Arabs in Ames, Iowa: Identity construction as influenced by media coverage after 9/11

by

Zayira Jordán Conde

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Hsain Ilahiane, Major Professor
Karen Kessel
Kim Smith

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Graduate College
Iowa State University

This is to certify that the master's thesis of

Zayira Jordán Conde

has met the thesis requirements of Iowa State University

Signatures have been redacted for privacy
To my children Francis, Shalome, Cassandra, Natalia, and Jonathan.

Because they are my life force, without them I would have never come this far.
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I would like to express my gratitude to my informants. They were my teachers. Their willingness to share with me their personal knowledge of community and their own perspectives on Arab identity made this research possible.

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

The attacks against the United States carried out by Arab Muslim extremists linked to a terrorist organization on September 2001 and the ensuing wars have turned the focus of the world’s attention to the Middle East, its peoples, and Islam. In the United States, the tensions of the current historical processes are made evident through media coverage of Arabs and Muslims on a daily basis. The message the media produces often includes stereotypical representations of Arabs and Muslims as violent irrational enemies actively seeking the destruction of the American way of life. All throughout the United States, Muslims and Arabs have had to deal with the negative stereotypical representations characterizing media coverage of these events. The Arab community in Ames, Iowa is no exception. They, too, have had to deal with the events and their corresponding media coverage. This thesis explores the relationship between negative stereotypes portrayed by the media after 9/11 and the construction of Arab ethnic identity in Ames, Iowa. It considers the media frenzy after 9/11 and its role in creating or stressing issues of identity among Arabs in Ames, Iowa. This work also deals with the coping strategies related to these issues. In my investigation I explore the perception among Arabs in Ames of a need to protect themselves from possible oppression, rejection, or aggression. Finally, I examine the coping strategy by means of which they resort to a downplay of what they consider salient ethnic markers in response to the perceived crisis.

The issue at hand is that of the strategies Arabs in Ames, Iowa resort to so as to cope with negative media attention. How are identity and self-assertion negotiated among the members of this community while they are in the spotlight? The case of Arabs living in Ames, Iowa seems to offer an unparalleled view at the perception of conflict and how the mechanisms used to deal with it interact with the sense of self of the group. Is their perception of self as a
group affected by the media frenzy? Do they perceive a need to protect themselves against oppression, rejection, or possible aggression? Have they internalized the oppressive stereotypes? Do they possess a sense of belonging to the Ames community? And if so, how is it affected by these events? Do they perceive themselves as an ethnic group at all?

In my work, I seek an understanding of "the Other"—within the limited context specified—when he/she is recognized as a member of a minority or immigrant group that is perceived as dangerous, suspicious, or a threat to the majority due to, in part at least, negative media stereotypes. In the following pages, I document perceptions and reactions to these issues from a group of informants who identified themselves as part of the community of Arabs in Ames, Iowa. This work is intended as an assessment produced from the standpoint of a participant observant as to how this community deals with the negative stereotypes presented by the media after 9/11 in terms of the construction and expression of their ethnicity. The findings and conclusions proposed in this work emerged from a conscious effort to reflect my informants' views. This thesis is the product of a two-month period of participant observation and extensive unstructured interviewing realized during the summer of 2003. I had the honor to be able to include sixteen informants who willingly contributed with their personal knowledge to my investigation and to whom I remain thankful for having given me access to their private lives.

Said's "Semantic Transgression"

Prior to any discussion of the subject this thesis deals with, it seems relevant to clarify the inaccuracies associated with the usage of the terms Arab and Muslim and the way I deal with this issue.
Edward Said (1981) critiques the misconceptions characterizing media coverage of Arabs and Islam as one of the various ways Arabs and Muslims are “exoticized” by the West. One of the constructions he reviews on his work is the interchangeable use of the terms Arab and Muslim. Said says that this is a major cause for the confusion the media creates on its audience. A careless use of lexicon, it seems, has led to countless misconceptions. The mainstream audience that listens or reads reports by the media that include these errors seems to be bound to accept the use of these terms as proper and informed. On the other hand, members of the group who understand the nuances of these representations might experience a sense of frustration regarding the incorrectness of these portrayals.

Said assesses this semantic transgression and points out that the representation of Arabs as always associated with Islam and the terms Arab and Muslim used interchangeably in Western media coverage of Arabs and Muslims responds to a reductive image of Islam (1981:44). Said states that these labels “function in at least two different ways and produce at least two meanings each time they are used” (1981:9). In this sense, the labels associated with Arabs and Muslims seem to have “the descriptive function (that) serves to differentiate categories, realities; (and) another one, a more complex meaning that seems to overgeneralize and essentialize the category it refers to” (Said 1981:10).

My awareness of the semantic transgression Said identifies in his work drives me to clearly identify the community I studied as Arab, not Muslim. In other words, this is a community where ties other than religion seem to be in place. Haddad’s (2004:27) assertions in this respect seem to support the idea that Arab identity in the United States is tied to nationality rather than religious identity. In Chapter 4 I shall present an itemized account of the religious
composition of my group of informants. In the same chapter, I shall also discuss the effect the
U.S. media representation of Islam and Muslims seem to have among Christian Arabs in Ames.

Said acknowledges that this error is not only found in media portrayals but also in
academy. The limitations of the historical and demographic data on Arabs that separates their
religious affiliation from their ethnic identity are made evident throughout this work.
Accordingly, the allusions to these two groups (Arabs and Muslims), sometimes overlapping
them and others not, follow the patterns found in the literature.

**Brief History of the Presence of Arabs and Muslims in the United States**

A historical account of the presence of Arabs in the United States seems to be
influenced by both the lack of agreement on a uniform categorization by the government and
the semantic transgression Said points out. In a report on a conference on Arab-American
relations held in 1976, Leuchtenburg contends that American historians are “ignorant of the
Arab presence in the United States” (1977:17). On the other hand, in her recently published
book about Arab and Muslim identity in the United States, Haddad (2004) seems to alternate
between references to Arabs without allusion to their religion and references to Muslims in
general. She presents a historical account that seems to make an attempt at documenting the
presence of Arabs and Muslims in the United States differentiating them whenever possible.

The categories used by the United States government to label Arab immigrants seem to
have been problematic from the beginning. The literature (Hassoun 2004, Haddad 2004,
Leuchtenburg 1977) seems to agree in tracing the arrival of Arabs and Muslims in the United
States to the late 19th century. The initial wave of immigrants was categorized as “coming from
‘Turkey in Asia’” and after 1899 the sub-category “Syrians” was added. In any case, Haddad
states that these early immigrants seem to have followed “patterns of integration and assimilation that refashioned them into American citizens” (2004:4).

Haddad says that by the end of the 19th century Muslims from Syria began arriving to work as migrant laborers (2004:3). She identifies those who arrived in the U.S. during this period as the first wave of immigrants. To be sure, after World War I the economy of the Arab countries was adversely affected. This seems to have spurred the subsequent move of “about 4,300 additional Muslims” who arrived to the United States between 1899 and 1914 (Haddad 2004:3). In 1924, the National Origin Act restricted the quota of immigrants to be admitted from the Middle East to 100 persons per year (Haddad 2004:4).

Haddad then identifies a second wave of immigrants that arrived to the United States after World War II. According to her, these Arab and Muslim immigrants were “predominantly of middle and upper class urban backgrounds” and seemed to have had better chances at upward mobility because of their education (2004:5). The author claims that two thirds married American wives, implying that the majority were single males, and “a large number” decided to settle down in the United States (5).

In what seems to be the most far-reaching study of an Arab community until then, Abdo A. Elkholy (Haddad 2004:5) estimated that by 1961 there were 78,000 Arab-Muslims in the United States. Comparingly, Leuchtenburg (1977:24) claims that in the decade of the 1960s around 100,000 Arabs migrated to the United States. Nevertheless, the changes in immigration policies in the United States after World War II seem to have brought about a change in the composition of the wave of immigrants coming from Arab countries which as time progressed started to better reflect the diversity of the Arab world.
Haddad points out that the most recent immigrants, the third wave, have come to the United States under strenuous circumstances. Most of them, Haddad holds, are refugees from countries torn apart by war such as Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, Somalia, and Palestine. She also adduces that their main concerns have gravitated toward survival instead of “issues of identity and assimilation” (2004:6).

Although the Arab community in Ames seems to be as diversified as Haddad claims the latest wave of Arab immigrants to be, most of them seem to arrive in this town to attend the state university. The future plans of those informing this project were not investigated in depth but most of them seem to ratify Haddad’s assessment about the temporary character of some Arab immigrants. It seems pertinent then to acknowledge Haddad’s argument that even if transient in character these “temporary residents appear to have some influence on immigrants as they interact with them in cultural, social, religious, and political affairs” (2004:7).

Significance of Study

Stereotypes limit our perception of the world. Although the oversimplification of traits attributed to human groups may seem necessary in a world characterized by the overload of information, it deprives us from the richness of proper human interactions. According to information provided by the Islamic Center of Ames, Iowa there are almost 200 million Arabs and more than a billion Muslims in the world. There is an estimated eight million Muslims in America, 26.2% of which are Arab. Approximately 24.3% of American Muslims live in the Central/Great Lakes Region. The oldest functional mosque in North America is the Mother Mosque in Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

Every year many Arabs come to Ames to study at Iowa State University, others come to join their friends and family, or just to settle down. After 9/11 (some would argue that even
before that), Arabs in the United States face an ideological message that discredits their particularities and lumps them in the category of faceless enemies. The current situation offers an incomparable opportunity to understand the mechanisms members of the community of Arabs living in Ames resort to in order to deal with a crisis which exalts the negative stereotypes portrayed by the media. Do they deny themselves the recognition and proud standing of their roots and the joy of sharing it with others? The information I gathered through the ethnographic study of this community is intended to serve as a tool for shaping new policies. With this project, I would also like to bring about a conscious analysis of the process by which media encodes messages dealing with ethnic groups.

An analysis of comparable negative stereotyping of a different ethnic group seems to demonstrate that the group in question resorted to similar strategies. In his discussion of the effects negative stereotypes have on Puerto Rican immigrants in the United States, Feagin says: “Some Puerto Ricans, particularly those who do well in U.S. society reportedly develop a feeling of shame about being Puerto Rican. The constant diet of negative images sometimes pressures them to describe themselves as ‘Latin American’ or as ‘white.’ They thus try to put distance between themselves and their brethren” (1984:304). Whether this response could be attributed to an internalization of oppressive stereotypes or is a strategy to avoid the possibility of conflict remains an assessment to be made. Still, the idea of an interaction between the negative images (produced by the media or other institutions) and the process of identity construction among minority groups in the United States, as illustrated through this example, seems to support a need to assess the impact of negative stereotypes in these communities.

As pointed out above, Arabs in Ames seem to resort to analogous coping strategies in dealing with the current situation. In the case of the Arab community in Ames, they seem to
perceive the need to not be explicit about their Arabness. The alternate worldviews and cultures enriching their ethnic backgrounds seem then to be subdued by behaviors, images, presentations that aid them in appearing less Arab. In a country that prides itself of the fairness with which individuals are treated this is a preoccupying issue. Minority groups have historically seen the need to resort to strategies that seem to affect their sense of self and the empowerment that comes with it. In a world where globalization and multiculturalism permeate the political and economic agendas, academics have the responsibility to address the need to offer fresh views of interethnic relations. In the last decade the field of anthropology seems to have become more preoccupied with the role mass media plays in the construction of culture. Spitalnik (1993) recognizes the lack of attention our field has paid to the relationship between culture and media in the past by declaring that “an inquiry into just why and how anthropologists have managed to neglect the centrality of mass media in twentieth century life would be not only of historical interest, but also of potential use in illuminating certain conceptual gaps in contemporary anthropological theory” (294). This research seeks to obtain an anthropological insight as to how the sense of self of a specific ethnic group negatively portrayed by the media is affected by such representations.

