The Role of Collective Memory and Cultural Trauma in Arab American Identity Formation

Sara Aftab

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Ashley Reichelmann, Chair
Toni Calasanti
David Brunsma

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ABSTRACT

In this thesis, I explore the cultural traumas and memories that shape Arab American identity in the US, and how such events influence their interactions and relationships with other Arab and non-Arab Americans. Drawing on memory and trauma literature, this study highlights the impact of collective memory and cultural trauma on individual and collective Arab American identity formation. Through 11 in-depth interviews, I found that trauma affected the respondents in two particular ways, through enduring traumas from their countries of immigration and the continuing impact of 9/11.

Specifically, I found that the traumas of immigrating from a country where respondents had experienced direct violence through war or oppression, or where they lacked socio-economic stability, deeply impacted how they understand and utilize their Arab American identity as a tool to uplift the voices of other Arabs. Additionally, I found although the participants did not explicitly consider 9/11 as a personal trauma, they saw it as a significant cultural event that influenced their self-perception as Muslims and their sense of belonging in U.S. society. Specifically, the profiling of Arabs post-9/11 caused the respondents to constantly self-surveil as well as had negative effects on the community. 9/11 also resulted in the respondents becoming more supportive of Arab American organizations through intra-country donations, as well as becoming more accepting of alternative ways to practice and understand Islam

This study contributes to the social science literature by examining how collective trauma affects the daily lives and identities of Arab Americans. It underscores the importance of inclusivity in research, recognizing the significance of Arab American voices and the need for a comprehensive understanding of the Arab American community.

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GENERAL AUDIENCE ABSTRACT

This study explores how cultural trauma and collective memory have shaped the identity of Arab Americans in the U.S. I found that Arab Americans were affected in two ways. First, the enduring trauma of war, violence, and oppression from their countries of origin impacted how they understood their Arab American identity and used it to advocate for fellow Arabs. Second, the continuing impact of 9/11 resulted in racial/ethno-religious profiling and constant self-surveillance, which affected the community's acceptance of alternative ways to practice and understand Islam. These experiences strengthened their sense of collective identity.

DEDICATION

To my late grandfathers, Jameel Aftab and Hamzah Kqulaisy, for profoundly shaping my life and understanding of who I am. Through the memories, stories, and values you imparted, you taught me invaluable life lessons and instilled in me a passion for learning. The wisdom you shared remains a guiding light, and your absence serves as a constant reminder to cherish every moment and strive for excellence. Though it saddens me that you cannot be here to witness this achievement, I dedicate this thesis to both of you, as a tribute to the profound influence you have had on my journey. Your memory will forever live on in my heart, and I am determined to make you proud by continuing to learn, grow, and improve myself.

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INTRODUCTION

Although Arabs have lived in the U.S. since the late 19th century, they represent an understudied ethnic group. Understanding the experience of Arab Americans—a community of immigrants and the descendants of immigrants, who have come from the Arab world (i.e., Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, Palestine, Iraq, Jordan, and Yemen) constituting North Africa to Southwest Asia (Arab American Institute n.d.)—is important as they carry collective kinds of trauma from their home countries that have contributed to their identities and behaviors in ways that are still poorly understood. Furthermore, given the collective trauma that Arabs in the U.S. experienced in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, Arab Americans' identity rapidly evolved in the face of new challenges, as they began to experience increased discrimination and racial profiling. Nevertheless, recent research on memory and identity has largely neglected the experiences of Arab immigrants. Additionally, where there is research, Arab Americans' identity has been studied as a monolithic group, where their historical, cultural, and national identities are not sufficiently appreciated.

These oversights in the scholarly literature are an opportunity to deepen the current understanding of the collective memory of trauma that shapes present-day Arab American collective identity. Therefore, the present study explores how collective memory of cultural trauma has affected individuals who define themselves as Arab Americans in the U.S. To achieve this goal, the exploratory study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What cultural traumas and collective memories have shaped Arab American identity in the U.S.?
2. How have these cultural traumas and collective memories influenced Arab Americans' relationships and interactions?

Below, I survey the existing literature on collective memory and cultural trauma, focusing on Halbwachs and Olick's approach to collective memory and Eyerman's analysis of cultural trauma. Next, I briefly highlight the history of Arabs in America in order to begin presenting their unique experience. Here, I also give an overview of existing empirical studies on this community. Afterwards, I present my qualitative results from interviews with 11 Arab Americans and use the conceptual framework of collective memory and cultural trauma to analyze their responses and to provide insight to the two overarching research questions. Finally, I present my conclusions and recommendations for further research. Although this study is modest and necessarily preliminary, my hope is that it will be a small step toward building out the literature on Arab American identity.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

As this study was based on a specific understanding of identity, collective memory, and trauma and applied these concepts to the understudied Arab American community, it is useful to examine the history of these ideas and their applications.

Collective Memory

This study used Halbwachs' (1992) conception of collective memory as a heterogeneous set of practices and norms that stem from a group context. Examples of practices and norms includes shared memories, narratives, artifacts, traditions, food, music, values, beliefs, and perceptions, which vary in time, space, and group perceptions (Halbwachs 1992). Halbwachs' concept is situated in a long history of literature on the relationships between identity and collective memory. The concept was first introduced by the pioneering work of Durkheim in the 19th and early 20th centuries and refined by the 20th century work of Halbwachs (Conway 2010). Durkheim (1995) focused his studies on the importance of the past in creating and

preserving group identity and solidarity. He described the notion of myth and the continuity of group identity and rituals as tools to renew collective consciousness through commemorating an imagined collective past (i.e., memories of the group), shared beliefs and traditions, and ancestral memory (i.e., memories specific to the family) (Durkheim 1995; Misztal 2003). He viewed religious attention to the past and myths as being connected to memory because it makes a group's members more aware of their group identity and connection to one another. Religious consciousness plays a role in providing narratives about the past, which helps create a connection to the past, membership in community, and a sense of solidarity among group members. All of these factors are associated with the construction of group identity.

While Durkheim devoted considerable attention to the role of the past and religion in society, he largely neglected the role of the present (Misztal 2003). Halbwachs sought to address this gap; while he followed Durkheim's view that rituals served to remind people of their past in daily life, he expanded the notion of collective memory to include both religion and other social institutions as mechanisms for carrying collective memory into the present. These mechanisms include elements such as families, occupational groups, museums, and monuments (Conway 2010). Olick (1999) extended the understanding of mechanisms by arguing collective memory is "a matter of how minds work together in society, how their operations are structured by social arrangements" (334) and viewed it as vital to the growth of a social group (Eyerman 2004). According to this view, people generate, recognize, and localize their memory in community (Assmann 1995; Olick 1999).

According to Halbwachs, since collective memory "is always group memory, always the negotiated and selective recollections of a specific group, then collective memory is similar to myth" (6). His definition looks at the group context in the remembering process rather than the

individual context. He asserted that individuals could not separate memories from the group context in which they acquired those memories. In other words, communities interact with collective memories as a way to identify themselves as a group, differentiate themselves from others, reflect on lessons learned (Eyerman 2004), establish values, impart life lessons to children, choose where to live, and decide how to live their lives (Harold and Fong 2017). These behaviors are at least partially passed on from generation to generation and influenced by new events.

Halbwachs also emphasized that collective memory functions through group context (Eyerman 2004). According to Halbwachs, "a group is solidified and becomes aware of itself through continuous reflection upon and recreation of a distinctive, shared memory" (Eyerman 2004:5). Individuals then use this shared memory as a "cognitive map," providing them a guide for their daily behavior and interaction as a group member (Eyerman 2004:5). In parallel with Halbwachs, Schwartz defined collective memory as "the distribution throughout society of beliefs, feelings, moral judgments and knowledge about the past" (Conway 2010:443). Both views argue that group identity and a community's collective memory are ways through which society functions—collectively, not individually—via emotions, thoughts, and beliefs.

Based on Schwartz's definition, Conway (2010) noted that collective memory deals with three main points: focusing on societal rather than individual experiences, the emotions a social group has about the past and their experiences, and how society commemorates the past and how this affects their view of the future. For Conway, social commemoration and practices are behaviors representing the meaning of the past in the public sphere. As a result, they reflect the public negotiation of opinions about the past among different social groups.

Collective memory can thus be understood as “a state of mind, oriented to the past, present, and future” (Conway 2010:444). According to Olick (1999), collective memory is concerned with “identifying shifting in social frames” for products (e.g., stories, rituals, pictures, speeches) and practices (e.g., recollections, representations, celebrations, acknowledgment, regret) (155). These products and practices are not monolithic; mnemonic practices vary and appear in different contexts but gain “their reality only by being used, interpreted, and reproduced or changed” within social frames (158).

Collective memory is vital to all communities. However, it is especially important for minority groups like Arab Americans, because their memories are often not part of the dominant culture. As the literature on collective remembrance has shown, memory is not only concerned with affirmation and heritage but also with processes of contestation, the aftermath of violence, and the emergence of counter-memories (Stoller 1995). Minority communities find themselves vulnerable, not only politically and socially, but also from the standpoint of identity. Constantly under pressure from hegemonic ideologies, minority communities struggle to sustain their unique sets of experiences and memories in order to keep alive a continuity with their past. Minority communities are also vulnerable because they often carry within their collective memory various kinds of trauma, sometimes related to explicit violence. Given that the realities of such violence are often obscured or repressed by non-minority cultural narratives, minority communities often struggle to keep alive and transmit these “counter-memories” (i.e., those memories counter to the “mainstream” memories). This results in a contestation between the mainstream and counter-memories.

Eyerman (2004) highlighted some of these processes of memory, violence, and counter-memory in his analysis of the formation of the African American identity. This community’s

experiences remembering the span of time from slavery to the Civil War to the civil rights movements shaped their collective identity and contemporary behavior. Although slavery was formally abolished after the Civil War, the memory of it has been kept alive through the arts and the intellectual and political work of African Americans. Such work to keep memory alive has contributed to institutionalizing African American collective identity in organizations such as the NAACP. Eyerman also argued that the collective memory of slavery was kept alive by generational cohorts of African Americans, especially in cities. For example, young members of the Harlem Renaissance rejected old perceptions of Black culture, seeking more modern and realistic ways of representing slavery through folk tradition, arts, and humor. They saw the past violence as something "interpreted as a stepping-stone toward a brighter future," while the older generation saw it as "something to be redeemed through the future" (22). These cultural memories extend into the present, represented in popular culture, intellectual debates, and the rise of Black/African American studies programs. These are all ways of representing the collective memory of African American identity within a social framework, where generations, space, and time influence how the past shapes current collective identity.

Cultural Trauma

The second key concept for understanding Arab Americans' modern identity is cultural trauma. As mentioned earlier, Arab Americans have experienced trauma both in their home countries and in the U.S. in the wake of 9/11. Thus, understanding the concept of trauma—defined as "an emotional response to a terrible event like an accident, rape, or natural disaster" (American Psychological Association 2022) – plays an important role in assessing Arab American identity. Cultural trauma is frequently thought of as a struggle with meaning and collective identity, especially when trauma occurs widely across the social fabric (Eyerman

2004). Once trauma is experienced, it continues to have a powerful hold on the community's sense of identity at the individual and collective levels. Therefore, by understanding the relationship between cultural trauma and the sense of self, it is possible to explore how the collective Arab American experience—be it negative or positive—has influenced individuals' identities.

Alexander (2004) defined cultural trauma as occurring "when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways" (1). Members of the affected group tend to either deny or accept the trauma that occurred. This first step directly affects all other elements of the trauma process, including whether they recognize the trauma, how they define its causes, their moral stance, and any group solidarity resulting from it (Alexander 2004). This trauma connects the past and prior generations to the present through two groups: carrier groups and mediator groups (Eyerman 2004:3). Carrier groups refer to members of the affected group who pass down the trauma to other members of the in-group through generational transmission, while mediator groups are responsible for articulating the trauma, the group's resulting needs, and spreading collective consciousness to repair and create a collective identity between the in-group and out-group.

