of national identity. Jordanian tribes themselves have cultural nuances that distinguish them from other Jordanian tribes and tribes of, for example, Iraq or the United Arab Emirates.

We have seen that history plays a very important role in the ways that people define and talk about themselves in relation to the making of their national identity. While history itself is subject to the selective memory of social actors that dynamically engage it in nationalist narratives, anthropologists should be concerned with how actors perform in light of this memory and engagement of history and not concern themselves with intricate veracities. Social forces, be they political, economic, religious or otherwise, influence the manner in which history is dynamically engaged at any given time.

Citizenship in a state can be but does not have to be related to national identity. The making of national identity can then be thought of as intensely personal, since the legal status of "citizen" has little to do with the personal sense of self. Whatever "Jordanian" means in Jordan also has meaning in Michigan; however, in Michigan, new identities are added to "Jordanian" (i.e. American, Arab Americans, etc.). Thus, all transnational identities must be made *and* learned. One cannot just assume that national identities are naturally occurring, or that by virtue of moving to Michigan from Jordan, one will automatically become a "Jordanian American."

As I have also argued, Jordanian Americans are constructing their national identity within several American narratives, the most recent and consequential of which is the new September 11 narrative. However, they are also creating their national identity within a nation—America—that heavily relies on the individual in cultural narratives, whereas pan-Arab society does not place such emphasis on the individual. This emphasis on individuality does not detract from the dichotomous fact that the nation must be somehow fixed within cultural currents that are shared and understood by other individuals in order for those individuals to talk about themselves in similar ways. How this is actually done is not of great importance; recognizing that such processes exist is much more useful because it highlights the dynamic and active role that individuals—even those at seemingly disadvantageous levels—play in the making of their own national identities, and these roles are not necessarily laden with resistance or contradiction.

The goal of this work has been to offer a more nuanced method for looking at national identities in transnational spaces. I have looked at Jordanian Americans, and their past and more recent historical vicissitudes, as examples of how we might begin to understand transnational national identities and the processes and cultural influences that are involved in their making. This work is intended to be a stepping stone for future ethnographic work on national identity, which will hopefully prompt other scholars to examine more closely the courses and negotiations, in many cultural and national planes, that go into the creation of distinct national identities.

Research on national identities involving close examination of history and cultural subtleties of the homeland shows that the making of national identity may involve practices that re more discursive than overt. National identities may not always be expressed publicly depending on the conditions of the environment in which national identity is expressed. This, coupled with the fact that most Jordanians in Michigan are relatively recent arrivals (after all, Jordan itself is a recent creation in history), also allows us to consider that most Jordanian Americans in Michigan still have strong ties to the homeland. Many have close family relatives—parents, siblings—still living in Jordan. This close affiliation with the homeland also adds to the national sentiment they feel toward Jordan, and thus is more likely to be expressed in national self-identifications.

[1] The use of the term "current" is implicitly dynamic; it can be understood as a progression, and active stream.

[2] All names of places (save for obvious ones, such as Detroit and Amman) and people have been changed to protect the identity of those who have generously participated in my research.

[3] "FBI Questions Scores of Iraqis in US" by Deborah Kong, Associated Press, 28 March 2003.

[4] "Engler talks with Arab Americans" by Niraj Warikoo. Detroit Free Press, 28 September 2001.

[5] "Arab Americans: Man, 46, charges in hate offense" by Cecil Angel. Detroit Free Press, 18 October 2001.

[6] "Black, Arab-American leaders assail racial profiling" by Niraj Warikoo. Detroit Free Press, 11 January 2002.

[7] "Fallout on Arab Americans: 'I'm scared,' metro Muslim says" by Patricia Anstett. Detroit Free Press, 22 September 2001.

[8] Most of this research was conducted at the end of 2002, *before* the registration procedures for Middle Eastern males commenced. I imagine Arab American and Chaldean social welfare agencies have had to mediate and negotiate hundreds of cases as a result of this latest humiliating procedure.

[9] Media reports of federal agents overtly and covertly visiting mosques, churches, places of business etc. in southeast Michigan were widely circulated post-September 11. The FBI made several public appearances at local Arab social events, and issued

public appeals to recruit Arab American agents. Such government and Arab American interaction intensified in early 2003 when the government announced plans to interview 11,000 Iraqi Americans in relation to "Operation Iraqi Freedom."

[10] Indeed, hospitality is a hallmark that Jordanians have truly embodied, specifically in relation to the tourism industry but also in day-to-day relations. "*Ahlan wa sahalan*" (loosely, "You are welcome here") is nearly an official national phrase, and the symbolism of the Arab coffeepot (with its connotations of being served in someone's home, a given in Jordan, and treated to lively conversation) is ever-present throughout Jordanian media and insignia.

[11] From www.arabamericannews.com. Accessed on 28 March 2003.

[12] John Comaroff, personal communication.

APPENDIX

Date: November 5, 2002

To: Robert Ulin, Principal Investigator
        David Chaudoir, Student Investigator for thesis

From: Mary Lagerwey, Chair

Re: HSIRB Project Number 02-10-23

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research project entitled "The Making and Maintenance of Cultural Identity Among Jordanians in Michigan" has been **approved** under the **exempt** category of review by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board. The conditions and duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University. You may now begin to implement the research as described in the application.

Please note that you may **only** conduct this research exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes in this project. You must also seek reapproval if the project extends beyond the termination date noted below. In addition if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the HSIRB for consultation.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Approval Termination: November 5, 2003

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