The stereotypical representations of minority groups that the media as a social model constructor create seem to serve as labor-saving devices that people resort to in order to generalize traits attributed to a certain group of people. That is, the public oversimplifies its understanding of these groups by labeling them, thereby limiting its own experience by informing their understanding with the prejudices and misconceptions the media frequently resorts to. Throughout the twentieth century there was a consistent effort to eradicate negative
media portrayals of minorities in the United States. This in turn created an increased awareness of the effect these reductions have on public opinion.

In discussing the problems in encoding the message media theorists Severin and Tankard (1997) refer to the subject of undue identification. They hold that this is “the failure to see distinctions between members of a category or class” (1997:98). These overgeneralizations are sometimes referred to as stereotypes. For many, stereotypes stand as the only means by which to develop an understanding of a group other than their own (the nominal “Other”). In this respect, homogenizing preconceptions become “general knowledge,” reducing individuals whose common denominator may be limited to any factor: their nationality, ethnicity, religion, or any other, to an easily digestible caricature, a unidimensional portrait that precludes the recognition of individualism. In the case of Arabs and Muslims, the damage caused by these overgeneralizations might be better exposed through Jordanian Ambassador Mohamed Kamal’s critique of journalistic stereotypes of Arabs in a 1987 op-ed article.

I am perturbed by the continuing tendency of the American media to utilize the simplistic equation “Moslem-terrorist-Arab.”

There are almost 200 million Arabs and close to a billion Moslems in the world. Is it honest or fair that they be blanketed with the “terrorist” label through the indiscriminate use of an identifying “Moslem” or “Arab” adjective in media coverage of terrorist actions emanating from the Middle East?

Journalists, even those who pride themselves on objective reporting, are curiously selective in their descriptions. They never refer to the Baader-Meinhof Gang as “Christian terrorist.” The Japanese Red Army Faction is never called “Shinto terrorist.” The obliteration of camps and towns in Lebanon is not called “Jewish terrorism”… The press would not thing of writing “black thief” or “Christian murderer.” Why then does a qualifying racial or religious adjective become acceptable when it is “Arab” or “Moslem”?

Moreover, the American media apparently found it convenient to ignore a resolution at the Islamic summit that unanimously condemned terrorism in any form as contrary to the teachings of Islam. Such a failure is but another form of the discrimination I have defined here. (Severin and Tankard 199:99)
The agenda setting theory of mass media holds that the repetitive message of the media raises the importance of an issue in the public's mind (Severin and Tankard 1997:249). In their 1972 article discussing the agenda-setting function of the media and its effect on the political arena, McCombs and Shaw state that the choice and portrayal of certain news contributes to shape political reality. These researchers hold that the audience not only learns about an issue through the media but also learns how much importance to attribute to it judging by the amount of time or information in a news story (1972:176). In the case of news media coverage of Arabs and Muslims after 9/11, due to the relevance of the news events, media portrayals related to these groups have remained in the headlines for a long period of time. Hence, the news stories after 9/11 may have contributed to raise an understanding of Arab as stereotypically negative in the public eye. In this respect, in her article about the Arab and Muslim community in the United States after 9/11 Haddad (2004) recognizes the appearance of an increasing tendency in the U.S. media to "portray Arabs and Muslims as the consummate 'other,' as terrorists, or, more recently, as the enemy of all cherished Western values" (48).

Media researchers interested in the stereotypical representations of minorities have studied the portrayal of Arabs in the United States. In their work, Lind and Danowski (Kamalipour and Carilli 1998:160-61) analyzed transcripts of approximately 35,000 hours (nearly 136 million words) of television and radio content aired on ABC, CNN, PBS, and NPR from February 1993 to February 1996. They stated that, when they were covered, there was an overwhelming association between Arabs and violence, threats, and war that could further the stereotype of "Arab as barbarian/aggressor/terrorist"; this corroborated prior research (Kamalipour and Carilli 1998:165). Lind and Danowski also concluded that, during certain periods, the theme of Arabs seemed to be ignored by the media (Kamalipour and Carilli
Ironically, the virtual absence of coverage related to Arabs in the U.S. media in a period when no major news events related to the Arab world captured the media’s attention may have resulted in a reinforcement of existing negative stereotypes. The lack of attention from the media toward this group during this period may have supported the societal perception of the group as unimportant and contributed to perpetuate the stereotypes of the past. Furthermore, Lind and Danowksi (Kamalipour and Carilli 1998) found that the description of the Arab cultures and peoples was overwhelmingly defined in relation to Israel (65). Additionally, it seems significant that the majority of the descriptions they observed were said to have an association with aggressiveness. Lind and Danowski argued that these notions were planted on us as children (Kamalipour and Carilli 1998:93). It could be feasible then that the stereotypes these researchers found in the news media could be associated to the construction of the stereotypical Arab throughout Western literature. In his book Orientalism (1978), Said discusses in detail the neocolonialist attitude the West has historically assumed toward Arab peoples and cultures and explains the model prevalent in academia as well as in the media.

In the case of Arabs in America, the stereotypical representations promoted by the media have not been sufficiently tended to in the past probably because of the lack of recognition of this group as a minority. Activism for Arabs in America has been hampered by various factors among which the lack of official recognition of Arab as a separate identity could have priority. Arabs in America do not have a clear label to hold on to. Earlier generations of Arab immigrants benefited from an “honorary status” as white that allowed them upward mobility (Majaj 1999:321). Seemingly taking advantage of its perceived benefits and also following the official discourse, the classification Arabs in the United States seem to go by more often currently is that of White or Caucasian.
Majaj (1999) illustrates the ways in which this label appears to act as a precarious classification. Majaj holds that, in the last decades, the honorary status as White that Arabs in America generally claim has been “readily stripped away at moments of crisis,” citing the Oklahoma City Federal Building bombing as an example (1999:321). Majaj blames this honorary White status for the inattention to racism and prejudice Arab Americans experience. Furthermore, she holds that the readily removable status jeopardizes the “attempt to articulate a viable ethnic identity within the American context” (321).

The issue of ethnic identity has proven to be central in the understanding of migrant populations in cases of protracted conflict. In her work about migration and conflict, González (1989:2) argues that “the definition of both self and group in ethnic terms is enhanced, if not actually generated, by (the) conflict/migration/conflict situations.” For many migrants, the identities claimed in diaspora have come to be the mechanism that has allowed them to exalt their sense of belonging, their humanity, and their inherent human rights. The study of the way ethnicity is acted on, revealed, and made evident in these contexts might shed light on the process of identity construction for immigrants in 21st century America. González (1989) claims illustrate a possible path:

The migratory process, whatever reasons motivate it, seems first to enhance the sense of solidarity among those who migrate, who are often united by the bonds of kinship, community, and ethnicity, as well as by class. Symbols of ethnicity, such as language or linguistic style, dress styles, dietary preferences and religious behavior serve as reminders of their origin to the migrants themselves, while at the same time marking these people as outsiders in the sheltering locale. They help to establish who are “we” and who are “they.” It matters little whether the migrants all shared these symbols earlier in their lives, for they now serve to bind them together, perhaps in new ways, and to shield them from an often hostile receiving society (1989:4).

Is this bond present among the Arabs living in Ames after 9/11? Arabs in Ames appear to be resorting to a situational ethnicity similar to that which Gonzalez describes “in which
individuals identify with one ethnic group for some purposes or under certain conditions, but with others or with only the national culture when that suits them better” (Gonzalez 1989:4). Similarly, Saliba (1999) speaks of a strategic identity movement whereby Arab immigrants have switched between nationalism and a Pan-Arab sentiment. She describes this mechanism as the force behind the activism dealing with politics and “racist media images of Arabs” (1999:306). Also, these strategic identity shifts are said to be enacted when Arabs embrace whiteness “to gain access to privileges conferred by the dominant society” (1999:306). With the heightened attention of the media and the proliferation of the images of Arab as enemy of America, in the case of the Arab community in Ames, identity negotiations seem to be at a point where no clear boundaries have been defined between the Arab and the American.

The reigning post-modernist/new era discourse in which our nation embraces multicultural assertion and pluralism seems to be accompanied by the idea that racism and prejudice have ceased to exist. The discourse, sometimes turned rhetoric, makes racist attitudes more insidious, less recognizable. On the face of these new trends in interethnic relations, most minority and ethnic groups have resorted to loudly voiced denunciations. Majaj (1999), on her part, asserts that Arabs in America might have been unable to articulate such a message in the absence of a unified recognition of a minority status:

Central to cultural pluralism is ethnic assertion, or what Charles Taylor calls “the politics of recognition”—the quest for public affirmation of group identity for the purpose of cultural survival. Such assertion is of particular importance to Arab Americans, who have historically been rendered invisible in the American context by their relatively small numbers, by their ambiguous location within American racial and ethnic categories, and by their tenuous status within American political and cultural contexts. [1999:320-1]

Other than informing strategies for interethnic relations, the present study seeks to provide grounds for re-assessing processes vital to the operation of the democratic institutions
of the American government. This work is intended to serve as an assessment of the way the
treatment of minority groups by the media contributes to create a perception of reality, not only
among the mainstream, but also among members of these groups themselves and illustrate some
of the ideologies that might come out of these processes. I propose the present work as an
assessment that could inform ethical discussions and the self-censorship processes historically
favored by the American media.

The demographic trends projecting minority populations’ high growth rate in the next
decades suggest these groups will see an increase in their potential at obtaining economic and
political power. The latest census proved that these once-ignored peoples are becoming more
powerful in number. Their representation (through activism) has increased accordingly all
throughout the country. These trends and the democratic institutions that bind the United
States government to an egalitarian treatment of these groups may act as the trigger for a timely
evaluation of the stereotypical models the media furthers. Other than being inhumane, the
stigma these groups have confronted in the past has been found to be illegal, to only exist in
opposition to the magnificent justice contemplated in our Constitution.

Why resort to monolithic views of events and people? The ethical dilemma goes beyond
the mere restrictions in time and space characteristic of the media. Fairness in coverage seems
to be one of the inherent rights our technological era calls for. In the meantime, academicians
dealing with issues of identity and media may want to inquire further into these matters. In
conclusion, the present work seeks to examine such questions and, in doing so, contribute to the
literature dealing with these issues.
CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In the following pages, I discuss the definition of ethnicity and its relation to the term identity. Guided by Barth's theory of ethnicity, I deal with some of the factors influencing the construction of ethnicity. Then, I address the relationship between the stereotypical messages portrayed by the media and the construction of an ethnic identity in the United States. To do this, I elaborate on media theory supporting the idea of media as a constructor of social reality. I also deal with the concept of Althusser's (1984) Ideological State Apparatuses as to inform the discussion on the formation of ideology in a capitalist state. The specific case of Arab ethnic construction in the United States is mainly informed by the works of Abraham and Shryock (2000), Ajrouch (1999), Majaj (1999), and Saliba (1999). Finally, in regards to the issue of 9/11 and its impact on the shaping of an Arab identity in the United States I borrow from Haddad’s (2004) timely publication.