Cultural trauma is uniquely social in its effect on identity, because it is embedded in the socialization process as a group member (Alexander 2004:16). Collective identity is fluid and continuously reimagined based on the past and present experiences of a community. Such experiences containing cultural trauma can affect an individual's sense of self and the larger group's identity. Collective identity and re-remembering of the collective past are thus a central

framework for resolving and understanding social problems and disturbances of collective consciousness.

Eyerman argued that "situating a cultural trauma at the root of collective memory…has implications for how [the trauma] is narrated" and can have negative effects when recalled, such as feelings of blame and isolation (as cited in Woods 2019:7). Narratives of collective memory could thus be produced to make sense of a cultural trauma and, in that way, narrative informs the broader context of a group's history. Eyerman argued that Alexander's 2004 theory of cultural trauma could supplement Halbwachs' theory of collective memory by demonstrating how "the ways in which past cultural traumas are remembered will have bearing on the unfolding of subsequent cultural traumas" (Woods 2019:8). When combined, these two theories demonstrate that trauma does not occur in a vacuum, and collective memory or representation of such trauma has direct effects on any future traumas that might occur.

To understand the roots of cultural trauma, Eyerman made a distinction between a cultural trauma and a "social drama," the latter of which is less intense and is started by "a 'breach' of a social norm" (Woods 2019:8). To make sense of the breach, groups develop narratives about what happened. Sometimes these narratives conflict with one another, resulting in competing narratives, which further reveals the divide between groups. If a social drama reaches such intensity that it threatens to destabilize a community's identity, this can be called a cultural trauma. Politically or culturally motivated assassinations are an example of a type of social drama that can escalate into a cultural trauma. For instance, Dutch collective memory has many layers of unresolved cultural trauma, such as the Holocaust during World War II and how the Dutch military reacted to the massacre in Srebrenica in 1995. In 2004, a Dutch person of Moroccan descent killed Theo van Gogh for directing a film criticizing Islam and the treatment

of women in Islam (Eyerman 2011). After van Gogh's assassination, other traumas came up in public talks about national identity. This trauma made people ask what it meant to be Dutch and provoked divisions about how to respond, which led to strong emotions and violence. Woods (2019) argued that such collective traumas "are capable of blurring into one another, creating deeper, ever more complex divisions within society, with multiple points of origin" (8). Eyerman also suggested that cultural trauma could be used to build a new collective identity, create group solidarity, and repair rituals (Woods 2019).

Cultural trauma is rooted in collective memory in some societies and can affect individual identity through the presentation of self. Presentation of self refers to how people express and present themselves (i.e., perform) and how they manage their behavior to gain the desired impression. During this process known as impression management, individuals engage in a performance of transmitting signs and symbols to an audience in order to control how they are perceived by others. Goffman (1959) claimed that individuals show their social identity in everyday life as if they were actors on a stage, wearing different masks depending on their role and situation:

> It is probably no mere historical accident that the word person, in its first meaning, is a mask. It is rather a recognition of the fact that everyone is always and everywhere, more or less consciously, playing a role… It is in these roles that we know each other; it is in these roles that we know ourselves. (10-11)

Performance can be used for all the same purposes interaction is used, largely to translate information and/or meaning to a specific audience. For this reason, people may adjust their performance to please their audience based on who the audience is and their relationship with that audience (48). The performance has a number of elements. Goffman suggested that people employ a "front," meaning "the expressive equipment of a standard kind intentionally or unwittingly employed by the individual during his performance" (13). Another element is the

setting, which involves the "furniture, physical layout, and other background items which supply the scenery and stage props for the spate of human action played out before, within, or upon it" (13). These two components often dictate the success of the performance, because they affect how the message the actor presents to the audience is interpreted. Impression management is important to group identity because it affects self-perceptions and group perceptions, particularly if others do not verify the identity being managed.

The process of impression management and how it connects actors and audiences is especially important for marginalized groups suffering from a stigma. Such individuals are often seen as "discredited" or not respected by the audience (i.e., outgroups), stemming from and contributing to their social marginalization (Goffman 1959). In daily life, these individuals have opportunities to use defensive techniques to counter negative societal perceptions of them, shape how others see them, and increase their social capital. In this way, their stigma places more pressure on them to show idealized behaviors and hide features of their group stigma in order to assimilate and gain full acceptance in society (79). However, there are some individuals who ignore these stigmas, present themselves as normal, and have social boundaries and limited relationships with outgroups. Sometimes, this creates a feeling of isolation and alienation.

A central concept important to impression management is identity. Social Identity Theory (Tajfel and Turner 1978) defines identity as group categorizations that affect how we see ourselves at the individual level. These self-perceptions and meanings then affect how we interact with the social world. It is also worth noting that social identity theory also acknowledges that some individuals may resist or ignore stigmas associated with their group, presenting themselves as normal and establishing limited relationships with outgroups. This is primarily a strategy utilized by minority groups who identities have been devalued. However,

this can sometimes result in feelings of isolation and alienation, highlighting the complex dynamics between social identities and individual experiences.

Why It Matters: A Socio-Historical Background of Arab Immigration to the U.S.

Before applying these concepts of collective memory and trauma to Arab Americans, this section provides a historical overview of the three waves of Arab American migration to the U.S. Discussing this immigration can help us understand the structural challenges Arabs have faced to assimilate into U.S. society as well as demonstrate how their ethno-racial challenges differ from other racialized minority groups. Understanding both makes it easier to understand the impact of collective memory on contemporary Arab American identity. This overview focuses on traumatic memory as a key part of the Arab American immigrant story and as a formative factor in their collective identity.

The Main Waves of Arab Immigration

Arab immigration to the U.S. can be divided into three main waves. The first took place from the late 1870s to the end of World War I, when the Ottoman Empire governed large numbers of Arabs. Most of the first wave of Arab immigrants to the U.S. were Christians looking for economic opportunities and wanting to escape the political and religious tensions in their countries of origin. Their aim was not to be part of U.S. society but rather to survive in this new country as temporary visitors who would send money to their families back home (Radwan 2016).

The second wave followed World War II, with a significant number of Muslims migrating from various Arab countries. This new wave was more educated and skilled than the first (Radwan 2016), and there was no clear pattern on how they were ethnically identified by the census i.e., as Arab, White, or some other category (Ludescher 2006). Arab Americans became

more ideological and politicized after the 1948 Arab-Israeli War and subsequent related conflicts (Radwan 2016). According to Radwan (2016), the Arab American community suffered the consequences of defeat and the shock of American foreign policy in the Middle East, which proved to be pro-Israeli" (410). Suleiman (1999) contended that as World War I "marked a watershed for the early Arab immigrants, the 1967 Arab-Israeli war did [the same] for the entire community" (16), and "the notion of pan-Arab solidarity [within the U.S.] and the appellation Arab-American took hold only after" that war (Radwan 2016:410).

The third wave began in 1967 and continues to this day. For Arab countries, 1967 was the start of a critical period since many Arabs became refugees wanting to migrate to the U.S. following different conflicts in their home region. Such conflicts include the Six-Day War between Israel, Syria, Jordan, and Egypt; the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land causing the displacement of large numbers of Palestinians; and the 1970-1980 Civil War in Lebanon. These events all produced more waves of immigrants to the U.S. who joined the existing Arab American community. The third wave of immigrants, however, came with more "anti-colonial sentiment and Arab nationalist ideas" due to the conflicts in their home region (Ludescher 2006:94). Recently within this third wave period, successive surges of immigrants have fled to Western countries beginning in 2011 due to civil wars and social upheaval across the Arab world during the Arab Spring revolutions. This new wave "further accelerated the ethnopolitical orientation of the Arab-American community" (Radwan 2016:410).

Later on, several Arab American organizations were established to defend Arab points of view and combat negative stereotypes about Arabs in mainstream U.S. discourse, foreign policy in the Middle East, popular culture, and the media (Radwan 2016:411). They also condemned U.S. interventions in the Middle East and the political instability in the region.

Structural Challenges Arab Americans Have Faced

Since the first wave of Arab immigrants to the U.S., Arab Americans have faced structural challenges. Many of these challenges fall under the heading of "anti-Arab racism," which broadly refers to processes resulting in the marginalization of Arab Americans. Similar processes have been used against numerous other immigrant and minority communities in U.S. history. Many times, such groups suffer from exclusion and racialization and have been treated as inferior to white people due to ethnicity, religion, and culture. Oppressors relied "upon culturalist and nationalist [ideas] that assume [these immigrant groups] are intrinsically unassimilable and threatening national security" (Salaita 2005:149). Arabs and Muslims have often been represented in American culture as having a tendency toward violence, "with a pathological culture and a morally deviant religion that sanctions killing" (Cainkar 2006:2). This attitude frames the experience of Arab immigrants and minorities, creating social boundaries in how they represent themselves to others, particularly non-Arabs.

Alimahomed (2011) studied how racialized processes shaped the representation, oppression, and emergent identities of the Arab Muslim diaspora. Her analysis drew upon the lived experiences of 60 Arab Muslims in Los Angeles, who were under the age of 18 and considered youth at the time of the events of September 11, 2001. Her study explored how the War on Terror shaped the collective and individual racial consciousness of that Arab Muslim population. She found that the newest generation of Muslims exhibited a distinguishing feature that older cohorts of Muslim Arab Americans did not possess; namely, they were far more likely to disidentify with whiteness, situating their Arabic racial identity as non-white racialized subjects.

Along similar lines, Cainkar (2017) discussed theories of immigrant integration in the Arab American experience. It remains unclear why the experience of Arab Americans in the early 20th century displayed more social, political, and economic integration than that of racially excluded African Americans, East Asians, Native Americans, and Latinos (El-Aswad 2013). However, according to Cainkar (2006), "substantial evidence indicates a widening social distance between Arab Americans and all other Americans" (243). Institutions of power have contributed to this social distance through structural inequalities in policy, physical security, and mainstream cultural representations (Cainkar 2006).

Salaita (2005) argued that before 1967, Arab Americans, who were mostly Christian at that point, "tended to assimilate even while maintaining cultural features of the so-called Old World, [but aspects such as] food, theology, child-rearing, and the Arabic language for the most part [were] not passed down from immigrants to children" (150). At that time, there was no real representation of Arab Americans in popular culture or politics. By the mid 1990s, Arab consciousness existed among Arab immigrants and across generations, who became more active in expressing their rapidly growing collective consciousness both intellectually and creatively. As an example, in the mid 1990s, 51% of people who immigrated from the Middle East identified themselves as Arab, but in 2010 this rose to 62% (Elaswad 2013). Elaswad (2013) claimed that "Arab Americans have a strong belief that Arabs in the United States are more united than the Arabs in the Middle East" (267). This has helped them face the aftermath of 9/11, when hostile beliefs about them were socially constructed in mainstream U.S. discourse. This discourse had occurred prior to 9/11, as can be seen in public opinion polls (Radwan 2016), and made it easier to attribute such an attack to Arabs in the first place.

After the 9/11 attacks, the U.S. government employed a variety of anti-terror tactics against Arabs and Muslims, including mass arrests, fingerprinting many foreign nationals, secret hearings, and monitoring individuals' telecommunications, financial records, and Internet activity (Alimahomed 2011). As a result, most Arab Americans have experienced some form of repression and fear, which in turn has led them to become more politically active and to protest this treatment. This falls in line with Santoro and Azab's (2015) assertion that "personally experiencing repression enhances protest participation, especially for those whose Arab identity is not especially salient" (p. 235). These examples of structural racism mirrored those occurring in the general population as microaggressions, bias, and hate crimes increased after 9/11(Santoro and Azab 2015).

Case Studies of the Arab American Community

Empirical social science research has examined the experience of Arab Americans from viewpoints of race and identity, stereotypes, and challenges with integrating or assimilating into American culture, Islamophobia, and the aftermath of 9/11 (e.g., Alimahomed 2011; Michael and Ghoshal 2015; Santoro 2015; Semaan 2014). These studies inform my study, because I believe these categories will be discussed by the participants in the interviews.

