“SPEAK AMERICAN!”
OR
LANGUAGE, POWER AND EDUCATION IN DEARBORN, MICHIGAN:
A CASE STUDY OF ARABIC HERITAGE LEARNERS AND THEIR COMMUNITY

BY
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ABSTRACT

This study examines the history and development of the “Arabic as a foreign language” (AFL) programme in Dearborn Public Schools (in Michigan, the United States) in its socio-cultural and political context. More specifically, this study examines the significance of Arabic to the Arab immigrant and ethnic community in Dearborn in particular, but with reference to meanings generated and associated to Arabic by non-Arabs in the same locale. Although this study addresses questions similar to research conducted on Arab Americans in light of anthropological and sociological theoretical constructs, it is, however, unique in examining education and Arabic pedagogy in Dearborn from an Arab American studies and an educational multi-cultural perspective, predicated on and drawing from Edward Said’s critique of Orientalism, Paulo Freire’s ideas about education, and Henry Giroux’s concern with critical pedagogy.

In the American landscape, the "East" has been the theatre of the exotic, the setting of the Other from colonial times to the present. The Arab and Muslim East have been constructed to represent an opposite of American culture, values and life. Through the agency of conflation, Arab (and Muslim) Americans are accordingly lumped together with people from abroad, making for their status as permanent outsiders. Thus, if the American Self represents an ideal, the inhabitants of this oppositional world of Arabs and Islam (an Anti-world) represent an Anti-self. A source of fear and object of hate and prejudice, this Anti-self is the object of derision and anything connected with it (e.g. language, customs, religion, etc.) becomes suspect and is devalued by association. This document has two objectives: First, to present an historical account of this context, and, secondly, to shed light on how and why things that are associated with Arab Americans in Dearborn are devalued. This is achieved by addressing the developments of meanings (of actions and symbols) in their American context, and how they have shaped (and still shape) the local culture’s depiction of and understanding of Arab (and Muslim) Americans.

Therefore, Arab American issues of language, culture and societal interactions should be understood as constituting a stream of American life, which represent a dimension of the total American experience, past and present, that is best understood through the paradigm of American studies. Viewing this experience as a cultural whole rather than as a series of unrelated fragments (e.g. immigration waves and settlement patterns, religious and state affiliations, assimilation and preservation debates), Arab American culture and issues begin to shine through as an organic and holistic experience whose characteristics are shared with other groups, suggesting research on this community is equally generalisable to others.
As an academic work, this document promotes an understanding of the Arab American experience from an interdisciplinary point of view through focusing on the phenomenon of language in the community with emphasis placed on the AFL experience at school. Therefore, it is a broadly-framed outlook that permits, in an introductory way, a view of the richness of the Arab American experience, particularly in Dearborn, Michigan, as part of the American experience.

Data were collected using two surveys, one for AFL students at a high school, and another was administered to adults in the community—in Dearborn. In addition, an action-research-based effort, individual personal interviews and focus groups were conducted with stakeholders in the community: parents/community members, teachers/school personnel and students, utilising personal involvement in understanding and analysing the data. Also, the study referred to archival and documentary evidence available in the school system. Four hypotheses regarding importance/significance and utility of Arabic were offered and tested by means of qualitative, interpretive analysis.