This study seeks to assess the effects of media stereotypical representations after 9/11 on the process of identity construction among Arabs in Ames, Iowa. Identity construction here is related to the individual's self awareness and acting on the variety of traits that have been traditionally associated with the “slippery concept of ethnicity” (Gonzalez 1989:1). Gonzalez acknowledges the variability in usage of the term ethnicity by saying that “most of the authors recognize that different investigators and theorists have used and will continue to use it in quite different ways” (1989:1). In this study, I have chosen to define ethnicity in emic terms “as the people being observed define themselves and others” (Gonzalez 1989:2). I shall contend then that what I recognize as the embeddedness of ethnicity within the identity of an individual and in turn of an ethnic group motivates me to use these two terms interchangeably throughout my study.
In a 1993 volume that came out of a conference on *The Anthropology of Ethnicity*, various experts set forth an assessment of the evolution of the theory of ethnicity since Barth’s famous work *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* published in 1969. Even though they support the idea that the central tenets of Barth’s theory still offer a reliable definition of the concept of ethnicity, the authors, including Barth himself, revisit the original discussion. In their introduction, Vermeulen and Govers, editors of the volume in question, indicate that the three basic statements Barth held as factual on his definition of ethnicity are as follow: “(1) ethnicity is a form of social organization, this implies that (2) ‘the critical focus for investigation becomes the ethnic boundary that defines the group rather than the cultural stuff that it encloses; the critical feature of ethnic groups is (3) the characteristic of self-ascription and ascription by others’” (1994:1).

In his article for the conference, Barth confirms that the center of interest on the investigation of ethnicity should still be the boundaries since “ethnic identity must be studied through the experiences through which it’s formed, not by creating an inventory of its manifestations” (1994:14). Furthermore, Barth praises Caton’s ethnographic work on a Yemeni tribe’s poetry by stating additional remarks that seem to further clarify the direction he proposes for the study of ethnicity: “A complex local institution locks actors into an agonistic tournament that makes participants converge significantly in action and style, creating a shared consciousness within a group, and discontinuity between them and outsiders” (Vermeulen and Govers 1994:17). It is this concept of a shared consciousness as discussed by Barth that guides this project.

Additionally, this study pays attention to context. According to Nash (1989:7) the study of ethnicity needs to attend to positionality, historicity, and the different elements that may influence its construction within a specific setting. This study deals with ethnic identity as a set
of associations and markers that bind a group of individuals into recognizing themselves as part of a group. That is, my informants profess allegiance to an identity as Arab. The most prominent element I pose as shaping ethnicity construction in this case is media stereotypes. The timeframe is limited to the time span of the study (summer 2003). I pay special interest to the reactions to media coverage after a major historical event (9/11) that has had identifiable impact on politics, economics, international relations, and many other aspects worldwide. This work, for that matter, is presented as located within a specific context of place and time.

Moreover, specific ethnic markers are salient in this research. Nash points out that aside from the kinship or blood marker, there are basic markers such as substance or the “propriety of eating together indicating a kind of equality, peership, and the promise of further kinship links,” and deity or common cult (1989:10-11). Aside from the discussion of the religious aspects that relate to this community, in my research I attend to what Nash calls surface pointers: dress, language, and physical appearance, since these seem to stand as the most visible expressions of ethnicity thus seemingly more prone to shedding than those markers that presumably constitute the core (Nash 1989:13).

I shall move on to the discussion of the ways in which a relationship between media stereotypes and the construction of ethnicity may be given. In relating the discussion of media portrayals to the shared consciousness Barth recognizes as part of ethnicity, I refer to C.Wright Mills’ (1956) discussion of the concept of cultural apparatus. Mills proposes that consciousness and existence are shaped and mediated by symbols and mass media. In regards to the specific role of the media in helping shape what he calls “a sort of psychological illiteracy,” he states that “very little of what we think we know of the social realities of the world have we found out first-hand” (1956:311). According to Mills, the “mass-like society” we live in calls for a “higher ratio
of deliverers of opinion" who are responsible for painting "the pictures in our heads... even to the point where we often do not really believe what we see before us until we read about it in the paper or hear about it on the radio" (1956:311). Our experience, according to Mills' theory is "organized in stereotypes" (1956:312). For Mills, media is a means of power that tells the individual who he is, what he wants to be, how to get that way, and how to feel the way he/she feels even when he/she does not (1956:314).

Accordingly, an analysis of neomarxist theory corroborates the idea of mass media's primordial role in helping to determine people's ideology in a capitalist society. In defining ideology Althusser (1984) states that it is "a 'representation' of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence" caused by "the existence of a small number of cynical men who base their domination and exploitation of the 'people' on a falsified representation of the world which they have imagined in order to enslave other minds by dominating their imaginations" (1984:36-7). Althusser further explains that there are specialized institutions called Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) that "function by ideology" in an effort to reproduce the relations of production in a capitalist social formation (1984:30). Furthermore, he claims that the unity of the diverse ideologies of the many different ISAs (Church, School, and so on) "is secured... by the ruling ideology, the ideology of the ruling class" (1984:23). He recognizes "the communications ISA (press, radio and television, etc.)" as one of these institutions (1984:17).

The concept of an Ideological State Apparatus seems to be further supported in Said's contention about the nationalist consensus that sustain media functions by "drawing invisible lines beyond which a reporter or commentator does not feel it necessary to go" (1981:53). In this sense, Said says the consensus defines what is meaningful and important according to the
prevalent state of matters (1981:53). The consensus Said speaks of and the ISA Althusser proposes seem further corroborated in studies where media theorists express concern about the far-reaching consequences of the “increasing concentration of ownership in the U.S. media” (Severin and Tankard 1997:397). It seems plausible then that, in the case of Arabs and Islam, the coherence of the image presented by the oligarchy of media moguls that owns the immense majority of media outlets brings forth the consensus of an elite that dictates and propagates the image of Islam, and with it Arabs, as they “take it to be” (Said 1981:144). Additionally, the idea of media hegemony proposed by media theorists Severin and Tankard (1997) and ratified by the FCC seems to further support Althusser’s argument on the influence of an Ideological State Apparatus in a capitalist society (308).

Moreover, the agenda setting theory seems to advance the viability of a connection between the messages encoded by the media and the social construction of reality. In their discussion of the agenda setting function of the media, McCombs and Shaw argue that “in choosing and displaying news, editors, newsroom staff, and broadcasters play an important part in shaping political reality” (1972:176). The public, McCombs and Shaw say, not only learns about an issue by watching the news but also determines how important the issue is by the amount of information dedicated to the news story (1972:176).

Although current media coverage of Arabs and Muslims has not yet been assessed, the media frenzy motivated by all of the major news events occurring on and after 9/11 dealing with the Middle East, Islam, Arabs, and Muslims seems to tend to incorporate the negative stereotypes found in earlier studies. The diffusion of these

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1 The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) is the government entity in charge of regulating the media. In its website, the FCC informs that in 2001 Chairman Powell created the Media Ownership Working Group (MOWG). This research group found that from 1980 to 2000, the count of media outlets owners was generally, relatively stagnant. This, they said, responded to tremendous consolidation, especially in the radio industry, [1] since passage of the 1996 Telecom Act (http://www.fcc.gov/ownership/).
messages has undoubtedly reached exponential growth in the recent period contributing to a reaffirmation of existing negative stereotypical "understandings" of Arabs and/or Muslims. In this sense, U.S. media coverage of the events of 9/11 and the ensuing wars could very well be perceived as damaging to the particular individuals and groups that have been associated with these, especially those who are in U.S. territory.

Furthermore, a recently published article seems to corroborate the prevalence of negative stereotypes in the news media after 9/11. In her recent article discussing the making of Arab and Muslim identity in the United States, Haddad (2004:15) points out: "surveys of the media have documented the demonization of Arabs, Islam, and Muslims as the monolithic 'outsiders,' the essential 'other,' whose beliefs and customs are characterized as inferior, barbaric, sexist, and irrational—values worthy of repeated condemnation and eradication." Moreover, Haddad holds that after 9/11 a growing consensus was revealed including "Beltway pundits and the press," in which Israel and America were presented as "co-victims of Islamic hatred of Judaism and Christianity" (2004:41).

In their look at Arab-American community life, Abraham and Shryock (2000) consider the effect media stereotypes have on the identity construction process of the Arab community in Detroit. Some of these are illustrated through life stories and academic essays compiled in their book. One of the authors included in the edited volume, Hamza (2000), elaborates on her particular experience talking about her "divided identity" and the chasm between her and her family's notions of Arabness: "My family life increasingly appeared 'foreign' to me, and I longed to fit in with the majority, to fully assimilate into the American lifestyle. This displaced loyalty
made me resent not only my Arab heritage but, much to my later misfortune, my family life as well” (2000:392).

Correspondingly, Ajrouch argues that the construction of an ethnic identity for the general population of immigrants in America is given through a process of interaction between “the host culture and the immigrant culture” (1999:138). Within this framework she sustains that Arab-American identity is created through a “dialectic... that includes a disdain for the American culture but includes a desire to acquire those attributes deemed desirable” (1999:138).

The dichotomy of assimilation versus cultural pluralism has historically shaped the discussion of ethnicity in the study of different waves of immigrants in the United States. Majaj (1999) adduces that Arab-American identity is tainted by historical processes that obstruct the formation of newer immigrants’ identities. Additionally, in her review of Arab-American literature, Majaj (1999:320) sustains that the writing “increasingly suggests ethnicity is articulated within and across boundaries of group identity.” Newly arrived Arabs, she says, find that earlier Arab migrants assimilated almost to invisibility. This is paired with the aversion caused by the demonization of everything Arab or Muslim and an uneasy categorization as White. Majaj claims that faced with these circumstances, Arab-Americans have opted for asserting their ethnicity “on a political and a cultural level” (1999:321). Majaj also considers the effects negative stereotypes have on the identity construction process by adducing that “for Arab Americans—still subject to identity-based discrimination and to repercussions from political events in the Middle East—ethnicity cannot be understood in isolation from factors affecting the group at large” (1999:325).

Seeing that the minority status recognition is anything but defined and clinging to a fragile categorization as White, Arabs in America face a highly problematic conundrum in terms
of identity construction acknowledged by Saliba (1999): “In a highly racialized society such as the United States, racial categories are necessary to gain access to the political power of minority status” (1999:305). Bearing in mind that “Arab Americans are pushed to the margins of available definitions” (Saliba 1999:324) when it comes to media coverage I identify the Arab community in Ames as part of a minority group. In this I seek to establish analogies between the historical media stereotyping of minorities in the United States and the coverage of this particular group. Gonzalez's claims seem to support this contention since she holds that the status of ethnic group is conferred to migrants when faced with pluralistic societies and often is used as an euphemism for minority or a lower class (1989:4).

To conclude this review I shall now elaborate on the coping strategies Arabs in Ames, Iowa seem to have resorted to in order to cope with their perception of conflict. In a study about the nature of trust between Palestinian Arabs and Jews in Israel, Rabinowitz (1992) explores the case of an Arab coach for an all-Jewish basketball team. In the account, he recalls the coach’s resistance to identifying himself as an Arab or using Arabic words that even Jews use on their daily talk. Rabinowitz says the coach resorted to a restricted relationship between him and the members of the team. The attitude adopted by the coach seems to corroborate the perception of a need to “lay low” some Arabs in Ames have asserted in my conversations with them.

The mechanism Rabinowitz calls restricted relationship appears as a strategy the Arab coach resorts to while dealing with a situation he could have perceived as critical (1992:531). Arabs in Ames seem to turn to an analogous mechanism that calls for a situational/located identity. In the case of Arabs in Ames, because of the particular crisis and negative perceptions and portrayals accompanying it, at least one of the coping strategies seems to be that of ethnic
markers being "turned off," at least in the public spheres. Arabs in Ames reflect a tendency not to demonstrate any clearly defined boundaries leading to a clear cut definition of an ethnic identity. Their negotiation of identity/ethnicity claims seems to transgress the boundaries, creating and re-creating these on a per situation basis.