Michael and Ghoshal (2015) conducted a field experiment on the racialization of Arab American women after 9/11. They posted eight online advertisements for female roommates in the cities of Detroit, New York, Houston, and Los Angeles. Four of the women in the ads had Arab names and four did not. Specifically, they predicted that more mosques in the area would increase or decrease the likelihood of answering an ad with an Arab name. This prediction tested whether their findings would follow the ethnic competition theory and Allport's contact hypothesis. The ethnic competition theory argues that "when a group has been racialized, a

greater presence can spur a heightened sense of threat by majority group members" (276). The contact hypothesis states that social contact reduces imagined stereotypes, therefore decreasing the social boundaries of the group. Detroit and New York revealed a relationship between ethnic competition and areas with a higher concentration of Arab Americans and mosques. In other areas, however, ethnic competition rose slightly in areas containing more mosques but went down in areas with a denser Arab population, such as in Los Angeles. The study noted the role of collective memory in motivating ethnic competition in New York City because of the memory of the 9/11 attack; however, in Detroit, the role of collective memory was not as clear cut. This could be due to the difference in the visibility of Arabs since Detroit has the highest Arab population of any U.S. city. Finally, due to the confusion between the words "Arab" and "Muslim" in the general population, it was not possible to tell if the biases of respondents were due more to ethnicity or religion.

In a qualitative study, Zopf (2018) conducted 53 interviews with Egyptian Americans from community and religious organizations, employing open, focused, and selected coding strategies. The sample contained Muslims and Christians, and the results revealed three main themes: brown racialization, Anti-American Muslim racialization, and foreign racialization. Thus, defining "Arab American" is complicated by different, overlapping forms of prejudice. The study showed a relation between discrimination and Islam, although Arabs make up less than 25% of the Muslim population in the U.S. The study explains the stigma of Arab identity in the broader context, where race and religion (i.e., Islam) are connected even when Arab Americans are not Muslims. This shows the complexity of stereotyping in the U.S., where the Arab American identity is inextricably linked to Islam.

My Contribution

I could not find empirical research explicitly addressing how collective memory shapes Arab American choices and behavior. I have thus linked these bodies of literature on collective memory, Arab immigration, and identity to explore how collective memory and trauma affect the Arab American experience vis-à-vis identity and behavior in daily life.

The literature on collective memory provided a lens to understand how memory is carried, transferred, and presented in the modern day. The work on cultural trauma demonstrated how such memories shape modern day identity, including the way people identify with social groups, present themselves, and interact with others. However, I found the current literature on collective memory and cultural trauma, as it relates to previous social science work on Arabs, to be limited in certain ways. The literature does not account for the foundational role of traumas occurring in Arab Americans' homelands prior to migration, with these traumas also being seen as the driving force of all three waves of migration. Additionally, the trauma of 9/11 shapes Arab American identity since it affects how they understand themselves in relation to non-Arabs, and how the development of Arab American stereotypes impacts their interaction with others. 9/11 also culminated in the creation of structural challenges directly and indirectly targeting Arab Americans. These two types of traumas could inform their present and future selves, such as what they chose to teach their children and what values they practiced or talked about. Combined, the literature led me to explore how collective memory and trauma inform the development of Arab Americans as a social group, through the following research questions:

1. What cultural traumas and collective memories have shaped Arab American identity in the U.S.?

2. How have these cultural traumas and collective memories influenced Arab Americans' relationship and interaction?

METHODS

This study focuses on how cultural traumas and collective memory affect the modern day identity and behavior of Arab Americans in the U.S. I sought to explore the relationship in terms of what type of collective historical memory was shared among participants and how that was apparent in their understanding of their identity and in their interactions with both Arabs and non-Arabs. Given the prominence of 9/11 as an acute trauma, I decided to compare those who arrived before 9/11 and those who came after 9/11. This sampling was intended to account for possible changes in the Arab American community in the wake of post-9/11 geopolitical events.

Recruitment and Sampling

All participants were older than 18 and had spent at least three years living in the U.S. To recruit participants, I used snowball sampling through my social connections in Washington, DC, and Northern Virginia. I reached out to local religious figures, community leaders, and non-profit Arab American organizations to share the recruitment flier and online demographic survey.

My initial goal was to find eligible people between the ages of 40 and 50. However, after one month, only two of the 30 respondents to the online survey were eligible. After consulting my committee, I expanded my range to include ages 35 to 50. I then reached out to the same group of diverse stakeholders and asked for additional recruitment. They provided names of people who were potentially interested, and I contacted them via email and phone to schedule a Zoom meeting. All interviews were done in a seven-week period. All participants spoke Arabic and English fluently. The interviews were mainly in English but switched to Arabic for the participant's comfort. Each interview took 45 minutes to an hour to complete.

Sample Description

Table 1 presents the demographics of the sample. Of the 11 participants, six had arrived in the U.S. before 9/11, and five had arrived after. In terms of gender, six were female and five were male. Pre-/Post-9/11 immigration and gender almost exclusively mapped: all respondents who immigrated after 9/11 were women, while all but one who arrived before 9/11 were men. Nine of the participants lived in Northern Virginia, one lived in Michigan, and one lived in Boston. Participants had lived in their respective areas for more than three years. All participants were between 38 and 55 years old and worked in diverse workplaces, except one who volunteers in the community. It is important to note that one participant was born in the U.S. after his father had migrated to the U.S.

The main reasons for immigration among the participants were economic opportunities and the search for better life opportunities such as social and economic stability, better education, and better healthcare. All except Mohammed and Hasan mentioned limited job opportunities in their home countries and sought to find employment in a new country. Three participants (Salem, Alia, Leena) came initially to the U.S. to study and ended up staying because of job opportunities and unstable economic conditions in their home countries. Five of the participants (Ahmad, Leena, Alia, Hanan, and Mohammed) narrated how instability in their home countries, such as the political and economic instability after the Arab Spring or the Lebanese civil war, were motivating factors to immigrate or remain in the U.S. One participant, Khaled, was unique because he did not immigrate from his country of origin; he was born and raised in three different Arab countries. His family were refugees due to the Israeli occupation of Palestine. Three of the female participants (Mariam, Amal, and Asmaa) mentioned reuniting with their spouses as a reason for immigration. Hasan was the only participant who was a second

generation immigrant, but his father immigrated to continue his education and decided to remain for a career opportunity. Overall, participants' reasons for immigration were often multi-faceted and interrelated. They were motivated by economic opportunity abroad and economic precarity at home, pursuing education, escaping violence, trauma and instability, and family reunification.

Table 1: Participant Demographics

Name	Gender	Age	Entered the U.S.	Ancestral Homeland
Hasan*	Male	45	Before 9/11	Egypt
Ahmed	Male	45	Before 9/11	Egypt
Mohammed	Male	44	Before 9/11	Lebanon
Salem	Male	50	Before 9/11	Sudan
Khaled	Male	52	Before 9/11	Palestine
Asmaa	Female	49	Before 9/11	Sudan
Amal	Female	39	After 9/11	Egypt
Hanan	Female	40	After 9/11	Morocco
Leena	Female	47	After 9/11	Tunisia
Alia	Female	40	After 9/11	Tunisia
Mariam	Female	53	After 9/11	Egypt

* Denotes second generation

It is important to acknowledge that the sample I used in my research does not necessarily represent the larger Arab American population; therefore, I do not claim that the results can be generalized to the entire population.

Data Collection Strategy

Ultimately, I conducted a total of 11 in-depth, one-on-one, semi-structured interviews with Arab Americans after receiving approval from Virginia Tech's Institutional Review Board (see Appendix A). Since I rely on a non-probabilistic sample (snowball), I do not make claims to the population's representativeness from the sample (Harold and Fong 2017).

The semi-structured interviews allowed me to generate follow-up questions tailored to the responses of the individual participants, ensuring I was able to assess what was most meaningful to the participants in relation to the topic of collective trauma and identity,

specifically relating to 9/11. I sought approximately ten interviews, believing I would achieve saturation, and I did, finding repeated themes despite the variance within the sample. These criteria are recommended by Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006) for establishing the point in data collection at which new information creates little or no change in the data already obtained.

My interview guide was developed around my two research questions. First, what cultural traumas and collective memories have shaped Arab American identity in the U.S.? and second, how have these cultural traumas and collective memories influenced Arab Americans' relationships and interaction? (see Appendix B). While no individual question allowed me to directly answer a particular research question, the flow and combination of the guide provided insight to specific research questions. To address Research Question 1, I asked questions about immigration and the participants' home countries, such as "Tell me the story about how and why you immigrated to the U.S.?" (see Appendix B, Question 1). Questions like these capture the driving reasons for their immigration and the role that events in the home country may have played in that decision. I also asked questions about collective events that have been deemed traumatic by other research, such as "How is 9/11 directly or indirectly related to you personally?" and "Are there important events that affect your identity and your presentation as an Arab American in the U.S.?" (see Appendix B, Questions 2, 7). These questions allowed participants to express their feelings or views about the events and identify which events were most impactful to them and who they currently are. To address Research Question 2, I asked questions about identity and daily interactions, such as "When you introduce yourself to new people, what do you ask them to call you?" and "Tell me about some of the most important personal traditions, rituals, memorials, and holidays you participate in" (see Appendix B, Questions 5, 6). I asked these questions as a way to observe, for example, if participants might

anglicize their names or prefer a nickname that is not Arabic, or if they avoided talking about their cultural backgrounds. Questions such as these were meant to illuminate how the practice of hiding (or emphasizing) Muslim or Arab traits might be a trauma response to ethno-religious profiling. Finally, the question about important personal traditions provided data on potentially traumatic national events in the participants' countries of origin.

Analytical Strategy

All interviews were recorded with the consent of participants. To increase reliability, I took notes during and immediately after the interviews. I transcribed and then read each interview, as well as combined all notes for each interview at the end of each transcript. Furthermore, I created memos consisting of the thoughts I had while reading the dialogue, focusing on discerning the meaning of key parts of the interview and how they might or might not relate to the research questions. The interviews were transcribed using the transcription software Otter. The recording was uploaded into the software, which produced a transcript of the audio file. The interviews were in both Arabic and English. Since the speakers had a pronounced Arabic accent, the software's accuracy in transcribing the audio created some errors. Consequently, an Arabic-to-English translator was employed to confirm the accuracy of the transcription due to time constraints and to avoid translation errors. Additionally, I spot-checked the interviews to confirm accuracy.

I divided the transcript into three sections based on how I structured the interviews. The first section dealt with the background of how and why the participants came to the U.S., where they lived and their experiences in their home countries, and what they liked and did not like about the U.S. (all topics potentially related to Research Question 1). The second section dealt with identity; participants were asked how they defined themselves and what items they thought

captured their self-views of their group identity, such as holidays and places (related to Research Question 2). The last section was also related to Research Question 2 addressing how traumatic and historical events affected the participants. A copy of the semi-structured interview guide can be found in Appendix B.

I employed thematic analysis to identify emerging themes in the transcripts and created a number of codes to analyze the frequency of themes. The codes were words or phrases that represented particular themes directly related to the research questions. These themes represented repeated patterns and experiences that were consistent across the 11 interviews, regardless of when they immigrated, or their gender, nationality, ideology, or ethnicity. This analysis thus looked for patterns in the responses. The codes and themes summarized in Table 2 are examples of those that were relevant to the research questions, such as identity and the social construction of self, collective memory, collective trauma, behavior, and sense of belonging.

Table 2: Example of Textual Codes

Code	**Textual Examples**
Religious identity	"hijab," "prayer," "mosque," "Ramadan," "religious holidays or rituals," "religious items or artifacts"
Collective memory	"Arab Revolution," "Arab Spring," "The Great Arab Revolution," "Tunisian Revolution," "Egyptian Revolution," "the Collapse," "September 11"
National identity	"Sudanese food," "Egyptian"
Stigma	References to discrimination and profiling, such as association between Arab/Muslim and "terrorist," harassment such as insensitive jokes and ridicule, and avoidance of certain people and places such as "contact with like-minded people"

RESULTS

Based on the thematic coding process, I discerned three main themes from participants' responses that are related to my two research questions: (1) enduring trauma from abroad due to experiencing direct violence, or lacking socio-economic stability, (2) undergoing post-9/11

ethno-religious profiling, and (3) participating in post-9/11 interethnic solidarities in Muslim communities. The first two themes, enduring trauma from abroad and post-9/11 ethno-religious profiling, address research question one, because they are related to traumatic events that have shaped Arab American identity in the U.S. The third theme—interethnic solidarities in post-9/11 Muslim communities—provides insight into research question two, demonstrating how the traumas highlighted in themes one and two have influenced Arab Americans' interactions and relationships. This solidarity theme captures three types of evolving relationships practiced by respondents: 1) how they adopted new attitudes and behaviors related to religion, 2) how their views of those who are different from them, both Muslim and non-Muslim, evolved to be less judgmental, and 3) why they chose to identify with religion rather than ethnicity, and how such identification incorporates and strengthens their ethnic identity. Combined, these three themes provide a basis for understanding how collective memory affects the modern Arab American identity.