Findings included: (1) Arab Americans valued Arabic as an emblem of their community in Dearborn, suggesting its employment as an indicator of political empowerment. (2) Conversely, in the non-Arab community Arabic was observed as a mark of the Other, and an artefact of ethnic retrenchment and rejection of assimilation. (3) Interestingly, however, development of English language competence emerged as a major concern in the community, outweighing Arabic language preservation. (4) While, language maintenance efforts in the community were observed as minimal, especially at the organisational level, and support for such programmes was marginal to nil. (5) Additionally, Arabic, while not the object of a desire to master as a medium of communication, was observed to signify a special symbol of heritage for Arab American youth in the Dearborn community, who may have rejected their parents’ ideas about learning Arabic, but had developed their own. (6) What is more, Arab American youth were observed developing a viable hybridised identity, whose mainstay is being “Arabic”, despite the dominance of English and Euro-Anglo cultural norms. (7) At the institutional level, Arabic was observed devalued in the school setting due to its association with Arabs, Islam, Arab Americans, and immigration. (8) Moreover, relations between Arab Americans and non-Arab Americans in the school system seems to have been equally impacted by this process of devaluation, furthering the cause of stigmatisation, prejudice and racism.
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My heartfelt thanks are due to my wife, Elizabeth, whose love and support made this work possible. And to my children, Benjamin (“Booboo”) and Suhaylah Razanne.
(and those who might come after them), I offer my hopes for a better tomorrow and my thanks for their loving hearts.

Alhamdulillah!
DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my mother, Salam Irene Kurdy-Ayouby, who taught me how to read.

And,

To my sister, Batoul Ayoub-Karam, and my brother-in-law, Mounir Karam, who are the best family one can hope for.

And,

To my wife, Elizabeth, and to our children,

And,

To all my good friends.
DECLARATION

I, Kenneth Kahtan Ayoubie, do hereby certify and declare that this document is my original work, except for quotations and citations, which have been duly acknowledged. I also declare it has not been previously presented to attain another qualification.

________________________________
Date: November 15, 2004
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Chapter One
Introduction to the Study

1.1 Orientation to Study

Although the vehicle of a great historical and modern civilisation, as well as an official language of the United Nations Organisation, Arabic in America is, nevertheless, an immigrant language, placing it in a subordinate position to English. This subordination not only ensues from Arabic’s migratory position, where the native language naturally has the national field advantage, however, this debasement is also due to its association with Islam, the culture of Arab world and other associated peoples and ideas that represent the *other* in America’s Orientalist popular mindscape.

Saddled with a baggage of prejudice that hearkens to the earliest days of the American Republic and its anti-Muslim European heritage, and throughout the twentieth century in America, Arabic has been observed as the language of backwardness, hostility and terrorism, given America’s identification with Orientalist, Euro-centric values at the same time as championing the Israeli side over the Arab cause. This disdain and suspicion of Arabic only grew worse in light of the tragic events of September 11, 2001 that led to devastation in New York, Washington, D.C. and Pennsylvania, *actioned* anti-Arab and anti-Muslim racism in the United States, negatively impacting Arab and Muslim Americans. In this culturally hostile milieu, Arabic in Dearborn, Michigan, where a large immigrant and ethnic community of Arab extraction has made its home, is one place to be found as an immigrant language, where it is thought to be locked in
cultural struggle for survival as an ethnic language against an over-arching assimilationist project.

The ancestral language of a third of the city’s population, Arab Americans in Dearborn have persuaded the local educational authorities to include Arabic in the curricular line-up of subject matter of study in the secondary public schools since the mid 1980s. Not only is this phenomenon significant because of the inclusion of what is generally referred to as a “less commonly taught language” in the curricular line-up of studies, but also for breaking the barrier at the high school level no less.

This experiment, its historical and socio-cultural context, and its constituents are the subject matter of this study. This qualitative action research effort is intended to report on the history of the Arab American community, both nationally and locally; the significance (or lack thereof) of Arabic to the community, along with the issues involved in the teaching and learning of Arabic at the public school level. Therefore, it is an effort, reporting the voices of students, parents, and teachers, in addition to other school personnel and community members concerning their views and beliefs on the teaching and learning of Arabic as a foreign (and heritage) language in Dearborn Public Schools, and the socio-cultural environment of the teaching and learning process in the city of Dearborn.