Advocating a possible course for Arab American identity construction Majaj (1999) calls for it to be a process where ethnic boundaries are negotiated both on a group and at the individual's level. She acknowledges Shohat and Stam's call for a move toward identities built upon affiliation rather than kinship (1999:325). Shohat and Stam (Majaj 1999) elaborate the idea of a "polycentric multiculturalism" that moves away from essentialist assumptions and focuses on power relations (1999:325). This concept, they claim, sustain the idea of identities that are "multiple, unstable, historically situated, the product of ongoing differentiation and polymorphous identifications" (1999:325).

Majaj also supports Mohanty's idea of "horizontal comradeship" as a viable means to devise alliances on the political arena where the interests of minority groups overlap and where "group identity and action are grounded on the implications" of the differences produced by categorizations such as ethnicity, race, sex, or class (1999:325). Majaj states that "within this framework, identity serves as a marker both of who one is and of what one does with that information" (1999:325).

Coping between assimilation and cultural assertion, the situation of Arabs in Ames seem to correspond to a negotiation of identity that Saliba identifies as strategic essentialism: "The construction of an Arab-American identity woven from the multilayered fabric of Arab life in the United States, may be termed 'strategic essentialism' and is 'crucial for any multicultural
struggle that hopes to allow for communities of identification, even if those communities are multiple, discontinuous, and partly imaginary” (1999:306).

Similar negotiations are discussed in feminist literature dealing with the construction of identity. Chicana feminist Gloria Anzaldúa (2003:179) talks about the juggle of identities or multiple personalities “plagued by psychic restlessness” la mestiza resorts to in order to deal with various simultaneous cultural realities in the United States. Anzaldúa refers to this strategy as being in “a state of perpetual transition” (180). Furthermore, Latina feminist María Lugones (1997:148) recognizes the plurality in each of us. She describes those outside the mainstream as ambiguous beings and proposes the concept of “world-travelling” as a strategy they resort to in order to deal with multiple cultural realms: “The shift from being one person to being a different person is what I call “travel.” This shift may not be willful or even conscious, and one may be completely unaware of being different from how one is in a different “world.” (154).

The move toward the recognition of a minority status seems to be far from crystallizing among Arabs in Ames. Most of the members of this community seem to be here only as temporary residents. In this respect, the Arab community in Ames seems to be deprived of the political power attached to a recognition that is “crucial for any multicultural struggle that hopes to allow for communities of identification, even if those communities are multiple, discontinuous, and partly imaginary’ (Saliba 1999:306). Nevertheless, Arabs in Ames seem to conserve a sense of union. They recognize themselves and others as part of one community which is unique. Even though a concerted effort toward activism seems to be far from materializing, they still act as agents who share the burdens of belonging to a group under fire. In their day to day, they seem to respond to their perceived needs by “traveling” between worlds. Sometimes they seem to resort to their Americanness, others to their Arabness, and
others to any other identity they might claim as theirs, and even others to a mixture of two or more of these. Thus, the mechanism by means of which in some situations they may appear to lay low, to underplay the evident ethnic markers of their Arabness, seem to resonate with the coping strategies found by Saliba among the Arab-American community in Michigan.

The cited texts have contributed to mold my approach to fieldwork and have shaped the analysis I present in this work. The theories referenced above have constituted the theoretical framework influencing my research methodology and my analysis. In the next chapter, I shall explain my methodology and then proceed to report the results. Finally, in Chapter 5 I shall present the conclusions I reached after analyzing the data obtained from my informants.
CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

In the following chapter I shall present a detailed account of the methodology used for collecting my data. I shall also explain the passage from raw data to codification. In addition, grounded on the study of Abu-Lughod’s (1989, 1991, 1993) work, I shall present a rationale for the methodology I used in my work.

The qualitative data gathered during unstructured interviews and participant observation stands as the main body of information I shall analyze in subsequent chapters. Although I present a critique of quantitative analysis in anthropology, in this work I have seen a need to support the information gathered through participant observation as well as through my unstructured interviews with such an analysis. The identification of patterns and what appears to be statistically significant information shall be presented and discussed on Chapter 4. A more in-depth discussion of my findings guides my conclusions which are presented in Chapter 5.

Research Setting

Ames, Iowa is a U.S. Midwest city with a population circa 50,000 (see Figure 1). Iowa State University is the main employer and economy booster in the area. More than 25,000 students converge in this town to bring it to life each semester. People from different ethnicities and international students could be characterized as a minority interacting with a majority of white middle class Euro Americans who predominantly come from small towns in Iowa. Through my interaction with the locals I have learned that a great number of them has rarely been exposed to experiences abroad or interaction with people from different backgrounds. For them, Ames is the first look at a multicultural community.

As discussed in Chapter 2, no figures on the Arab population or instruments identifying members of the Arab community in Ames were available. Still, as I was acquainted with some
of the members of the community, the networks that are seemingly in place (see Chapter 4 for further discussion) functioned as to provide me with names and contact information of a number of possible informants.

Arabs in Ames seemed to obey the pattern the city's general population follows (further discussion in Chapter 4). Most of them are students of the state university. Still, there are some that are established and recognized members of the community, merchants and professionals. Their origins are varied too. Some of the individuals I interviewed for this study came from countries as diverse as Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, and Palestine.

Rationale

One of my philosophical commitments in anthropology is to strive for the recognition of the particularities in any community. Like Abu-Lughod (1993) in her study of the Awlad Ali in Egypt I seek to understand and present “life as lived” rather than falling into the essentializing trends that have characterized anthropology in the past. Abu-Lughod's approach stands as a guide to my work. I think that as more individuals from the colonized Third World enter into our field this type of research will be widely accepted. Abu-Lughod struggles to reflect/reproduce the tone in which the stories are told. She not only gives voice but also makes each individual voice valid, including her own, in the telling of culture as a holistic experience. The complexity of human life is then honored through this methodology. I share her perspective in the study of culture in the sense that my interest comes from the recognition that we share a sometimes unsuspected amount of experiences with the people we call different.

Moreover, I agree with Abu-Lughod's discussion of the essentialist aspects of anthropology in that the study of human culture has evolved and needs to consider the
unstoppable blend of human experience caused by today's globalization. Abu-Lughod's work presents a paradigmatic shift for those who intend to produce ethnographic work that seeks validity through the presentation of personal stories reflecting in this way the eclectic surrounding of today's cultures.

Abu-Lughod contends that the effects of homogeneity, coherence, and timelessness in ethnographic writing contribute to the creation of "cultures" characterized as bounded, discrete entities. She calls this a "dangerous fiction." Furthermore, she recognizes the fluidity of human experience as the center of interest in a contextualized ethnographic project. Her presentation of the Awlad Ali stands as a vehement example of thoroughness that should be emulated by those who are willing to present a thorough assessment of human culture.
In her critique of past anthropological tenets, Abu-Lughod points out that the gap between professional discourse and everyday life establishes a separation between ethnology and its reader, and anthropology and the people written about, contributing to a representation of the other as different and inferior. She calls her work a discourse of familiarity and employs a writing style that draws from everyday stories. Her writing brings the reader closer to the experience of “the Other.” Abu-Lughod takes it onto herself a struggle with the existing approach to the study of humanity. Whereas most in this field are in pursuit of the differences grounded in inherent relations of power, hers is a project that breaks the spell of the exotic traditionally associated with our field. Her exercise of anthropological study from a renovated perspective seems to have been missing in our field for a long time. In her work, Abu-Lughod, has been able to bring, not only to academia but to the informed reader as well, a means to participate in the experience of a human group within its particularities but also as it is influenced by the exogenous elements that have an impact on human life in the 21st century. This is where the strength of her work lies and it should be the most vital goal of any anthropological pursuit, that our proximity will allow us to see the unique along with the commonalities that characterize human experience.

As an anthropologist whose work is informed by Lila Abu-Lughod’s research, I would argue that the pursuit of anthropology is somewhat limited when quantitative methods are used. Although quantitative methodology might have proven effective in dealing with social issues in specific discussions, such as media studies, in anthropological research it might turn into a means for desensitivization. That is, the use of this type of analysis might aid in reflecting a body of data where human beings are objectified and essentialized. What I contend, in agreement with Abu-Lughod’s exposition through her work with the Awlad-Alid of Egypt, is
that such research approach contributes to objectify individuals as numerical data. Through her work, Abu-Lughod contends that essentializing views of people as agents of culture denies the particularities of human existence.

Similarly, feminist studies have identified and critiqued the androcentric bias in the body of knowledge. In the field of anthropology androcentric perspectives have been responsible for incomplete and erroneous accounts. Although, under the light of our platonic conception of the scientific method, data may seem much more valid when under a numerical scrutiny, and as it is also required by the establishment, I seek to obtain a more humane perspective. In my work, I shall present the kind of research that Abu-Lughod (1993) has brilliantly furthered as a view at how “people live their lives.” I shall present an assessment of the Arab community in Ames and the coping strategies its members use in response to the negative stereotypes promoted by the media that is objective but not distant.

My work strives to present a holistic view at each individual’s take on the issues discussed. In my work, I refuse to essentialize this group presenting the analysis in the most contextualized way possible. At the end, it seems plausible that this kind of approach contributes in the production hypotheses that might seem rightly framed within a context. Furthermore, this approach seems more likely to succeed in reproducing scenes that illustrate the little traditions as well as the greater scheme of human interaction.

Participant Observation

Participant observation seemed to be an appropriate methodology that would allow me to share a large amount of time with the people who considered themselves part of this group. In this scenario, it was also necessary to resort to information cross-checking techniques in order
to avoid biased data. Note taking and audio recording were the tools supporting and allowing the proper registration of data and eventual analysis.

The reason behind the use of this specific methodology is that a structured questionnaire, because of the nature of the topics under discussion, could have acted as a deterrent or an intrusive technique. Contrastingly, the usefulness of driving the subject closer and creating an atmosphere of confidentiality and trust seemed to be easily attained with a less evident questioning and data gathering methodology. The establishment of a relationship (cordiality and sincere interest) with my informants prior to my fieldwork appears to have operated as a trust building factor. My engagement in participant observation previous to interviewing my informants, as well as throughout my fieldwork, provided my analysis with a framework for cross-referencing the information gathered during the interviewing stage. The exercise of participant observation seemed to have ensured an understanding of the environment and external aspects surrounding the community.

My limited knowledge of Arabic and my study of Islam proved to be somewhat useful in establishing a bond with the group. The occasional use of Arabic appears to have facilitated my acceptance as a researcher who was genuinely interested in the group. Also, the timeline established for the project allowed me to engage myself for a fair amount of time so that I was aware of the issues, explored them enough, and consequently produced as valid an assessment as possible.

A major concern I had was the possibility of rejection or doubt that would stop informants from the necessary trust to be open in their remarks. Nevertheless, my informants seemed to have accepted me as a reliable confidante. This seems to have been possible, at least in part, because of my prior relationship with members of the group. Furthermore, I assured
them of the practical end that the study sought to achieve. By indicating that the benefits of my project could be geared towards the recognition that Arabs in the U.S. "guide themselves primarily by self-seeking rationality—rather than irrational hatred" and that this could contribute to facilitate a shift in prevailing attitudes (Rabinowitz 1992:533), I aided my informants in understanding my project as an effort to shed light on the effects caused by negative media stereotypes.