Theme 1: Enduring Trauma from Abroad

Trauma Related to Direct Violence

Participants (seven of 11) consistently identified various historical events in their regions of origin that produced lasting trauma for them and their communities. These events were often violent and oppressive actions by state or international actors. Seven participants brought up one or more of the following events as traumatic: the 2003 Iraq War, the Arab Spring in Tunisia and Egypt, including the Rabaa massacre in Egypt, the Sabra and Shatila massacres, and the ongoing occupation of Gaza. Both Khaled (male, age 52, from Palestine, pre-9/11 immigration) and Mohammed (male, age 44, from Lebanon, pre-9/11 immigration) spoke of their experience with war. Alia (female, age 40, from Tunisia, post-9/11 immigration) and Leena (female, age 47, from

Tunisia, post-9/11 immigration) spoke of the political and economic instability following the uprisings of the Arab Spring. Hasan (male, age 45, from Egypt, second generation) brought up the collapse and the political polarization in Egypt as a result of the Arab Spring, while Ahmad (male, age 45, from Egypt, pre-9/11 immigration) and Amal (female, age 39, from Egypt, post-9/11 immigration) spoke of the Rabaa massacre in Egypt, which refers to the military's 2014 violent removal of pro-Morsi protesters which resulted in a disputed death toll between hundreds and thousands of civilian protesters (Al Jazeera 2019). As talking about it was extremely painful, Amal chose not to share any details beyond losing family during the event. However, Amal was willing to explain how it encouraged the development of ingroup support structures by Arab Americans, "I can't overcome what happened, but, *alhamdulillah* [Praise to Allah], I hope we all will learn to support each other and stand with each other." Through this quote, Amal demonstrates how the trauma of events like the massacre has lasting effects on group members and their interactions.

The Iraq War in 2003 was brought up by one participant as formative to his identity. Mohammed (male, age 44, from Lebanon, immigrated pre-9/11) initially came to the U.S. because of the civil war in Lebanon. Interestingly, Mohammed did not go into detail about the civil war, but stated the following about how the Iraq War shaped his identity:

> …you know, my American friend—yeah American, not even Arab or Muslim—at work talked about the Iraq War. He feels ashamed and bad about the war, and when we talk, he usually brings it up. It makes me think, "why don't I feel the same way?" I mean, it's not that I don't care, but why does he feel bad and express that, not me? Sometimes this embarrasses me when it comes up.

Although Mohammed did not elaborate on this issue or explain why his friend was talking about the war, his friend's frequent references to the war clearly stuck in his memory and affected how he negotiated his Arab and Muslim identities in the workplace. Specifically, it made both of

these identities more salient in the workplace, resulting in him being more conscious of his behavior and how it might be interpreted by others.

In Mohammed's case, cultural trauma imposed on an ingroup by an outgroup may be observed in the broader context of the Iraq War and its impact on Mohammed's Arab and Muslim identities. Mohammed indicated that he believed his American coworker felt guilty about the war, which he largely talked about as unnecessary and destructive to the people of Iraq. Mohammed's experience of being singled out at the workplace and treated as a representative of his Arab and Muslim identities can also be viewed as a sort of cultural trauma imposed by the outgroup, in this case, his American coworkers. Because of the feelings and expectations of his coworker surrounding the Iraq War, he was seen as a representative of Arab or Muslim culture and identity. Mohammed felt pressured and responsible to perform as a representative of the Iraqi people despite not being Iraqi himself. He felt a need to take on this representative role no matter the specific nationality of the Arab population being discussed. Both Mohammed's experience with tokenization and expectation to perform identity contribute to the development of cultural trauma, because it provides a constant reminder from an outgroup, indicating that the event should have more meaning than it might to the individual.

Mohammed's example demonstrates that rather than being an entirely internal process, one's processing of a traumatic incident can be altered by external elements. Cultural trauma in this case was developed by a complex interplay of variables, including the conduct of an outgroup member toward an ingroup member focusing on discussion of war and violence, the focus on his Arab identity without recognition of his American identity, and his identification as a representative of Iraqis despite being Lebanese. These interactions led to the development of a cultural trauma, resulting in Mohammed over-explaining his workplace behavior to his boss for

fear that it might be misinterpreted and protecting himself from potential issues with his coworkers:

> From the first week I joined the work, I told my boss that every Friday I need to go and pray the noon prayer at mosque. I even explain that we have a short sermon and it's like our weekly holiday, it's a very special day of the week. I will never do anything regarding practicing Islam without explanation. [I] don't expect others to understand. You begin so you will not be in trouble.

As apparent here, even though the Iraq War began almost two decades before, for Mohammed, those events continued, even in 2022, to create situations related to his Arab identity that confused and embarrassed him.

Another source of trauma for one of the participants was the violence of living under siege and otherwise being occupied by another power, which limited mobility and self-determination. Khaled (male, age 52, from Palestine, pre-9/11 immigration) talked about this issue, noting that the occupation of Gaza remains traumatic to him because Israeli occupation and oppression made it difficult to participate in common bonding rituals:

> The current situation in Gaza, you know, where people are still surrounded, they cannot even go fishing… they have no electricity, they've been controlled and every time they try to stand up on their own, they just come and destroy them again… I always teach my son about it and give him more pictures that you have to carry this day, the flag, moving on, that he will have to teach his children and his grandchildren or whatever, that you know, these things are unfair, you know that people like this living under siege and with the collateral damage to everybody.

Khaled described how the occupation affected and continues to affect basic human rights of the Palestinians but also their ability to engage in social interactions that are often foundational to individual and group identities.

Aside from the immediate effects occupation can have on group solidarity and experiences, Khaled's example demonstrates its legacy through the personal and long-term generational effects that the situation in Gaza has on him as a Palestinian American living outside his homeland. He passes intergenerational knowledge to his son about the injustices

faced by the people of Gaza and the importance of carrying on the struggle for justice to future generations. This demonstrates his recognition of the long-term impact of the occupation on the Palestinian people and his commitment to actively ensuring that the Palestinian community's children and grandchildren are aware of the situation and are prepared to continue the struggle for justice. Further, Khaled went on to explain that he advocates for and educates those he is in community with, such as non-Palestinian coworkers and friends, about the struggle of Palestinians. Despite no longer living in Palestine Khaled feels connection and solidarity through a national identity and raises his son to carry this identity.

Khaled's example integrates multiple types of trauma, including personal and cultural trauma. While the people of Gaza face the physical traumas of living under siege, including restrictions of movement and denial of access to basic resources, they also face cultural traumas such as being barred from cultural expression. This situation created a sense of collective cultural trauma that is passed down through generations. Khaled carried this along with a family history of three generations of refugee status in three countries. Now a U.S. citizen, these multiple traumas shape his identity as a Palestinian American. He raised his son with an understanding about the injustices Palestinian people face living in Palestine and modeled explaining the challenges to American friends, particularly the challenges Palestinians face when traveling or getting a job abroad. Khaled also demonstrated using personal experiences to highlight the impact on everyday Palestinians, specifically the experience of racial profiling especially in travel because his ID means that he is banned from entering some countries. It is important to acknowledge here that Khaled's experience as a Palestinian American is different from the other participants', as it deals with Israeli occupation of Palestine. The trauma of occupation differs

from the trauma of instability after revolution and civil war, in that the other participants dealt with violence inflicted by in-group members.

One shared concern about trauma from one's country of origin involves its generational effects. For example, other respondents explained that their children responded to shared memories of violence in unpredictable ways. In some cases, it encouraged children to become open-minded and accepting of individuals from their country of origin. However, some children limited contact with individuals from the country of origin if they perceived that their parent were unfairly targeted or punished in their country of origin. Such was the case with Ahmed (male, age 45, from Egypt, pre-9/11 immigration), who was banned from visiting his home country of Egypt due to his opinions about the Arab Spring and the Rabaa massacre:

> One time, my kid told me that he tried to stay away from his friend even though I do love him, but I knew that his family were big supporters of the current regime [in Egypt] and I was like, "Don't do that." One of the good things that I have learned in this society is not to label anyone by his blood or position. I was like, I think we don't do that or raise our kids to do that.

Ahmed's experience illustrates how collective memories and cultural traumas are transmitted to the next generation via the institutional reservoir of the family. Ahmed's child decided to limit contact with a friend because that friend's family supported a political regime that harmed his father. This demonstrates how families can play an intimate role in the continued legacy of cultural traumas, because they maintain and share the narrative with future generations, which shapes their attitudes and behaviors towards individuals from their country of origin. In this way, the trauma of violence is embedded within the family as a part of their collective memory, influencing how they view and interact with the world around them.

Ahmed also detailed how traumatic it has been for him to be banned from visiting his home country because of his political beliefs: "Being banned from visiting my country and not being able to see my mom or sister is very painful." Ahmed's experiences demonstrate how the

traumas from his country of origin continue to not only affect him, but also have ramifications on his family relationships with his mother, sister, and children.

Among five out of the 11 respondents, experiences of trauma from their home country that involved violence inflicted upon their group members serve as constant reminders of "who they are" in the context of interacting with wider U.S. culture. Sometimes these reminders exist by choice, having been passed down in stories and instilled in their children, while other times they are imposed by outgroup members. Either way, the reminders make their Arab American identities salient through their regular manifestation in daily life, and sometimes affect their behavioral interactions with others.

For the six out of 11 participants who did detail a home country trauma, these experiences with violence, such as with Amal (female, age 39, from Egypt, post-9/11 immigration), may have been too traumatic for them to share more than a few personal details about. Research indicates that memories can be repressed at the individual and societal level after traumas, such as war (for more information on the ongoing debate about this phenomenon at the group level, see Otgaar et al. 2019). As mentioned in my sample description, one research limitation I faced was that I did not account for the possibility of trauma being too difficult for some participants to recount.

Trauma from Economic and/or Political Oppression in Country of Origin

Nine out of 11 cited the Arab Spring as a significant event in relation to their hopes for political changes, as well as better civil engagement and institutions in their home country. In this way, the collective memory of the Arab Spring among Arab Americans reflects a sense of hope and inspiration, as well as a desire for social justice and political reform. Many Arab Americans saw the Arab Spring as a moment of collective action and empowerment, where

people came together to demand their rights and challenge oppressive regimes. For these individuals, the events of the Arab Spring have influenced their perspectives on issues of democracy, human rights, and social justice, and have motivated them to become more politically engaged and active in their new communities in the U.S. At the same time, the aftermath of the Arab Spring and ongoing conflicts in the region have also led to a sense of concern and advocacy for those affected by these crises, and a desire to promote peace and stability in the region. Overall, the collective memory of the Arab Spring among Arab Americans reflects a complex set of emotions and perspectives, but it is clear that the events of the Arab Spring have had a significant impact on their lives and identities.

The Arab Spring was a series of protests, uprisings, and revolutions that began in late 2010 and early 2011 in several countries in the Middle East and North Africa region. The protests were initially sparked by a Tunisian street vendor's self-immolation in protest against harassment and confiscation of his goods by local authorities. The protests quickly spread to other countries, including Egypt, Libya, Syria, Bahrain, and Yemen, among others. The protests were largely driven by popular discontent with autocratic regimes, corruption, economic hardship, and a lack of political freedom. In some cases, the protests led to regime change, as was the case in Tunisia, where President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali was forced to flee the country, and in Egypt, where long-time dictator Hosni Mubarak was forced to step down and be imprisoned. In other countries, such as Syria, Libya, and Yemen, the protests escalated into full-blown civil wars, with significant regional and international involvement.