**Interview Questions**

My conversations took place in unstructured form. An objective and quantifiable questionnaire was created prior to my fieldwork. This served the purpose of guiding a thorough inquiry. It also covered a broad spectrum of aspects regarding the issues in question (See Appendix A). The questionnaire acted mostly as a guide since, for the sake of a free flowing conversation and to avoid writing while my informants talked, the questions were presented in a casual way, as they seemed appropriate within the context of what was being discussed. The possible limitations presented by the small size of my sample (16 informants) are addressed by incorporation of the ethnographic data. The quantitative analysis then is reinforced with the background provided by the participant observation methodology.

The interview schedule I used during my fieldwork consisted of a total of 32 questions. These were divided into six areas: demographics, ethnicity, social interaction, safety, travel, and media perception. As stated earlier, the questionnaire worked as a guide for discussion so as for me to keep track of the issues discussed. I registered my informants' responses on the questionnaire form and identified them by name initially. I also took ethnographic notes on a separate notebook, and supported my notes with the audio recordings made during the conversations. After I finished my fieldwork, I transcribed the audio recordings word by word.
Then, in order to assure my informants confidentiality, I coded their names using letters so that the data tied to each informant was recognizable and attributable to the right source but not identifiable to others. The data obtained from these transcripts was incorporated to the body of data analyzed in this work.

One of the major struggles I faced, because of my high regard for qualitative knowledge, was the codification of the data gathered. I coded the transcripts of my 16 interviews according to the topics included in the questionnaire. I produced a spreadsheet in which all of my informants were included. For each subject discussed there were a number of possible responses that were coded accordingly. For example, age distribution was summarized in three different age brackets: 18-30, 31-40, and 41+. In the case of qualitative data such as usage of Arabic language in public, the categories summarizing their responses (never, not so frequently, frequently, everyday) were devised as to better reflect their answers. During my interviews, in my interest for attaining closeness and legitimacy among my informants I deemed it necessary not to limit their responses to statistical scales (i.e. Everyday, Frequently, Not so frequently, etc.). Hence, many of their responses were qualified statements and whenever possible I elaborate on these (see Chapter 4). Still, the figures that came out of the quantitative analysis are presented as a qualified representation of the multiplicity of views that my informants communicated through their comments. In the next chapter I shall analyze the results coming out of my coded data.
CHAPTER 4. RESULTS

In this chapter I shall present an analysis of the data I gathered during my interviews along with pertinent information detailed in my ethnographic notes. I shall also discuss the relationship between the factors I inquired about in my research: demographics, ethnicity, social interaction, safety, travel, and media perceptions. Throughout the discussion of these variables, I shall attend to nuances that appeared significant in certain cases. Finally, I shall end this section with a summary highlighting my major findings. My conclusions are to be further elaborated through a more in-depth discussion to be presented in Chapter 5.

My decision to embark on this specific research subject was born out of three main reasons. First, I had met and shared a lot of time with Arabs in Ames, Iowa in the three years prior to the research. This would be something that would facilitate my entrance into their community as a researcher, since they had recognized me as a trustworthy individual. Also, the passage from a personal relationship to being recognized as an anthropologist would be smoother than if abruptly introduced to the community. Additionally, the particular situation and delicate subjects we would discuss demanded a researcher with the kind of approval from the community that I had already attained. My decision to not identify any of my informants by name was an additional reassurance they obtained when they agreed to being interviewed. Second, I wanted to explore the perception they had of the U.S. media. Many times before my research started, in my own living room, three, four, five, eight Arabs would talk about the issue of media coverage in the United States. Because of the significance of the events of 9/11 and my knowledge of media issues, I thought it vital to reflect the momentum in a study where both media and ethnic construction were discussed. Basically, my interest was in documenting how media stereotypes and ethnic construction among minority groups might interplay in a critical
situation. Third, as a Puerto Rican who has pursued higher education in journalism in the United States I have become knowledgeable in the history of prejudice and stereotyping of minority groups characterizing U.S. media throughout the last century and the effects these have had in these communities. My goal is then to contribute to an understanding of the way media stereotypes affect minorities in the United States.

After three years of knowing them, arguing with them, having passionate conversations on the politics of the Middle East, sharing food with them, and getting to know Islam better, my fieldwork benefited from my insider’s take on most of the subjects we talked about and a safe-enough distance that allowed me not to “go native.” At first, my fear of being too close stopped me from pursuing this project but then I recognized the need for documentation that would acknowledge what could be taken as a critical situation for a group at a moment in the United States where passions, prejudice, and oppositional feelings were at an all time high. My goal of attaining an understanding of the effects United States media portrayals, specifically news coverage on TV, had on their ethnic identity and its assertion, declaration, and exhibition is born out of the realization that such assessment could very well serve other groups in similar situations of conflict.

Demographics

Figures delineating the Arab population in Ames are obscured by the very classificatory schemes alluded to in this thesis work (See Chapters 1 and 2). The U.S. Census Bureau in its 2000 reports did not include a specific category to identify people of Middle Eastern origin or ethnicity. The data available by race includes White, Black or African American, American Indian and Alaska native, Asian, Native Hawaiian and categories for some other race and two or more races. Nevertheless, the State of Iowa includes information on its website that confirms
assertions made by many of my interviewees. The census data available at the State of Iowa’s library website informs that White is a person having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, the Middle East, or North Africa (http://www.silo.lib.ia.us/specialized-services/datacenter/additionalinfo/raceethnicityinfo.html). The data collected by place of birth or languages does not provide for an assessment of the population of Arabs in Ames or Iowa for that matter either.

My familiarity with the community drives me to a presumption that the Arab community in Ames consists of a drifting population that could be estimated as about 50 to anywhere near 100 persons at any given moment. Other than because of normal migration, the number may see rapid fluctuations because of graduations (after which students leave) and enrollment of new Arab students at the university each semester. It is also influenced by the impossibility to identify those who might have assimilated to the mainstream and do not acknowledge an Arab heritage or are unable to assert an Arab American ethnicity because of the official classificatory scheme. In any case, there is an absence of official documentation that acknowledges population figures of Arabs, Muslims, or Arab-Americans in Ames. Faced with this, the need for me to resort to networking in order to obtain a sense of who belongs to the community was evident.

As a participant-observer of the community in general, I was able to share with people from the community in different instances. Through my conversations I identified or was referred to a number of individuals who became informants and were interviewed extensively. The open-ended questionnaire developed prior to the start of my fieldwork worked mainly as a guide to discussion. Since I sought to develop an empathy with the interviewed, as a researcher I found it necessary to often sustain open conversations that would inevitably end up being
drawn to the subjects dealt with in my research. From the sixteen unstructured interviews I made and the ethnographic notes taken during my fieldwork, I obtained valuable insight on the group's perspectives on five main subjects: ethnicity, social interaction, safety, travel, and media. The subjects being investigated, ethnicity and media, were complemented by assertions on three additional topics that seemed relevant to the discussion as a whole.

The age distribution of the sample is representative of the town of Ames as being a university town. As shown in Figure 1, almost three quarters (74%) of the interviewees were between the ages of 18-30 and all of these were students of the university at different levels. Those who comprised the 31-40 age group were either students at graduate level, recently graduated, or worked as faculty. One of those over 41 was a business owner. Therefore, the great majority (81%) were students at the university. Thus, this tended to corroborate the drifting nature of the community. While there seemed to be a few bona fide members of the community that remained more or less permanently in Ames, the great majority appeared to be in Ames as temporary residents. Having stated this, I would like to revert to my discussion of Haddad (2004:7) found on Chapter 2 in which she holds that these individuals are influential and are influenced by their community while they remain a part of it.

Figure 2 shows the gender distribution. Among those interviewed 87% were male. This figure reflects the make up of the university's population. Iowa State University's figures on gender distribution show a historical majority of males in the university's enrollments both for graduate and undergraduate degrees (http://www.iastate.edu/~inst_res_info/FB04files/PDF04/FB04-40.pdf). Nevertheless, the difficulty at obtaining female informants could signal the community women's resistance, fear, or suspicion toward this type of
Figure 4.1, Author's Survey, Summer 2003.

Figure 4.2, Author's Survey, Summer 2003.
research, or it might also be an indicator of their lack of engagement in the public arena. This would contradict Haddad (2004:44-45) who in her publication claims that as men have withdrawn from the public arena after 9/11, women have been appearing more public. At the same time she sustains they seem to be keeping domestic problems quiet for fear of damaging their husbands and children's future.

The majority of the women I tried to connect with were through attempts made through male informants and they were not university students but members of their families. In this sense, the limited response might signal a stricter observance of cultural norms that restrain women's movements in the cultures they come from. Even when a professional Arab woman was the one to offer a list of people I could contact, these were all men. Nevertheless, the lack of informants I could reach as opposed to Haddad's assertions on the increased visibility of women after 9/11, signals a need for a more systematic effort to study issues that might appear relevant to the women of this community.

The restricted time dedicated to this research project limits the conclusions that can be drawn from the data in terms of gender perspectives on the subject. As I struggle with my personal resistance to use the male as the norm, in this work, the findings are qualified statements that seek to inform the perceptions of a community that as a whole seems to be constituted by an unusually higher number of males than that encountered in the general population.

Nevertheless, a hint of what we could encounter in the larger Arab and Muslim population in the United States was offered by one of my informants when relating his sister's experiences after 9/11: "I was in school. A lot of people didn't know about it till later on. I talked to my sister and she's like you'd better keep quiet. Don't bring... Don't say a word, don't
say anything. I guess she was at work when it happened and... where was she? In Minnesota and she works in a big insurance firm and I guess there was only her and another girl that were Muslim and everybody was just like giving them the dirty looks and things and so I guess I was very lucky I wasn't actually exposed to what happened.” My informant did not make clear if his sister wore the veil either before or after the events or the way her co-workers had come to know about her being a Muslim. Nevertheless, the veil as religious and ethnic marker seems to play an important part on how Arab and Muslim women could have experienced prejudice after 9/11. It seems pertinent then that future research on women's coping mechanisms under the light of media coverage of Islam and, specifically, veiled women should inform these issues.

The people interviewed for this research were all at least beyond their first year of postsecondary education. Figure 3 shows most of them (68%) were either students who were seeking to finish a 4-year degree or had recently obtained it. Almost a fifth of my group of informants (19%) were seeking to obtain masters degrees whereas 13% were at a doctoral level or were pursuing post doctoral studies. Figure 4 shows a breakdown by occupation that might further support the claim that this was an educated group of individuals. At this point, I would like to propose that their level of education might have functioned as a trigger for them to be informed both at the technical level required by their field of expertise as in the more general level, namely in terms of current events. In fact, this group seemed to make a point of keeping themselves informed in the latter respect, especially about events dealing with the Israel-Palestine issue and other such topics they found compelling and proximate due to their ethnic background.
LEVEL OF EDUCATION

- PhD or over: 13%
- Master degree: 19%
- Bachelor's degree: 68%

Figure 4.3, Author's Survey, Summer 2003.

OCCUPATION

- Faculty: 6%
- Business owner: 13%
- Student: 81%

Figure 4.4, Author's Survey, Summer 2003.
Religion

Most of the literature on Arab-Americans documents the presence of the largest community of Arabs in the United States as established in Michigan. This specific community has been found to be composed mostly of Arab Christians. In this sense, the community of Arabs in Ames might reflect the composition of the Arab community in Michigan to a lesser extent (see Figure 5). I found a considerable number of Christians among the Arabs in Ames.