The Arab Spring had a profound impact on the political and social landscape of the Middle East and North Africa region, leading to changes in the balance of power, the emergence of new political forces, and the reconfiguration of regional alliances. It also had a significant

impact on the economic and social conditions in many countries in the Middle East and North Africa region. While the uprisings were largely driven by demands for political freedoms and an end to autocratic rule, they also highlighted long-standing economic and social grievances, including high levels of unemployment, poverty, and inequality.

The political and economic instability that followed the Arab Spring, particularly in countries such as Syria, Libya, and Yemen, led to widespread violence, displacement, and the collapse of basic services such as healthcare, education, and infrastructure. The Arab Spring also led to a general sense of uncertainty and instability across the region, which had an impact on businesses, investment, and employment opportunities. Many people, particularly those with skills and education, sought opportunities elsewhere, leading to a significant increase in emigration from the region. Overall, while the Arab Spring was initially motivated by demands for political change and greater freedoms, the economic and social impacts of the uprisings played a significant role in driving migration from the region.

All respondents except Salem (female, age 47, from Tunisia, post-9/11 immigration) and Asmaa (female, age 49, from Sudan, pre-9/11 immigration) mentioned the Arab Spring as a significant event, because it allowed them to envision the potential for a better future for the Arab region as well as affected their understandings of the privileges of being American and living in a democracy. Four of the respondents described it as providing “hope,” representing “pride,” and being “unforgettable.” However, these discussions of the event were also laced with tones of lost hope and depression. For instance, Ahmad (male, age 45, from Egypt, pre-9/11 immigration) stated that: “The Arab Spring gave us hope. I cannot forget my feelings and how the environment looked back in 2010-2011, But it did not last!” His quote demonstrates how the wider event of the Arab Spring served as a beacon of hope in the moment, but that feeling faded.

Alia (female, age 40, from Tunisia, post-9/11 immigration) and Leena (female, age 47, from Tunisia, post-9/11 immigration) mention that even though they welcomed the revolution, their home country was never able to fully overcome its past corruption. Alia (female, age 40, from Tunisia, post-9/11 immigration) said, "Tunisian revolution is our pride, but corruption is deeper than what we thought, it's bad." Her quote demonstrates that while the people have pride in the push for freedom, the inability for it to succeed serves as a point of deep sadness and despair, reminding them it was not enough.

All respondents consistently articulated that democracy was their preferred system of governance because it aligned with their personal values and allowed them to speak their minds about both domestic and global issues. Their escape from oppressive governments and destabilized economies allowed participants to experience the U.S. in a more engaged manner, as such freedom was not allotted to them in their home countries. Hanan (female, age 40, from Morocco, post-9/11 immigration), Ahmed (male, age 45, from Egypt, pre-9/11 immigration), and Khaled (male, age 52, from Palestine, pre-9/11 immigration) described coming to the U.S. in order to pursue the "American dream" and "[be] in a democratic country," as well as "hoping to have a better life and more freedom." The U.S. was also described as a place of opportunity where someone could succeed based on personal effort, as suggested by Hasan (male, age 45, from Egypt, second generation). Even though he is second generation, he stated clearly what other participants struggled to explain:

> But America is still a place where you can distinguish yourself based on your merit. So if you work hard, and if you do well in school, or you do well at sports, if you apply yourself, you actually have the opportunity to perform well. And I think when you perform well, people respect you because of that.

Ultimately, for Hasan and others, their distinctive Arab American identity was reinforced in the U.S., with the beliefs that they were privileged to be here and could earn the respect of their

community in the U.S. through hard work and diligence. This distinctive identity and deep engagement with the American system seems to stem from the trauma of living in and emigrating from countries experiencing political and economic instability.

Many respondents felt the stereotypical "American values" were very much in line with those of Arabs. In support of this, Mohammed (male, age 44, from Lebanon, pre-9/11 immigration) said the following:

> Arab values are like dignity. […] some of the Arabic values are hospitality, generosity, not being dependent on someone else, giving, being useful to others, being honest, being truthful, protective, the risk taking, and so much, so many of these also are American values, as some of the American values is the, you know, carrying the banner of freedom of democracy.

To the respondents, the dual identities of Arab and American had many overlapping components vis-a-vis the shared values, even though non-Arab Americans might not see this similarity. The respondents felt that this dual identity required more responsibility than simply being one or the other. Being Arab is their born identity and was granted to them. However, being American is their chosen identity. They are proud of their American identity and do not take it for granted, because it provides them with a platform to serve and advocate for their born identity (i.e., Arab) and the people they share this identity with who are still politically oppressed in many of their home countries.

All the participants highlighted the pride they feel in phrases like "I am a proud Arab American," "I am proud of my identity as Arab American," "being American doesn't mean I forget my Arab roots or people, I pick the best of being Arab and American and be myself." The successful balancing of these identities results in an integrated whole, and here is where we see the integration of experiences from their home country overlapping with their present identity. As Mohammed (male, age 44, from Lebanon, pre-9/11 immigration) said, "So I see an Arab American as a person who combines both American values and Arab values. And this is what

America is about, really." In this quote, Mohammed is expressing a widely held belief among the respondents: the values held by Arab people, such as dignity, hospitality, generosity, honesty, and truthfulness, are not in conflict with the values of freedom and democracy. Rather, these values can be complementary and can contribute to a more democratic and just society. The respondents in the study may have identified with these values as part of their Arab identity, but they refer to freedom and access to democracy as part of privileges they have due to their American identity.

All 11 participants were unanimous in their promotion of democracy as a belief system that encourages personal freedom and good citizenship. The contrast between living in a democratic political system and the participants' prior experience with less democratic or undemocratic political systems in their home countries helped explain this viewpoint. Democracy was viewed as the ideal setting for the individual to freely practice their religion and contribute to society through the development of personal skills and wealth. It allowed participants to serve their people and the broader Arab community by advocating for their needs and highlighting their issues. According to Khaled (male, age 52, from Palestine, pre-9/11 immigration), "in this country [America], if you don't stand for your rights, we can't stand for you." Ahmed (male, age 45, from Egypt, pre-9/11 immigration), also said that "we as Arab Americans have so much to offer to the Arab world and to this country." These quotes demonstrate that the responsibility the respondents felt in carrying both identities was rooted in their experiences in their home countries (e.g., the collective memory of the Arab Spring and the collapse, the political instability in the Arab region to some countries like Egypt and Tunisia, the Israeli occupation, oppression). Practicing good citizenship was a way to honor both identities while combating the traumas associated with them. This dual identity is described by them as a

privilege and source of power that the respondents use to connect to the broader Arab community, by allowing them to advocate for both identities.

Theme 2: Post-9/11 Ethno-Religious Profiling

All 11 participants acknowledged 9/11 as a powerfully transformative event for the Arab American and Muslim communities. Participants noted that post-9/11 engendered ethnic and/or religious profiling, expectations of group representation, and struggles with identity. In the aftermath of 9/11, the American public began giving Arab Americans previously unseen amounts of attention, and respondents consistently noted these changes as a cause for renegotiating their identity as Arabs. For many Arab Americans, the events of 9/11 were not simply an external experience, but also changed the social and emotional fabric of their everyday lives.

A common theme participants elucidated was the constant need to self-surveil and be on the lookout for potential violence against themselves as Muslims. This need to forever be on guard created a sense of anxiety that did not go away even after time passed and the external negative reactions dissipated. For example, Leena (female, age 47, from Tunisia, post-9/11 immigration), states that “My only thing is to try not to be alone and always be in a group as a woman and as a hijabi. It takes one crazy individual to do anything.” In this quote, Leena uses the present tense indicating that she still has a fear based on her identities as an Arab woman who wears a hijab. Her description of “one crazy individual” indicates that the fear is of the unknown and the potential of what could happen because of how people perceive her. Similar sentiments were expressed by Asmaa (female, age 49, from Sudan, pre-9/11 immigration) who said wearing her hijab could be a risk, because “you never know who you will pass by you and may cause you any harm.” Even men, like Ahmad (male, age 45, from Egypt, pre-9/11 immigration),

understood the unique risk to women who wear hijabs. He stated, “as Muslim, we have to think twice where to go and at what time.” However, this risk based on attire was not exclusive to women. Salem (male, age 50, from Sudan, pre-9/11 immigration), who dresses in a thobe, or an Islamic religious robe, to go to prayer each day, says that while he feels comfortable wearing this clothing in his own neighborhood, he would not feel comfortable wearing it in an unfamiliar area. These examples demonstrate how respondents are conscious of how their Muslim attire could make them a target of violence.

Six out of 11 respondents discussed how they altered their lifestyle in terms of schedules after 9/11. Amal (female, age 39, from Egypt, post-9/11 immigration) believed these changes to her lifestyle helped her stay out of harm’s way, because “usually by 9 PM we are in bed, except if we are coming from an event or social gathering where we will be together as a group.” Through this language, she implied that her post-9/11 life has changed. She also indicated that her “otherwise normal” (i.e., average) lifestyle could be perceived as less threatening, because “our lifestyle is straight. Our relationship is straight.” Other respondents, such as Salem (male, age 50, from Sudan, pre-9/11 immigration), discussed how “usually Muslims do not stay late at night” and that he does “nothing for us outside” after 10:00 pm. However, Salem did not explicitly say these changes were related to fears from 9/11. Broadly, these examples demonstrate how the enduring nature of 9/11 may have resulted in individuals embodying vigilance, by making lifestyle changes in an attempt to minimize discrimination. Respondents learned to avoid certain places due to safety concerns and only communicate with like-minded and empathetic people.

Three other participants—Amal (female, age 39, from Egypt, post-9/11 immigration), Khaled (male, age 52, from Palestine, pre-9/11 immigration), and Hanan (female, age 40, from

Morocco, post-9/11 immigration)—said that 9/11 had negative effects on the Arab American community. Their responses were interesting because Khaled came to the U.S. before the attacks and directly witnessed how the events changed his community. While Amal and Hanan came after the attacks, they shared the same assessment that the community had been changed by the attacks, even though they did not observe the change firsthand. Hanan and Amal noticed that Muslims were being blamed and made to feel bad about themselves. Hanan said that negative news was promoted within the media, as large media companies would suggest that Muslims were responsible for the attack and no attempt was made to distinguish between various types of Muslim communities and Islamic beliefs. These respondents felt that the stereotyping, often perpetuated by the media, made life as a Muslim difficult. Hanan also said that some people thought "we as Arabs and Muslims are just terrorists; they blame us and don't want us to be here." Through these examples from Hanan, we can see how Arab Americans were aware of the negative images of the "Muslim/Arab American" group identity and their impacts.

Additionally, these same three participants—Amal (female, age 39, from Egypt, post-9/11 immigration), Khaled (male, age 52, from Palestine, pre-9/11 immigration), and Hanan (female, age 40, from Morocco, post-9/11 immigration)—felt blamed for the attacks in some ways due to ethno-religious profiling. The blame was felt far more during formal interactions in complex relationships. In formal, structured settings like in airports or interactions with law enforcement, it was not possible to escape actions like racial profiling or organizational stereotyping and prejudice. Khaled and Mohammed both experienced racial profiling, increased prejudice, and special screenings while traveling after 9/11. They both associated these changes with their country of origin and being Muslim. Both also discussed how complicated the formal process was for obtaining the necessary documents for visas as well as the extraordinary efforts

they were asked to complete to maintain them. Mohammed (male, age 44, from Lebanon, Pre-9/11 immigration) discussed the length of the process, taking nearly four years to arrive in the U.S., and still more years to receive the formal papers for citizenship. Khaled (male, age 52, from Palestine, pre-9/11 immigration) still remembers the frustration of having to leave the U.S. and return to maintain good status. He said the following:

> And even though I got the visa, I came into the U.S. here. My visa was for three years. When I came in, they still asked me to leave the U.S. every year outside, and then do a background check and come back again.

Participants perceived such experiences as increasing after 9/11, and in light of U.S. policy changes made under the auspices of the Patriot Act, this perception appears accurate. Government policy appeared to reinforce a general negative view of Muslims and a legally constructed fear of the other. The needs for multiple screenings and to leave the country more often caused emotional and mental distress as well as economic hardship. There was no mechanism to avoid these requirements; they were mandated and enforced by the government. In this regard, policy changes essentially created a group identity through sanctioning a group that had no connection to the devastating events of 9/11, and these changes were felt by the individual group members. The processes as instituted added to the challenges of being an Arab American.

Respondents indicated that they were uncomfortable with attention from non-Arab and non-Muslim Americans, post-9/11. For example, Hanan (female, age 40, from Morocco, post-9/11 immigration), Amal (female, age 39, from Egypt, post-9/11 immigration), and Leena (female, age 47, from Tunisia, post-9/11 immigration), mentioned that they did not think about 9/11 unless their American friends brought it up to show support and sympathy. Their friends often used words or phrases like “I know you are not terrorists,” “each country has bad people not just Arab,” “it is unfair for the Muslims to pay the price for September 11,” and “I am not

like those Americans who blame Muslims for what's happened." Such statements, while intended to be supportive, had the opposite effect of further stigmatizing the respondents by making them feel marginalized and labelled as outsiders. They did not like this extra attention and connection between their identity and 9/11, because they considered it to be a product of media stereotypes about Arabs and Muslims.

The Direct Impact of 9/11 on Identity

The most extensive and detailed account of 9/11's personal impact came from Hasan (male, age 45, from Egypt, second generation), the only respondent who was a second-generation Arab American. It is important to note that Hasan's account may not be representative of the experiences of all Arab Americans or Muslims in the aftermath of 9/11; however, his interview very clearly demonstrated how 9/11 was a definitive turning point in his identity formation. Specifically, he described the emotional impact of the attack on him as follows:

> The attack was a dramatic shock for me but helped me learn more about myself as an Egyptian American and Muslim. It is a tragedy every time I remember the attack and how the meaning of life changes in my mind, and I started to adopt a new way of thinking about life.

Hasan is talking about how deeply he feels the trauma of 9/11 every time he thinks about it, but how this constant reflection on the trauma helps him understand who he is, the group he represents, and how he wants to live his life. Notably, Hasan stated that, "9/11 was in my DNA" and explained that it increased the emotional stakes of his everyday interactions with others.

Hasan noted that 9/11 was a shock that changed his views on modern life, culture, customs, and his relationship with different communities in different countries. Again, his status as the only second-generation Arab American in this study must be noted and thus could make his reaction unique from the other participants. The shock of 9/11 intersected with his experiences growing up in the U.S., as the attacks caused him to think about how he negotiated

his Arab roots within an American way of life. He did not recall any attack on him personally as a result of the event, but he found he was "discovering the different identities I carried, the American, Arab, and Muslim," and ultimately felt content to see his primary identity as Muslim. He is a primary example of how 9/11 encouraged Arab Americans to prioritize their religious identity over their ethnic one, since it can provide more strength and support through the number of other Muslims in the U.S. This concept is discussed more fully under Theme 3.

Hasan also discussed how 9/11, similar to other historical traumas, shaped the Muslim community as a group. Specifically, it taught him how to deal with the tragedy and the trauma of ethno-religious targeting through relying on group support and personal resilience. Hasan explained how 9/11 helped him deal with experiences of trauma that came after: "I learned about tragedy and trauma, which is why actually when the Egyptian revolution happened and the uprising and all of that, I didn't lose my cool the way a lot of people did." Here, he was saying that he learned how to control his emotions from the previous trauma of 9/11 and therefore, did not lose his temper in anger or frustration, which is something he believed many of his compatriots did. Essentially, he attributed the level-headedness that he developed during 9/11 as the reason he did not experience an extreme emotion during the Arab Spring.

It is possible that this change in thinking also affected how Hasan behaved in interactions with others, becoming more pragmatic in expressing his cultural or religious identity with those with whom he shared common ground. He said that after 9/11, he spent two years pondering what it means to be Muslim, Egyptian, and American. He went to study religion in Egypt and traveled back and forth between Egypt and the U.S., which changed his worldview, belief systems, and way of thinking about the wider identities that he carried, which is the topic that will be discussed in Theme 3.

Hasan's position as a second-generation Arab American may have influenced his experience of 9/11 in ways that are different from first-generation immigrants. As a second-generation immigrant, Hasan may have felt a stronger sense of identification with American culture and society. He may have also experienced a greater sense of shock and disorientation at the attack on American soil, given that his sense of belonging to the U.S. may have been stronger than that of his immigrant parents. At the same time, Hasan's identity as an Arab American and Muslim would likely have made him a target of discrimination and suspicious in the aftermath of 9/11, regardless of his generational status. Thus, while his experience may have been influenced by his second-generation status, he would still have been impacted by the broader societal and political changes that followed the attacks. It is important to recognize that the experiences of Arab Americans and Muslims after 9/11 were diverse and shaped by a range of factors, including generational status, gender, ethnicity, and socio-economic background.

Hasan's detailed examples of how 9/11 affected him personally demonstrate how this particular event may have served as both a personal and cultural trauma to Arab Americans as individuals and as a group. It made some more conscious about how they were perceived by others, but for at least one it caused a deep reflection on what the Arab American identity means and how he wanted to live his life. Each example in Theme 2 demonstrates that the trauma of 9/11 affected either how identity was presented or how it was interpreted by the participants.

Theme 3: Interethnic Solidarities in Post-9/11 Muslim Communities

After 9/11, all 11 respondents noted changes in how Muslim communities practiced solidarity with other Muslim communities, both nationally and internationally. Respondents gravitated toward religious identities that allowed for the broadening of social ties across nationalities. The religious identity served as an avenue for the amplification of solidarity rather

than exclusion, becoming a superordinate identity that subsumed race, gender, nationality, and other statuses in the service of generating community support (Rabinovich and Morton 2011).

Although not all Arab Americans are Muslims, all participants in this study identified as such, with the majority of interviewees identifying Islam as the primary anchor of their identity. All other identities, such as national affiliation, were subordinated to it. This was demonstrated by comments such as "I choose to define myself as Muslim" (NAME of respondent and details). As Arab Americans' previous national identities were disrupted by immigration and laden with trauma from conflict, their religious identity provided a greater opportunity to create support systems. Hasan (male, age 45, from Egypt, second generation) highlighted this sentiment in his discussion of participating in religious observances while growing up:

> We grew up with quite a few Muslim families, but Muslims from all over. There were some Egyptians, some other Arabs, very few, but mostly Muslims from the subcontinent. And those Muslims in my area formed a masjid [mosque] for the community, a Muslim community, and I grew up in that community. And I think that most of this is the experience of many people that they might not, or I should say, many people that don't grow up in a neighborhood or in a county or a town in which there are many people from their same background. So you have to look to something higher, what's higher than our ethnic background is our religious background. So again, I got to know a lot of the Muslims in that area.

Hasan's experience exemplifies the sentiment that religious background allowed him to create a community with those "from their same background" in a way that ethnic identity would not. Considering the experiences of many Muslim Americans after 9/11, it can be inferred that the strong sense of community and support that Hasan experienced prior to 9/11 within his diverse Muslim community could have provided a foundation for solidarity during the post-9/11 period. In other words, the existing support networks and bonds formed within the Muslim community, based on shared religious identity, could have played a crucial role in helping individuals navigate the challenges they faced after 9/11. While the passage doesn't directly state this link, Hasan's experience of building a strong religious identity within a diverse Muslim community

likely prepared him and others for the difficult times that followed 9/11. The pre-existing sense of community could have enabled them to gather and support each other more effectively during that difficult time.

After 9/11, Ahmed (male, age 45, from Egypt, pre-9/11 immigration) and Asmaa (female, age 49, from Sudan, pre-9/11 immigration) noticed that Muslim communities began to offer more support to Muslim communities that did not necessarily share their nationality or ethnicity. In the wake of the attacks, there was greater skepticism toward Islam from U.S. government state agencies. This skepticism expanded to any financial exchanges between Muslims and thus cut off a crucial means of support Arab American Muslims had established prior to 9/11. For example, Muslim Arab Americans would frequently send their families and other philanthropic causes in their home countries remittances. Remittances are a key responsibility of emigrants as they provide resources to families for meeting immediate daily survival needs and other expenditures. However, after 9/11, the Muslim community was targeted for greater regulations and restrictions on transferring funds to and from Muslim countries, such as Saudi Arabia. These regulations resulted in increased surveillance of all international relationships that Arab Americans engaged in. This change in support trickled down to the local Arab American population through increased feelings of isolation and separation from their home countries and the global Muslim community. When the U.S. government imposed restrictions on certain Muslim organizations, respondents noted that their financial interactions with those organizations became more difficult, and the organizations had to change their defining discourse to avoid being blacklisted according to U.S. law. Thus, the restrictions made it harder to engage in the traditional pre-9/11 support that Muslims had engaged in.

To accommodate the change, these organizations therefore became more inclusive and began to involve previously excluded groups, such as non-Muslims and different sects of Islam, in their activities. They shifted to a more general mission of raising awareness and funds for broader humanitarian issues, such as poverty, healthcare, education, and disaster relief. In essence, the U.S. government's restrictions on funding transfers forced these Muslim organizations to expand their missions and become more diverse and inclusive in their approach; this inclusiveness trickled down to the individual level, encouraging interethnic solidarity among the organization's members.

Ahmed (male, age 45, from Egypt, pre-9/11 immigration) also noted the changes in support from the global Muslim community after 9/11. Because of the same restrictions that caused an interruption to remittances, there was an interruption in external support for Arab Americans. For example, Arab Americans and Arab American organizations could no longer receive support from their Arab countries, because of the presumed association with the attacks. These changes in federal regulations caused the Arab American community to become more solidified and insular, while becoming disconnected from the global Muslim community. After 9/11, Muslim communities in the U.S. learned that living in self-isolation was not an efficient way to build strong, sustainable communities and that there was value in being a part of American social life. Ahmed, who has been involved in community organizing pre-and post-9/11 with a Muslim organization, noted that after the attacks, this organization widened its reach to include non-Muslim community members. Ahmed explained this as follows:

> What happened after 9/11 taught us not to isolate ourselves from American social life. And it helped us to always be with our Muslim Ummah [i.e., all Muslims as one people] and not isolate ourselves. This is what unites us and makes our identity unique, not just by ethnicity or nationality. It's about humanity, manners, beliefs, and doing what needs [to be done] for the public good.

This quote demonstrates how the restrictions caused a community solidarity effect, particularly in how social justice efforts and charity matters involving Arab Americans could only be supported with internal donations (i.e., donations from other Arab Americans). Instead of living in isolated groups, Ahmed explains how American Muslims joined together in order to provide support. Ahmed also noted in his interview that he continues to engage non-Muslim members of his community, inviting over guests for monthly gatherings in Ramadan celebrations.

As Ahmed's words demonstrate, Muslim Americans found support beyond their immediate residential communities, and reaching beyond these communities allowed them to strategically develop practices such as cultural acceptance and tolerance in wider society. In other words, the forced circumstances of 9/11 and its aftermath of government surveillance showed them that support did not have to be limited to only Islamic settings and communities, and everyone could provide support to each other as long as they had similar ideals and values. In this way, a negative event produced an interesting opportunity for reframing what support means and who could offer it, expanding from a narrow religious view to a wider view linked to shared values and other commonalities.

All participants talked about reforming the way they practiced Islam after 9/11, such as by increasing their awareness of different schools of thought and practices within the religion. As a result, participants showed more acceptance toward other Muslims. These reforms largely centered around the way Muslims dealt with other Muslims from different schools of thought and began to see all Muslims as part of one community. One participant, Asmaa (female, age 49, from Sudan, pre-9/11 immigration) noted a change in support from her multiethnic Muslim American community after 9/11. Specifically, when Arab Muslim American women began to be harassed by non-Muslims for how they dressed—such as for wearing hijab or khimar, or

choosing to dress modestly—Asmaa started getting more overt support from her local Muslim community for her choices, whatever those choices were. Asmaa felt this support was more overt after 9/11.