Although the Arabs I had come in contact with before 9/11 were all Muslim, they knew many Arab Christians that lived in the community and even spent time and had established friendships with them. The percentage of informants that were Muslim (76%) to Christians (24%) appeared as a reflection of the networks Arabs in Ames seemed to hold on to. The community, in this sense, appeared to have resorted to bonds other than a religious affiliation. Arabs in Ames seemed to rely on ties that bound them in other ways by claiming commonality
on ethnic markers such as language, food, cultural ideologies, and a tendency to spend time together, or what Nash (1989) calls substance (see Chapter 2 for an in-depth discussion). My research seemed to reveal an implied consensus among Arabs in Ames independent of religious affiliations that seemed to bend toward disapproval of media stereotypes, especially after 9/11.

In regards to Arab Muslims, as discussed in Chapter 1, Said (1981) discusses the semantic transgression found in the Orientalist literature and media coverage of Arabs and Islam. His findings illustrate the interchangeable use of the terms Arab and Muslim in Western media coverage of the Middle East. When inquiring on this issue I probed my Muslim informants persistently. I was especially interested in their religious practices because of the notoriety the coverage of Islam as synonymous of Arab appears to have had in the U.S. media both before and after 9/11. The looseness in religious practices could be attributed to what they have claimed was a different environment from that of “back home.” For the younger informants, it could also be the result of the newly attained independence from parental supervision.

Throughout my interviews with Arab Muslims, the recognition of a looseness on their following of religious practices such as prayers, visits to the Mosque, and the prohibition of alcohol did not seem to come about easily and only accompanied by a sense of shame and guilt. Still, many seemed to acknowledge a laxity as compared to their practices while in their countries of origin and, at least one, admitted to have stopped going to the mosque after 9/11.

The Arab Muslims whom I had come in contact with before 9/11 were a mixed group in terms of religious practices. Some attended mosque services frequently, others just prayed at home, while others had abandoned strict practices that they followed while in their countries of origin after coming to the United States. My knowledge of the group of Arabs I had become
acquainted with before my research seemed to be a dependable predictor of what I found in my fieldwork. As shown in Figure 6, among my informants, more than three quarters (77%) never went to the mosque.

This figure seems to corroborate Haddad's (2004:33) assessment on the majority of Muslims in the United States (over 80%) as being “unmosqued.” Some (15%) declared that they went frequently while others (8%) stated they did not attend so frequently.

One of the most striking findings was that some of those who I knew attended the mosque before 9/11, stopped going after this. As I stated above, one of my informants said that he thought it was “not favorable” to visit the mosque after 9/11. After some time had gone by I asked him again and he corroborated the same position. He related he had continued to go to the mosque for a few weeks after 9/11. Then, he said, the Mayor of Ames had come to visit and handed out presentation cards so that anybody who had a complaint could get in touch with
him. Whether this reassurance had an effect opposite to the one intended remains unknown but my informant said he had stopped going to the mosque after that.

**Citizenship**

More than half (56%) of the people I interviewed declared they were U.S. citizens (see Figure 7). Again, the issue of citizenship seemed to be mirrored on the group of Arabs I had met prior to my research. In the case of my informants for this work, through their stories, I came to know that the great majority had arrived to the United States from the Middle East to pursue their studies. This led me to believe they had been born in the countries they came from. Nevertheless, after I inquired about their citizenship I found out that most of them had been born in the United States, later joining their extended families at their places of origin, and returning to the United States to attend college after graduating from high school. Only a few had, at some point prior to my question, asserted their American citizenship.

![U.S. Citizenship Chart](image)

Figure 4.7, Author's Survey, Summer 2003.
The issue of U.S. citizenship seemed to have only been brought up by my questioning of the subject and it did not seem to be highlighted as an identity marker by most of these individuals. Even while acknowledging their U.S. citizenship the individuals recognizing it still seemed to identify themselves more with categories that related to their Arabness (Middle Eastern, Arab, Muslim, and so on). Although they seemed to exhibit what Hassoun (2004:18) calls a “deep attachment to the concepts of democracy,” their citizenship and the passport that comes with it seemed to act as a practical resource they used as needed. On the other hand, their citizenship did not appear to function as an igniter for activism or an immediate assertion of an Arab-American identity. It seemed as if it was taken rather as a highly esteemed asset. Their passports seemed to work for them as an objectified benefit provided by chance because of the place they were born in.

Ethnicity

The claims of ethnicity in this group were highly fragmented. Figure 8 shows a detailed breakdown of the different ethnicities my informants identified with. The group was formed by people who, independently of their citizenship, cited as their country of origin many different nations. Among these were: Palestine, Egypt, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Somalia. Even though 56% of my informants were U.S. citizens only 13% considered themselves Arab-American. When asked about their ethnicity most of them proceeded to present a long argument ascertaining different views about their own ethnic claims. Mainly, they seemed to exhibit a lack of satisfaction with the existing classificatory scheme. One of my informants’ comments on the issue of ethnicity better illustrates this point:

“Middle Eastern is usually... So you don’t have specific ethnicity for... I am not sure if I’m white. I don’t look white but... (laughs). But, yeah, this is usually what they have in the directions when you fill ethnicity. Basically, under white so you’re not a minority... Sometimes you’re mixed with Mexicans so basically they don’t care (laughs).”
Moreover, the official classificatory scheme itself seemed to be a source of anxiety when it comes to claiming any Arab-related ethnicity like in the case of an informant who said: “Arab-Americans are White. We count as White. We don’t count as any other ethnic but they want to specify that. I think they’re not gonna do it because it’s gonna be, specially after September 11, more than obvious it’s discrimination, clear discrimination.”

My informants confounded racial categories for ethnic ones claiming an ethnic label that should rather be considered a statement related to race. Among those who claimed the ethnic label that most suit them as White or Caucasian (25%) many seemed to have a need to offer an extensive rationale of how an indefinite “they” was responsible for them to have to resort to such categorization. An excerpt from one of my interviews might illustrate this point better (my own words always appear italicized):

Informant: I’m Caucasian (in a very firm and secure tone of voice).
Would you go for that category?
Informant: Yes, because I went... I'm not making this up. I went to the police office in Ames and they said that we are categorized as Caucasian; this is true I'm not making this up. I used to put it as Hispanic by mistake because, you know, okay, they didn’t have Arabs, I didn’t know what to put and I used to put by mistake... is true...

They don’t have Arabs, you say...

Informant: Arab is not an ethnicity, by the way.

What is it then?

Informant: (Long silence) The Arabs are classified as Caucasians.

Walter Benn Michaels (1992:685) in an article for Critical Inquiry on the construction of identity dealing with race states that “Race transforms people who learn to do what we do into the thieves of our culture and people who teach us to do what they do into the destroyers of our culture; it makes assimilation into a kind of betrayal and the refusal to assimilate into a form of heroism.” Seemingly, for my informants, the admission to a flagrant Americanness tied to their citizenship status could have been interpreted as a betrayal to the roots they claimed as theirs, to their genuine identity as Arabs. In this sense, the community of Arabs in Ames, specifically those who had an American citizenship, seemed to exhibit resistance to assimilation when it came to abandoning cultural practices from their places of origin. Their dichotomous cultural practices, those that could be taken as American and the ones that seemed tied to Arab tradition, appeared as only possible through their maintenance of a strenuous balance. As if echoing the juggle of identities Abraham and Shryock (2000) claim Arabs in Detroit make, my informants’ private and public identities seemed to differ from one another. For a more in-depth discussion of my informants’ public and private personas I shall expand later in this chapter when I analyze the subject of social interaction.

When asked about their identification in terms of ethnicity most of my informants seemed to exhibit ambiguity and confusion in terms of the categories they resorted to. The
majority mentioned more than one classification but most (30%) identified themselves as Arab whereas others (19%) identified themselves as other in terms of the existing classificatory scheme. Some (13%) resorted to a classification as Middle Easterner that they said was seldom recognized in such system.

The issue of race seemed to interact with ethnicity as an identity marker in different ways. Those of my informants who were black or dark-skinned seemed to have had other schemas in place when it came to their assertion of ethnicity. Such is the case of two persons I interviewed together. They had been in the United States for some time. These informants had an excellent diction in English and it would be hard to tell they were from elsewhere. One of them was a U.S. citizen and he said alternately people took him for Hispanic or African American.

I had been informed that my other informant, whom I interviewed at the same time, was a refugee which, if ratified, would corroborate Haddad’s reference to the nature of the last wave of Arab immigrants as discussed in Chapter 2. He did not clarify this point during our meetings. Perhaps this could be due to an interpretation of such identity as lesser in comparison to his counterpart who claimed to be an American citizen and always accompanied him to our sessions. About his strategies in dealing with identity as a Black Arab, this informant declared: “Me being black and I don’t really look like I’m foreign, I didn’t have any problems. Nobody knew who I was. Some people, very few people, knew but they didn’t really, it didn’t really affect me at all.” In this case, race and language proficiency seemed to have been elaborated into an alternate identity (African American) that downplayed the individual’s Arabness.

When it came to the workplace Arabs, Muslims, Arab Americans, Black Arabs and even those who were mistakenly taken by any of these experienced their lives in America differently.
Ironically, during my research, I met a Turkish male who had two masters (Economy and Statistics), a strong accent, and what could have been taken as an Arab appearance. This person did not get a job after months of active search whereas my informant referenced in the preceding paragraph, a Black Arab who held a Bachelors degree and spoke English fluently told me how he had benefited from tokenism more than once: "I think mainly I usually get jobs because most companies wanna be diversified so when they meet like an educated, you know, well presented black person they usually like to hire me because it makes the company look better, so... and I present myself very well and so I usually get what I want."

The contrast between those ascertaining a U.S. citizenship (56%) and those who claimed a classification as Arab American (13%) seems significant. This contrast may be related to my informants' long stays in their parents' countries of origin. Of those who were American citizens a majority called the countries they were raised in home. Nevertheless, the contrasting figures seem to speak volumes about their perceptions of self and their place in American society. Most of them did not seem to think of themselves as American and they seemed to isolate their citizenship and place of birth (when it was U.S.) from the ethnic claim they made. That is, a move toward a solid identification as Arab-American does not seem to have been crystallized in the Arab community in Ames, at least during the time of my research. Perhaps because of the temporary character of many of its constituents, the Arab community in Ames did not seem to elaborate the discourse of Americanness found in the community of Arabs, Muslims, and Arab-Americans in Michigan.

Social Interaction

In terms of their social interaction, the group seemed to be highly engaged in exchange with people from what they considered is their same ethnicity. Figure 9 shows that in public, the
Figure 4.9, Author's Survey, Summer 2003.

Figure 4.10, Author's Survey, Summer 2003.
great majority (87%) spent their time with people from their same ethnicity frequently or everyday. A similar number (81%) claimed to spend time with people from their same ethnicity frequently or daily in private (see Figure 10).

The same trend seemed to hold in respect to their usage of the Arabic language where the data reflected that 75% of the interviewees claimed to use it in public frequently or everyday. Contrastingly, more than half (56%) claimed to use Arabic in private less than half of the time (see Figure 11). The figures on the use of the Arabic language in private seemed to be somewhat driven by either the presence of family in town or the decision to have a roommate of the same ethnicity. Half of the interviewees claimed they spent time in private with people of the same ethnicity everyday and almost a third (31%) answered they did so frequently.

Their usage of the English language at home (Figure 12) seemed to have also been instigated by their choice of roommate or presence of family with more than half (56%) claiming the usage of English at home to be at more than half of the time. Moreover, my informants’

Figure 4.11, Author’s Survey, Summer 2003.
Figure 4.12, Author's Survey, Summer 2003.

Stories reflected a notion of family and friends as a safe haven that is made evident in the figures reporting on their social interaction. In this respect, my informants seemed to center their lives in Ames around people of their own ethnicity, privately and publicly.

Contrastingly, their stories seemed to expose differences between their practices while in public and their private activities. My informants seemed to want to appear inconspicuous or more American when they were in public. Even though their answers to my questions in terms of the usage of Arabic in public (see Figure 13) seemed to point toward a relaxed use of the language in public my informants appeared to resort more frequently to the use of English even when amongst themselves in public than in private. They seemed to express a sense of relief and comfort while they were at home mostly in their usage of the Arabic language, the tone and volume of their conversations, and the subjects they were willing to discuss. In the time I spent with my informants I observed numerous private conversations that would deal with politics and
religion in the private spheres. These argumentative sessions were loud and they offered room for disagreement amongst themselves. In this sense, their customs in private did not seem to be mirrored in their meetings in public. While in public, the tone and volume of their conversations seemed to be tenuous and the subjects appeared as less of a controversial nature.

Safety

To understand their perceptions in terms of safety I inquired about their awareness of occurrences that could be considered racist or prejudiced on an ethnic basis. Figure 14 shows that the great majority (77%) answered positively to this question and proceeded to point out instances of events that had happened in the larger context in the U.S. and sometimes locally. Still, it seems significant that even with the immense recognition that things happen, had happened, and would continue to happen to Arabs and Muslims in the United States and in Ames (a sense of inevitability of the state of matters), an overwhelming majority (87%) answered
Figure 4.14, Author’s Survey, Summer 2003.

Figure 4.15, Author’s Survey, Summer 2003.
positively when they were asked if they felt safe in Ames (see Figure 15). This contrast might respond to their sense of being in a place that is safer than the rest of the United States. This contention might be supported by the number of interviewees (56%) that said they did not feel as safe in other places in the U.S. (Figure 16).

Those who emphatically asserted they did not feel safe in Ames had been involved in major events that were well known by many in the community. One, an Iraqi citizen, was arrested by immigration officers; another one was violently attacked while visiting a fraternity house. Perhaps, the public character of these events could have worked as a catalyst for these informants to be able to articulate their perceptions of Ames as not being a safe place in an outspoken way. On the other hand, I must acknowledge that the safety Ames seemed to offer to most of my informants might have been linked to their limited social interaction. In this respect, my informants seemed to be constrained mainly to interact with people they recognized.
as of their own ethnicity (87% in public everyday or frequently). Was Ames only safe because they spent time mainly with people of their own ethnic group? While a correlation between a sense of safety in Ames and my informants' limited social interaction might not have been solidly established through my limited research, it remains a feasible subject for further investigation. Nonetheless, the community of Arabs in Ames during the summer of 2003 appeared as a close tight group of people who shared their time with each other and limited their interactions with people who belonged to groups other than their own.

**Traveling Concerns**

When asked about their concerns about traveling after 9/11 many of my informants went to great lengths into their own stories to detail the experiences they had gone through. Many of them had been detained for long periods, their luggage had been searched, they had been questioned on the purpose of their stay in American territory, and so on. Although many did not seem to answer to the question about their feelings in the matter of traveling with a categorical yes or no, the majority (69%) seemed to express certain anxiety about the newly established traveling measures (see Figure 17). Many of them also seemed to be aware of their physical appearance as a possible cause for racial profiling. Furthermore, there seemed to be a variety of interpretations in terms of the regulations established after 9/11 and the specific effect these would have on their travel plans.

**Media Perceptions**

During our conversations, when it came to discuss U.S. media coverage of Arabs and Muslims, in every instance an immediate answer was followed by the offering of extensive arguments that elaborated on what my informants seemed to perceive as incontestable fact: the negative stereotyping. Throughout what I would call “declarations of concern” all of them were
thorough and poignant in describing what they characterized as an unfair portrayal of Arabs and Muslims. Even Christian Arabs were drawn to make extensive critiques and considered themselves part of the depiction the media was creating. Many, including Arab Christians, mentioned the conflict between Palestine and Israel as one of the scenarios where most of these imbalances were being played out. All of them but one categorized the U.S. media coverage of Arabs after 9/11 as being continuously negative. The qualifier used by the individual who classified it differently was "kind of negative."

In her discussion of the aftermath of 9/11, Haddad (2004:41) says of the Muslim community in the United States that they reacted with an initial fear of potential backlash. Eventually, Haddad claims, the community has set on a search for coalition with groups that deal with civil rights. Contrary to the public reactions reported on the Arab community of Michigan, the general agreement in respect to the negative media coverage in the Arab
community of Ames does not seem to translate into activism. Perhaps this is due to the greater number of Arabs in the Michigan area or the crystallization of an Arab-American identity and with it the empowerment brought about by an authentic claim to minority status.

All but two of my informants used the internet for alternate sources of news and all but one consulted Arab newspapers. Although the Arabic channel Al-Jazeera was mentioned as an alternative source of news in some cases where satellite was available they all seemed to resort to the internet to consult Arab media that seemed to belong mainly to their places of origin.

The only interviewee who was not able to elaborate on a perception of media representations of Arabs and Muslims had very limited knowledge of English and confessed to not understanding enough the English language to be able to produce an assessment. On the other hand, and much to my regret, the same person candidly confided his concerns about his immediate environment. In a secretive toned kind of voice he related:

Informant: Here, I find the people here... They are... I have the feeling that they are against me.

Like who?
Informant: All people. Here at the university (mumbles affirmatively).

How do you feel? How can you see that?
Informant: I see... I... When I work in the computer they come and... they annoying...

Who?
Informant: All the teaching assistants.

What do they do to you? Do they tell you things?
Informant: No, but they don't talk to me or they talk... me. Like also in the class from the professors...

I told him how I related to that.
Informant: It's because I am Arabic and because I am here. My position... upside down. I am from... I have scholarship from the Food and Agriculture Organization. But they are against me. Maybe they have... They are worried maybe they... suspicious.

*But does it have to do with the war and 9/11?*

Informant: I don't know what is the problem! I feel all the teaching, all the students, not one, all the students, all they are get together... I mean for me... When one went to talk to you they try to make a... This is... I don't know. This disturbs me.

All but the informant cited above said they watched either CNN or Fox. Most criticized Fox vehemently and some even said they had stopped watching it because of their biased coverage or negative portrayal of Arabs and Muslims. Their perceptions of the media seemed to turn to frustration in most cases as exemplified in the following comments by one of my informants: “It's been, like I said Comedy Central, CNN, Fox... I mean, I listen to Fox, those guys are stupid, or they think everybody else is stupid, too much stereotypes, too much, way too much, everything is Muslims, Muslims... Is it ever gonna stop?” One of the interviewees claimed to have written a letter to an Iowa local channel because of their coverage on Arabs and even claimed that the way the sniper was described, his being a Muslim being highlighted, was prejudicial to Muslims and Arabs. Another person expressed concern for an increasingly negative coverage: “I don’t think it was fair anyway before 9/11 and I think things got worst after 9/11.”

In terms of the way U.S. media coverage of Arabs and Muslims affected Arab identity construction in Ames after 9/11, ambiguity seemed to run a thread through their perceptions of their environment, the media, the public in general, and themselves. Most of my informants claimed they felt safe in Ames but, at the same time, spent most of their time with people of

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2 At the time of the interviews (June-July 2003) a sniper was killing people randomly in the Washington D.C. area. The suspect had been identified by the media as a Muslim.
their own ethnicity both in public and private and harshly criticized U.S. media. In this respect, there is a memorable quote from a person that opened his interview by telling me: “Who wants to be an Arab now?” His comments seemed to sum up the contrasts between what most of my informants said and how they went about the business of being Arab in Ames during the summer of 2003.

Informant: A lot of people are confused about their identities, especially Arabs now.

Why?

Informant: With all the stereotypes, and all the drama, and all that stuff, I mean, I hate to say it but it, I mean...

Do you get that feeling from people?

Informant: Yeah, of course like I notice a lot of people after 9/11 they wanna like try to appear more American kind of. You know what I mean?

Who?

Informant: People here.

Ethnographic Data

Even with the official character I tried to instill my interviews with, since I thought it pertinent to strike a balance between the objective anthropologist and what my informants could perceive as a collaborator, most of my informants were almost always candid in discussing the topics. In the case of one informant whom I had never met until our conversation took place she was very forthcoming in telling me about her frustration with a local channel whose coverage of Arabs and Muslims she said accentuated specific aspects like religion that she thought were not highlighted in the coverage of people from any other ethnicity.

Sometimes, their attitudes and gestures would reveal a lot more than their words. Such is the case of an informant who stated he would identify himself as White only to immediately
follow up, as if in need of justifying himself, by saying “they” had told him that that was the way he should classify himself. When I inquired about the undefined “they” the term seemed to hang above our heads and basically stayed unresolved. The character of concern I imbued my interviews with is revealed through the following passage from my ethnographic notes dealing with this instance.

I felt he needed understanding and reaffirmation and I told him I had read articles that talked about the official classification of Arabs in America as whites. Basically, I felt I had to reassure him that what he was doing was okay; it was a trend, not some kind of betrayal to his fellow Arabs.

In the weeks prior to my interviews I came up with an outline of the understandings I had developed about the Arab community up to that point. The question at the top of my notes read: What do I know (or presume to know) about Arabs in Ames? Always striving to remain faithful to my insistence on avoiding essentializing remarks, I declared that the people I had lived among or at least shared time with up to that point were or possessed:

- Stark political views on the Palestine issue.
- All seemed to agree on the bias of the U.S./West media.
- The great majority were Muslims, some being stricter on their religious practice whereas others drank alcohol, smoked heavily, and seldom (or never) went to the mosque. They expressed their agreeability with Christians and celebrated Ramadan, specially the socialization during Eid³.
- Knew good to excellent English.
- Had been educated mostly in private schools in the Middle East.
- There was tension between Arabs from the Gulf and Egyptians.

³ The end of Ramadan, a month of daylight fasting and abstention observed by Muslims throughout the world, for which my informants got together and celebrated.
• They had different dialects and a common knowledge of conversational Egyptian and written standard Arabic.

• Some women were veiled and some wore pants and covered their arms.

Most of my initial observations seemed to hold after the end of my fieldwork. Interestingly, upon the end of my interviews and in revising my notes, I was struck by an entry made for a couple I interviewed together that seemed to summarize the positions expressed by most of my informants in many respects.

Mainly, what I got from them both was a sense of belonging and closeness. They seemed to prefer to be among people of their own ethnic group and seldom open the venue for interacting with other ethnic persons. Their use of the Arabic language seemed predominant even in public and both agreed on their feeling of safety while in Ames, not in other places as much. They tended to resort more to Arab and Middle Eastern media and agreed on the bias of the coverage in media outlets such as CNN and Fox (channels they itemized themselves). They were aware of racist comments both made out to them directly and indirectly and expressed feeling uncomfortable about it.

With the variability in claims of ethnicity, it seemed rather noticeable that all of them were united in recognizing themselves as Arab when it came to a critique of U.S. media coverage. Christian Arabs transgressed religious boundaries to close ranks with their Muslim counterparts in this respect. Although a clear place in the U.S. ethnic classificatory schema might have not been resolved it seemed the people I talked to were united by a sense of belonging, despair, and disillusionment when it came to the journalistic coverage after 9/11 (and even before that) of the ethnic group they identified as part of. The effects of the stereotypical representations they perceived seemed to be played out on the public expressions of their ethnicity: they kept those ethnic markers that could be manipulated to themselves, underplaying them in the public arena and restraining themselves of further elaboration on points of discussion in situations they
deemed conflictive, dangerous, or potentially harmful as to avoid bringing light upon themselves.