Another example of this phenomenon within my sample was the widening acceptance of the holidays of other Muslim groups. For example, many Muslim Arab Americans celebrate events like Mawlid, the birth of the Prophet Muhammed- peace be upon him-. However, not all Muslims celebrate this holiday, and some even view it as heretical. After 9/11, as Muslim Arab Americans sought refuge in their communities, holidays like Mawlid gained greater acceptance. For example, in response to a question about changes since 9/11, Leena (female, age 47, from Tunisia, post-9/11 immigration), said that while she did not celebrate Mawlid, she allowed her children to go to it, and talked briefly about attending or showing respect to celebrations and holidays observed by other Muslim sects, such as Mawlid or fasting on the 15th day of Rajab. Salem (male, age 50, from Sudan, pre-9/11 immigration), mentioned that he sometimes attended the community gathering on Mawlid for a short time to show respect to his Muslim neighbors who believe differently from him, and his wife occasionally sent food if she had time. He said that "no one would judge us if we did not participate; we all respect our different interpretations, and this is what I like about my community." His quote demonstrates recognition of differing points of views and how they are treated in one community.

Salem (male, age 50, from Sudan, pre-9/11 immigration) and Leena (female, age 47, from Tunisia, post-9/11 immigration) ultimately gained support from their family for taking a less conservative stance towards religious practice, and demonstrating greater openness and acceptance toward others who do not believe the same as they do. They accomplished this by fostering acceptance among Muslims, with the hope that this would be passed on to their

children, who would grow up being more accepting of others regardless of their religious beliefs. In direct response to a question about changes since 9/11, Leena, Salem, and other participants from the same school of thought suggested that the traumatic events endured by the Muslim American community after 9/11 provided an opportunity for greater integration and tolerance. Leena (female, age 47, from Tunisia, post-9/11 immigration) said that it is very important to her to engage with the community and be flexible, and that not everything or practice we have to disagree with, because "our religion is clear and simple at the end." Salem (male, age 50, from Sudan, pre-9/11 immigration) also shared a similar view, stating that "Muslims need to take care of their community, they need to be all together, despite any differences." While Salem and Leena's behaviors might not be in the majority, they demonstrate a need to adapt to the conditions of a new country and its culture. Immigrants from the same religion are not always able to find people with the same background who also share their beliefs and practices. Consequently, community building requires flexibility in practice and modification of behavior so future generations can be successful.

These practices demonstrate how Muslims became more open-minded, tried to learn more about their religion, and used their open-mindedness to bond with other Muslims after 9/11. As first- or second-generation Arab Americans, participants understood the importance of openness, integration, and community, particularly when they were being stereotyped by non-Muslim Americans. They taught their children that the Muslim community needed to put aside differences, stick together, and develop good relationships with each other post-9/11. They learned to value the creation of new communities among Muslims and found ways to expand their connections to non-Muslim residents holding similar views without requiring total acceptance of all Islamic tenets. This experience highlights the fluid and evolving nature of

identity, particularly for Muslim Arab Americans in my sample who are navigating the challenges of balancing their ethnic, cultural, and religious identities in a post-9/11 America.

DISCUSSION

In this section, I discuss the results in relation to my two guiding research questions:

1. What cultural traumas and collective memories have shaped Arab American identity in the U.S.?
2. How have these cultural traumas and collective memories influenced Arab Americans' relationship and interaction?

Despite participants' differences in country of origin, ideology, school of Islam, and time of immigration, I found that respondents identified specific events as affecting their identity and presentation as an Arab American in the U.S. They described these events as holding symbolic power that reinforced their Arab identity and their shared feelings of trauma, disappointment, and loss of hope. When recalling their experiences of 9/11, all 11 respondents discussed the theme of race and ethno-religious profiling, through explicit and discrete examples. Specifically, all participants spoke about their religious identity and how the event had an impact on the Muslim community. However, Hasan, the second generation Arab American, was the only participant who clearly and definitively spoke about how 9/11 directly impacted his identity. In contrast, when speaking of the trauma of historical events such as war, oppression, and instability that caused them to immigrate, nine of the 11 respondents referenced their Arab ethnic identity. Respondents also indicated that the trauma from their home countries impacted how they perceived their American identity and enacted their Arab American identity through practicing good citizenship. These findings indicate that traumas, both 9/11 and those from their

home countries, continue to impact the lives of Arab Americans through how they understand and maintain their group identities.

While immigration timing was varied among participants (i.e., approximately half came before 9/11 and half came after), it appears the timing did not affect the findings. Additionally, gender was also nearly perfectly aligned with immigration timing. The only factor that did appear to affect responses was status as a first generation or second generation Arab American. Specifically, I found that Hasan, who was born in the U.S. and so would be identified as a second generation immigrant, held different views than the first generation participants. However, this finding cannot be extrapolated because it is a sample of one.

Regarding Research Question 1, according to the Arab Americans I spoke to, events such as wars, political instability, oppression, and immigration led to shifts in their identity as their community tried to absorb the shock of these events and changed the way they behaved and interacted with both Muslims and non-Muslims. Participants' responses were broadly consistent with the theories of collective memory and cultural trauma outlined above. Their descriptions of multiple traumatic events and the impact of those events on their Muslim communities and their fellow Arab Americans were consistent with Eyerman's (2004) description of cultural trauma, which noted that cultural trauma produces struggles with meaning and collective identity.

There is also evidence that Arab Americans engaged in impression management post-9/11. In his theory of impression management, Goffman (1959) argued that individuals present themselves to others through the roles they play and, when individuals perform roles, they try to express their characteristics and deliver an optimal image of themselves. In short, individuals try to present others with impressions that please them. At the organizational level, two out of 11 respondents indicated how Islamic organizations reformed toward both the Muslim and non-

Muslim community, becoming more inclusive. At the individual level, all 11 respondents noticed how their relationship to Islam and other religious members changed after 9/11. Specifically, some referenced how they adjusted their practice of Islam to be less strict and more inclusive of fellow believers who practiced their faith differently. These behaviors align with Goffman's theory of impression management, which suggests that individuals try to express their characteristics and deliver an optimal image of themselves when performing roles.

At the same time as managing their presentation, all respondents also openly and clearly expressed pride in being Muslim. They did this through continuing to practice their religion, celebrating their religious holidays, and embracing their given Arabic names. These continued behaviors indicate that the respondents felt comfortable with their Arab Muslim identities, even after 9/11 and did not feel the need to conceal their authentic selves. Even as they presented their authentic selves, they did acknowledge how the ethno-racial profiling pressured them to manage how they presented themselves to non-Muslims and sometimes even self-surveil for safety and fear of risk. One of these practices was avoiding places and people who discriminate against them. This could also be seen as a trauma response, as it is a way for individuals to protect themselves from further harm and potentially traumatic experiences. While some may see this as a form of "impression management," it may also be interpreted as a way to cope with the collective trauma of discrimination and oppression that many Arab Americans have experienced in the U.S. It is important to acknowledge and consider this response in the context of research involving marginalized communities that are discriminated against. These methods of managing impressions—consciously or unconsciously—were tools that participants in the present study reported using to navigate post-9/11 America, even while they remained proud of their Arab Muslim identities.

Related to the trauma of historical memories, participants shared a collective experience of political oppression and violence in their home countries, which influenced their views on being good citizens and celebrating democracy in the U.S. They emphasized the importance of advocating for their rights and supporting democracy as a reaction to the lack of similar rights in their home countries. This shared value is rooted in the collective memory of trauma from violence and oppression that they experienced in their home countries. These findings demonstrate the impact of cultural trauma on the formation of identity and values. They also highlight the role of collective memory in shaping individuals' views and actions towards building a better future. This is similar to Conway's (2010) argument about how collective memory affects views of the future. The respondents' pride in democracy and practicing good citizenship is directly related to their collective memory of past trauma as well as their hopes for what America can offer them.

Regarding Research Question 2, in the wake of such traumatic events like 9/11, many participants turned to their religious identity as a way of processing their trauma and its aftermath. They explained the need to be group members and create strong bonds with the Muslim community, a larger group than their Arab ethnicity, as a source of support and representation. These answers were consistent with Conway's (2010) suggestion that the collective experience is key to the promotion, construction, and solidification of group identity. Conway's concept of group identity is not limited to any specific type of identity, such as the Muslim identity. Rather, it encompasses any shared experiences or values that contribute to the formation and solidification of group identity. In the context of the present study, respondents shared experiences related to their Arab identity, Muslim identity, and experiences as Arab Americans in the U.S. These collective experiences shaped their identity and contributed to the

formation of their Arab American identity. Therefore, while their Muslim identity was certainly a part of their collective identity, it was not the only factor contributing to their group identity. Rather, the respondents drew on a range of shared experiences and values to construct and solidify their identity as a collective.

Participants in the present study identified two ways their relationships to Islam affected their identity. First, religion was a way to anchor their identity and was superordinate to national or ethnic affiliations. Second, given the increased public attention to Islam after 9/11, participants changed how they practiced and presented their religion to the American public.

Limitations

Despite offering tentative answers to the research questions, this study had a number of limitations. The first was the small sample size, which is not representative of the diversity seen in the Arab American population. For instance, participants were limited to people between the ages of 35 and 55, which does not represent a full spectrum of Arab identities. All respondents also identified their religion as Muslim; however, 63% of the Arab American population in the U.S. identifies as non-Muslim (America by the Number 2016). The small sample also did not account for regional and/or ideological diversity among Arab Americans. The largest Arab American population in 2019 was in California (Statista 2022). However, Michigan, where one of my respondents is from, has the second largest Arab population in the U.S. as well as the fastest growing one (Nasr 2019). Given Harold and Fong (2017) findings about how neighborhood makeup affected the facilitation of collective memory among the Jewish population, it is reasonable to assume that those who live in predominantly Muslim or Arab American communities will both be differentially affected by collective memory and express their identities differently. My sample was not able to capture this potential effect. Related, the

majority of my respondents lived in urban or suburban areas, and I cannot speak to how these processes may facilitate in or be facilitated by a rural residential environment.

Another important issue with the ability to generalize is the overlap between pre- and post-9/11 immigration and gender is almost perfectly aligned. While I am not certain of the reason for this alignment, female respondents did differ from male respondents in significant ways. For instance, all women came to the U.S. to either accompany or join their spouses. Despite this difference, women and men both equally identified 9/11 as affecting them through ethno-racial profiling. One difference I noted was how women were more likely to discuss how post-9/11 community support emerged among Muslim American women and on behalf of them.. Additionally, many of them had spouses living in the U.S. while they were abroad, meaning they may be assessing a comparative effect of 9/11: how it affects their spouse versus how it affects them, or how it affects them through the experiences of their spouse. However, my questions were unable to capture this potential effect. For these reasons, it might be difficult to truly understand the standalone effects of 9/11 and how they are related to gender, due to the near perfect alignment of gender and timing of immigration. Future research should probe the effects of gender more specifically.

Second, the items in the questionnaire could have been focused in a way that more specifically addressed the research questions. One way would have been to shorten my interview to a closed yes or no question and then provide open time for the participants to explain their responses. For example, I could have asked, “Does 9/11 affect your behavior as an Arab American?” instead of “how do you think 9/11 affected your behavior?” I think a concise answer “yes it affects me,” or “no it does not” would give more direct insight and connection to the research question. Essentially, I would be asking the respondent to explicitly consider 9/11’s

effects rather than infer such effects from their implicit responses. This may be necessary because nearly 20 years have passed and thus a direct probe is likely necessary. Additionally, I allowed participants to self-identify as Arab American, rather than providing a definition and ensuring they fit into it. This meant that all respondents could have different understanding of what it means to be Arab Americans. For instance, people who view Arab as a race may engage in more or less activism than those who view it as an ethno-religious group

Third, when coding the data, I only analyzed it for themes I thought germane to my research questions; thus, contrary data or surprising findings could have been obscured. A fourth limitation was the mix and overlap of identity between ethnicity and religion. As all participants were Muslim, I was not able to capture a more nuanced view of Arab Americans, for example, by surveying Arab Christians. Additionally, my identity as an Arab woman could also have affected the respondents through an interviewer effect (see reflexivity statement below for more details about my identity and positionality). This impact was most likely in their assumption that I may have had certain knowledge or perspectives based on my identity; this assumption of shared knowledge may have affected how they perceived my questions, and their willingness to disclose certain information or opinions. Finally, there continues to be a lack of empirical and theoretical research about collective memory and cultural trauma in social science research, especially about Arabs and Arab American. This limited the support the present study might have been able to draw on and made it harder to compare the results with prior research. Despite these limitations, the findings provide important sociological knowledge concerning how collective trauma affects the daily lives of Arab Americans.