During the summer of 2003 and perhaps in response to the perception of prevailing negative media coverage of the events of 9/11 and afterwards, Arabs in Ames seemed to negotiate their ethnic identity on a situational basis; their various ethnic markers seemed to be highlighted or played down depending on the perception of the situations they experienced. Far from homogeneous, the community of Arabs in Ames seemed varied in terms of nationality, creed, social and educational backgrounds. It seems remarkable then that there was a general agreement in terms of their perception of the media coverage. This may explain that what I would call their ethnic pride, the outright exhibition of what could be considered Arab traits, seemed to have been conditioned by their perception of safety. That is, although they might have asserted an Arab identity in the course of my conversations with them, their social interaction seemed to be influenced by factors that could be related to an alternative reading of the issue of safety. In this context, the claim to an authenticity that could have enabled them to move toward activism in order to address their concerns about the media was hindered. Perhaps, this may respond to what Haddad (2004:44) argues is a move toward self-censorship in the case of the Muslim community of the United States after 9/11. Haddad's contentions resonate with my findings in regards to the Arab community of Ames during the summer of 2003. Finally, Haddad's assertions, although alluding to Muslims in general, reverberate with my work in that I would agree with a perception of the Arab community in Ames as being under scrutiny and seemingly elaborating a response that left "little room for public conflict." In the following chapter I shall build on my findings and present conclusions arising from the discussion of the data presented in this chapter.
CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSIONS

In the preceding chapters I discussed the construction of negative stereotypical portrayals by the media when dealing with minority groups in the United States. I reviewed theory dealing with media as a constructor of social reality. Then, I linked this theoretical framework with the stereotypical portrayals associated with Arabs in the United States. I also reviewed literature that could inform the relationship between the ideologies promoted by the media and the construction of an Arab ethnicity in the United States. In particular, an assessment of such issues for the Arab and Arab-American community in Detroit was considered. In order to provide a frame of reference, in my discussion, I compared this community to the Arab community in Ames, Iowa.

In the present chapter I shall elaborate on my findings by interfacing my data with the literature on Arab-Americans. At the end, I shall establish the conclusions arising from my research and discuss how the goals proposed for this project were met. One of the few articles discussing the responses of Arab-Americans to the current crisis deals with the abuse by American soldiers to prisoners in Iraq. In the article Hassoun (2004:18) denounces: “the stereotypes of Arabs as dogs to be paraded on leashes or creatures less than human had to have been carried from the US to Abu Ghraib.” Furthermore, concerning Arab-American reactions to the current events (the war with Iraq, the reports of abuse, and so on) Hassoun states that Arab-Americans are experiencing difficult times and that they have “feelings of alienation and isolation… coupled with feelings of shame (because the US is still, after all, our country too)” (18). Hassoun recognizes that Arab-Americans hold a partial Arab identity that links them to U.S. actions in the Arab context. And in the U.S. scenario she contends that Arab-Americans are “coping with new fears at home” (18). To conclude, Hassoun poses a question that seems
pertinent to our discussion: "How this plays out will direct and determine the position and role of Arab and Muslim Americans in this society for decades to come" (19).

Some of the factors I explored in my discussion on Chapter 4 were my informants' ethnic claims, their social interactions, and their perceptions on the topics of safety and media coverage of Arabs and Muslims after 9/11. I discussed the fragmentation of ethnic claims as a function of the absence of an official distinctive category other than White. I also analyzed the information on the group's social interaction and concluded that it seemed to be limited, to a certain extent, to people of their own ethnic group. On the other hand, I found what I consider an interesting contradiction between the group's claims in terms of safety and their awareness of events that could be associated with prejudice, their concerns with traveling, and their perceptions of the media coverage after 9/11. The relationship between these factors could be explained by associating their limited social interaction in Ames to their sense of security. That is, while they might have felt powerless in dealing with issues that seemed out of their control (the media, travel measures, prejudice), in Ames they had a sense of refuge because they were mostly among their own.

Judging by the responses from my informants, the Arab community in Ames, Iowa during the summer of 2003 was deeply concerned with the negative stereotypes they perceived as appearing continuously in the U.S. media. Not only did they express concern but some of them exhibited an attitude toward this specific subject that could be said to reflect a sense of frustration, powerlessness, and, at times, outright sarcasm. Although my informants seemed to recognize that the renewed attention on Arabs and Muslims as the ensuing wars developed appeared to be consistent with representations that contribute to reinforce negative stereotypes,
by the time of this research, this awareness had not been translated into an articulated effort to address this issue.

Based on my findings, on the matter of ethnicity, the community of Arabs in Ames during this time period did not seem to be able to produce a unified claim that would allow them to appropriate a definite identity. That is, claims to a diverse array of ethnicities were made. To complicate the issue, some individuals seemed to express confusion as to which ethnic or racial label identified them better in the context of the United States government’s official discourse. How could they identify each other as Arab but not respond with such ethnic claim when asked about this specific subject? Haddad (2004:7) states that “the Arabic language may seem to be the strongest common bond among Arabs and an initial indicator of ethnic identity.” Haddad’s argument seems to explain the tie without name the Arab community in Ames seemed to resort to. While they might have made different claims in terms of ethnic affiliation, maybe as a result of the lack of an official category delimiting their identities in the United States, at the same time they seemed to recognize the bond their language created and seemed to define this ethnic marker as the one determining their group’s cohesiveness.

One of the most comprehensive works published after 9/11 dealing with Arabs and Muslims in the United States is Haddad’s (2004) lecture entitled Not Quite American?: The Shaping of Arab and Muslim Identity in the United States. Haddad’s (2004:28) contentions in respect to Arab and Muslim identity among recent immigrants seem to resonate with what I found in the Arab community in Ames: “For many among the third wave immigrants, ‘Arab’ has become a secondary modifier of identity, which is in state of flux depending on context. Their primary identity can be Shi’i, Muslim, Lebanese, Arab, or American, depending on the circumstances that demand differentiation.” Nonetheless, in discussing general effects the
events of 9/11 seemed to have among Arabs and Muslims in the United States Haddad
describes the community as embracing a move toward coalition building and points out that, for
Muslims, "relating to non-Muslims has become a priority" (45).

The sense of powerlessness I found in my informants' assessments of the media,
traveling measures, and prejudice seems to be echoed in Haddad's analysis when she claims that
"many feel that because of their ethnicity or religious affiliations they no longer have the luxury
to disagree" (45). Haddad critiques the press as well as policies and legislation she deems
harmful since they seem to be discriminatory against Arabs and Muslims. Furthermore, my
informants' claims in relation to their social interaction seem to point toward a sense of isolation
that also agrees with what Haddad argues is a strategy the larger community has resorted to. In
this respect, Haddad claims that the boundaries of isolation are sometimes self-imposed out of
fear (Haddad 2004:39).

In his work dealing with the Arab-American community of Detroit, Nabeel Abraham
notes (Majaj 1999) that "unlike other forms of racism, anti-Arab racism is often tolerated by
mainstream society." He also claims that Arab-Americans are "one of the few ethnic groups it is
still 'safe to hate'" (1999:321). Regrettably, Abraham's analysis seems to convey an awareness of
an implied inevitability of the state of matters. Faced with this hatred, prejudice, and racism the
words of one of my informants resonate: Who wants to be an Arab? Nevertheless, I would
argue that the identity of a group characterized through its ethnic distinction seems to have
served in the past as a mode for self assertion. The recognition of a sense of self, the
appropriation of an identity for minority groups (i.e. Chicano) has contributed to an articulation
that sometimes culminates in activism.
In the case of the Arab community in Ames, the appearance of a subdued ethnicity seems to be tied to the strategic use of the multiple identities members of the group appear to claim as theirs. Seemingly, during the summer of 2003 the Arab community in Ames had not yet articulated a voice, a unified ethnic or minority identity claim that could allow its constituents some sort of political expression. The absence of a coalition building process in this case may have been one of the drivers for ethnic markers associated with their Arabness to be seemingly "turned off" or on a "stand by" mode.

This work is meant as an effort to contribute to the literature by offering an assessment of the reaction of Arabs in Ames to the media portrayals of Arabs and Muslims surrounding the current conflict between the United States and Arab nations or groups. Accompanying the assessment of media issues in the community I explored the group's definition of their own ethnicity. Some of the crisis management mechanisms that relate to the group's ethnic identity were discussed. At the end, this research is intended to offer conclusions that could be useful in assessing other groups' experiences in similar conditions. This work seeks to stand as a vehicle for promoting media awareness of the stereotypical portrayals of minorities and ethnic groups. I hope to see this effort replicated in other groups undergoing similar strains. The resulting research could work as a framework for media's responsibility to be invoked in the pertinent forums so as to call attention to media's role in the construction of a biased conception of reality and help identify the venues for effecting positive changes.

To conclude, recent developments signal a move toward a coalition building process where, at least, some voices are beginning to be heard. Such is the case of Basil Mahayni, a student that according to an article published on the Cityview (a regional newspaper) on October 13, 2004 received an award for his efforts in activism. In the article, Beth Dalbey
reports that Mahayni "has led a peaceful response to harassment against Arab and Muslim students at Iowa State University" (2004:8). Furthermore, the move toward coalition building with non-Arab, non-Muslim groups that Haddad recognizes as part of the response to 9/11 seems to be given here. This is reflected in the inclusive character of the organization Mahayni built which responds to the name "Time for Peace" and, according to him, recognizes that "we are all equals" (8).
APPENDIX: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

ID#____

I. ETHNICITY
   - Describe your ethnicity. List racial or ethnic identifiers you would check in a questionnaire (more than one if necessary).
     White, Black, African-American, Arab-American, Arab, Other:
   - Are you a U.S. citizen?
   - Do you speak Arabic? Other languages?
   - Do you read and write Arabic?
   - Religious Affiliation

II. SOCIAL INTERACTION
   - Number of family members living with you
     i. Diagram
   - Language spoken at home
     i. Arabic
     1. Less or more than 50% of the time
     Other
   - Number of times visiting a mosque in the last two weeks
   - Number of times together (walking around, seating at a café, having dinner, shopping, “hanging out”) with one or more persons of your same ethnicity in public (other than the mosque)
     i. Within last week
     ii. Within last two weeks
   - Were they
     i. Friends
     ii. Family
     iii. Mere acquaintances? Explain.
   - Number of times with people of your same ethnicity in private
     i. Within last week
     ii. Within last two weeks
   - Were they
     i. Friends
     ii. Family
     iii. Mere acquaintances? Explain.
   - Arabic language use in public
     i. Less or more than 50% of the time
   - Arabic spoken in private
     Less or more than 50% of the time

III. SAFETY
   - Do you feel safe in Ames? Explain.
- What about other places? Explain.
- Are you aware of any specific occurrence?

IV. TRAVEL
- Do you have concerns about traveling?

V. MEDIA PERCEPTION
- What media outlets do you consult?
- What about news coverage?
- What is your perception of the U.S. media coverage of Arabs since 9/11?
  i. No negative stereotypes
  ii. Some negative stereotypes
  iii. Continuous negative stereotypes
- Explain.
- What is your response to this?

VI. DEMOGRAPHICS
- Year of Birth
- Gender
- Level of Education
- Level of Income
- Occupation
- Place of Birth
- Country of Origin
- Age came to U.S. ____ Ames ____
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