Reflexivity

As an Arab Muslim woman who grew up in an Arab country, I took my Arab identity for granted. However, while living in the U.S. as a student, I developed a sense of my Arab identity that I did not experience before coming to the U.S. Being among other ethnicities in the U.S. made me more aware of and sensitive about my own ethnic group in the Arab community. Watching other ethnic minorities show their culture and talk about their identity made me question my own identity. For example, showing generosity, exchanging gifts, wearing traditional garb, and having ethnic gatherings and festivals are all culturally and socially constructed interactions, possibly used to consciously or unconsciously maintain a group identity. This experience caused me to watch my own ethnic group to see how they preserved their identity in the U.S., what they chose to carry on and highlight, what made them feel their Arabness, what historical memories or events connected me with Arabs in the U.S., and what we had in common. These were all questions on my mind during many discussions with Arab friends and in public gatherings that prompted me to try to better understand the Arab American community in the West.

My main baggage in this study consisted of my expectations. I expected that everyone would connect the way I connected to an Arab ethnic identity and that we would share the same meanings and feelings about being Arab. I also expected that everyone would share their details about cultural traumatic events, but this was often not the case. Some people held political views but preferred to avoid discussing politics. This contradicted my initial expectation that they would give answers based on historical memory rather than the mainly religious or national events they ended up discussing. While all except two respondents shared that the Arab Spring was significant to them, and some shared one or two traumatic events, I thought everyone would

at least mention the Palestinian issue, because of its historical importance in modern Arab culture and its ongoing nature. As Suliman (1999) noted, the 1967 Arab-Israeli War marked a watershed for the Arab community in the U.S., where the notion of pan-Arab solidarity began to spread. However, this topic was only mentioned by three of my participants. One was a Palestinian, so mentioning the topic could be expected, while the other two said that Palestinians had a stronger collective memory than other Arab groups. The respondents acknowledged that Palestinians represent a special case among Arabs, because they use their identity as a political movement.

CONCLUSION

By drawing on memory and trauma literature, historical analysis, and qualitative interviews, I engaged in an exploratory study to understand how collective memory of cultural trauma has impacted individual and collective identity among Arab Americans. This study explored the cultural trauma and collective memories that have shaped Arab American identity in the U.S. While participants did not explicitly state that 9/11 was a traumatic event for them personally (with the exception of Hasan), 9/11 was a traumatic cultural event that affected the individual and collective identity of Arab Americans in how they perceived themselves as Muslims, and how they located themselves within U.S. society. The findings indicated that these participants dealt with the resulting stigmatization of Arabs and Muslims by restricting their interactions and creating distance from any non-like-minded people and from those who did not value freedom of opinion or respect their culture and religion.

Respondents also shared experiences of cultural trauma from their home countries despite the differences in the source of the trauma. This cultural trauma was associated mostly with war, violence, and social and political oppression in their home countries. These collective memories and cultural traumas appeared to affect participants' relationships with Arabs and Muslims in the

U.S. and to their country of origin. They connected with other Muslim and Arab Americans by valuing and practicing good citizenship in the public sphere with fellow Americans, regardless of ethnic or religious background. Furthermore, they saw the power of democracy and freedom they had as Americans as key to connecting with issues related to the broader Arab community both in the U.S. and abroad.

This study has suggested that my respondents' Arab American identities have been conditioned and overlapped by a broad range of collective memories of violence, including 9/11, and political oppression involving social and economic instability. Although structurally this phenomenon bears similarities to other minority communities in the U.S., the Arab American experience is unique and warrants its own dedicated research. This community's self-understanding and public perception have continued to evolve as new geopolitical events and self-reflexivity shape the community. Future research should first consider a larger sample of this diverse population, taking into account differences in age, religion, and socio-economic background. Additionally, it would be beneficial for future research to focus on Arab Americans who are known for their activism in issues related to Arab Americans. Activist-oriented Arab Americans are likely more aware of how much they can gain from being recognized as Arab; this research examine how they navigate their identity within the larger context of race and ethnicity in the U.S., and how this impacts their sense of belonging and community. Broadly, there is much to be done on including the lives and experiences of Arab Americans in the social science literature. This thesis contributes a small piece, focusing on how collective traumas affected the daily lives and identities of Arab Americans.

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APPENDIX A: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL LETTER

VIRGINIA TECH.

Division of Scholarly Integrity and
Research Compliance
Institutional Review Board
North End Center, Suite 4120 (MC 0497)
300 Turner Street NW
Blacksburg, Virginia 24061
540/231-3732
irb@vt.edu
http://www.research.vt.edu/sponsp/hrpp

MEMORANDUM

DATE:	December 13, 2021
TO:	Ashley Reichelmann, Sara Mohammad Attab
FROM:	Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (FWA00000572)
PROTOCOL TITLE:	The role of collective memory and cultural trauma in Arab identity formation
IRB NUMBER:	21-564

Effective December 10, 2021, the Virginia Tech Human Research Protection Program (HRPP) determined that this protocol meets the criteria for exemption from IRB review under 45 CFR 46.104 (d) category(ies) 2(ii).

Ongoing IRB review and approval by this organization is not required. This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about whether these activities impact the exempt determination, please submit an amendment to the HRPP for a determination.

This exempt determination does not apply to any collaborating institution(s). The Virginia Tech HRPP and IRB cannot provide an exemption that overrides the jurisdiction of a local IRB or other institutional mechanism for determining exemptions.

All investigators (listed above) are required to comply with the researcher requirements outlined at:

https://secure.research.vt.edu/external/irb/responsibilities.htm

(Please review responsibilities before beginning your research.)

PROTOCOL INFORMATION:

Determined As:	**Exempt, under 45 CFR 46.104(d) category(ies) 2(ii)**
Protocol Determination Date:	**December 10, 2021**

ASSOCIATED FUNDING:

The table on the following page indicates whether grant proposals are related to this protocol, and which of the listed proposals, if any, have been compared to this protocol, if required.

Invent the Future

VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY
An equal opportunity, affirmative action institution

APPENDIX B: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE

Thank you for agreeing to share your experience living in the U.S. (review consent sheet). If you have any questions about the study, I would be happy to answer them.

Opening Questions

1.·Tell me the story about how and why you immigrated to the U.S.
- When did you first arrive?
- Who did you arrive with?
- Why did you come to the U.S.?
- Was this your first time in the U.S.?

2.·What, if any, concerns did you have about immigrating to the U.S.?

Relocation to DC

3.·Did you live somewhere else in the U.S. before DC/NOVA?
- Is this the location where you initially immigrated to?
- If so, do you currently still live there?

4.·What are some positive and negative aspects of living in this neighborhood in the DC area?

Daily Routine Vignettes

5.·Can you tell me about what your typical day is like?
- What is your daily routine? Tell me in detail like you are talking with a friend on the phone about your day. For instance, what did you do yesterday? When did you get up, and so on?
- When you leave your home, what are some typical places you visit? Are there places that you go to connect to your Arab identity?

6. Based on one or two places they say, ask them:
- How frequently you go there?
- Why do you like it there?
- Why do you go there?
- Who do you go with?

7. If they work, ask about the workplace:
- How did you end up working there?
- Do you like it? Why or why not?

8. If they have children, ask about school:
- Is it a public or private school?
- Did you select the school or were you forced to send your children there due to circumstances?
- Did you move to this area so you could send your kids to school there?
- Do your children feel welcome in the school, playground, and other areas?
- Did your children join any neighborhood activities, such as soccer?
- Do you like it? Why or why not?

9. Do you have a religious routine that you stick to? Describe how you carry it out.

- Where do you go to practice it, and how often do you go there?
- Who do you go with?
- Why do you like to practice this routine?

10.·Are there any places in your neighborhood that you typically avoid?

- Have you ever been there before, and if so, who have you been there with?
- What has caused you not to want to go there?
- If it is a common place, such as a grocery store, what do you do to meet your needs (i.e., do you go out of your way to another grocery store, send a friend, or order online)?

Identity

In this segment I am trying to assess your relationship to your cultural heritage.

1.·What is it like to be an Arab American in the U.S.?

2.·Is there anything that you have adopted from U.S. culture?

- If not, is there something you have wanted to adopt? Why haven't you adopted it yet?
- Are there things about U.S. culture that you have avoided? What are some of these? Why have your avoided this/these things?

3.·How do you express your culture Are there things that you say or do that show your culture? (e.g., food, language, clothes, jewelry)?

- When do you usually wear X cloths/jewelry? Ex: holidays, daily basis, alone, mainly with Arabs?
- When do you usually speak X language? Ex: holidays, daily basis, alone, mainly with Arabs?
- When do you usually eat/cook X type of food? Ex: holidays, daily basis, alone, mainly with Arabs?

4. Are there any meaningful items in your home that are closely related to your identity as [chosen ethnic/racial/religious identity]? (e.g., artifacts, furniture, clothing)

If Yes

- Do you put these items in a visible place or a hidden place?
- Do you have a daily use for X items?
- Do you use them during social gatherings with people from your group or outside your group?
- Do you use them on special occasions or on a daily basis? (e.g., holiday / daily basis / formal events)

If No

- Do you want to have any?
- Which items like this would you want to have?

5. Think about items that are meaningful to you.

- Are there any items you are comfortable showing at your home when your Arab friends visit but not when your non-Arab friends are present?
- Are there any items you are comfortable showing at your home when your non-Arab friends visit but not when your Arab friends are present?

If Yes

- Tell me more about what this.

Identity and Interactions (Name, Languages, Holidays, Non-Arab View of Arab Americans)
Name

6.·When you introduce yourself to new people, what do you ask them to call you?

- Do you use your given name or do people usually call you something else?
    - If so, what is it? Why did you choose to do so?
    - If not, do you want to? Why?

Holidays

7.·Tell me about some of the most important personal traditions, rituals, memorials, and holidays you participate in.

8.·During these events, who do you participate with, for instance your family, community, friends?

- Tell me more about what you do during these events.
- When does it take place?
- What is your role? Can you describe it?
- What activities do you do?
- And what food do you eat?

9.·Are there other events that are important to your family and community but are not important to you? Please describe them.

- Do you participate in them?
- Why or why not?

10.·What do think that non-Arabs in the U.S. think about Arab Americans?

Collective Traumatic Events

1.·How do you think 9/11 affected your daily behavior and expression of being an Arab American?

2. How is 9/11 directly or indirectly related to you personally?

3. How does or did 9/11 affect how you express your identity as an Arab American?

4. Have you ever felt threatened or treated poorly because of 9/11?

- How do you know it was related to 9/11?

5. Do you think 9/11 affects relations with people outside your community?

- In what ways?
- Has it ever affected your relationships personally?

6. If they have children:

- What have you told your children about 9/11?
- Does 9/11 affect how you teach your children to behave or the types of conversations you have with them?

7.·Are there important events that affect your identity and your presentation as an Arab American in the U.S.?

- How is [chosen event] directly or indirectly related to you personally?
- How does [chosen event] affect how you express your identity as an Arab American?

8. Have you ever felt threatened or treated poorly because of [chosen event]?

- How do you know it was related to the event?
- Do you think these events affect relations with people outside your community?
    - In what ways?
    - Have they ever affected your relationships personally?

If they have children:

- What have you told your children about these events?
- Do these events affect how you teach your children to behave or the types of conversations you have with them?

9.·What is your advice for an Arab thinking about immigrating to the U.S. or an Arab who has recently immigrated to the U.S.?