1.1.1 Arabic in the Schools: General Problem

Arabic in Dearborn Schools: Arabic language teaching and learning at the secondary level is a new experience in the American setting. Traditionally, foreign languages taught at the American high school have included Latin and French. Only because of Cold War politics did American schools attempt to diversify offerings of
languages to include Russian and German at the high school level (Roeming in Donoghue, 1967). Spanish gained ground in American classrooms as result of the growing numbers of Latin Americans in the United States, and as recognition of the political and economic importance of Latin America to that country. Spanish has become such a ubiquitous presence in America that the United States is considered the fifth largest Spanish-speaking country in the world (Gilbert-Schneider, 1976). The increase in Spanish speakers in the U. S. has led to the institution of Spanish for native speakers programs to various degrees of success that nevertheless speak to the growth of the importance of that language (Rodriguez-Pino, 1997). In a sense, the introduction of Arabic into the Dearborn Schools resembles that of the addition of Spanish as a foreign language elsewhere in America. The same prejudices which Spanish encountered, because of its connection to lower status United States residents and/or citizens, Arabic, too, can be perceived to confront similar issues. One can add to this the baggage of the connection of Arabic to Islam and to contemporary Middle Eastern politics, (e.g., terrorism) (Shaheen, 1982; 1984; 1989). Moreover, there seems to be an inherent American distaste, if not distrust of things which are of Arab background, given an earlier history which viewed the Arabic-speaking world as a lawless domain, (Allison, 1995).

While there are some private schools of religious and secular purposes that offer Arabic tuition as part of its curriculum in several American locales (Kuntz, 1996), only Dearborn Schools (the official name of the Dearborn public school district), a state-supported system, offers a full program at the high school level. Arabic was introduced into the schools early in the 1980s as a pilot project in one high school. It grew out of a request from a parent-teacher committee of the bilingual (English as a second language)
program. Whereas one enlightened principal took the chance, others in the community opposed the measure on the ground that it was a move in the wrong direction—away from English towards a “native” language, which was perceived as a threat to the local culture and system. Nonetheless, there were a considerable number of parents who pushed the project forward and students who enrolled in classes that the pilot project succeeded (Harp, 1999).

But it is significant that Arabic was born from the milieu of the Bilingual Education Program, something it has never been able to outgrow in the mind of people. Bilingual Education is a program devoted to teaching English language skills to immigrants. However, from its beginnings in the 1970s, the Bilingual Education program was thought to teach Arabic instead of or in conjunction with English. Theory aside regarding the efficacy of such pedagogy, the Dearborn program always taught English as its core mission. Yet a description of the program such as the following was and is prevalent:

“This program is mandated by Public Act 294 which states that when 20 or more Students speak the same foreign language, basic concepts, such as reading, math, social studies, must be taught in their own language.

“English-speaking students who are interested in learning Arabic, which is the foreign language that applies here, may participate in the program. While this program is locally funded, Dearborn is applying for federal monies to help augment the program.” (League of Women Voters, 1976).

Indeed, this statement is misleading! Although the act promoted assistance with students’ native languages, it did not support native language pedagogy, and the Dearborn program never taught Arabic, rather used Arabic as a medium for English instruction. However, given that such a reputable and influential organization such as the “League” promoted the wrong view of the program, it allowed for detractors of the
program to go to war against Bilingual Education on the basis of its teaching of Arabic. Therefore, when Arabic was being introduced as a foreign language, an automatic assumption was made regarding its “academic” and “organizational” connection to Bilingual Education.

Indeed, Arabic as a Foreign Language (AFL) has had a “negative” public relations impact on Bilingual/Bicultural Education (BBE) to the degree that many within the broader community still assume that it teaches Arabic along with English, or at the expense of English! Moreover, the connection of AFL to BBE has been problematic, as well. Those who opposed “Bilingual/Bicultural Education” naturally opposed Arabic as an outgrowth of an already suspect program. Therefore, this constellation of attitudes towards any perceptions of AFL/BBE as one unit has had an impact on both programs, which cannot be assumed as positive.

In the intervening time since the eighties however, Arabic has become an established discipline in the foreign language departments of secondary institutions, having been taught at two of three possible high schools in the district, but it remains a language of a minority, whose students are in the majority of Arab background. Although Fordson High School, where the pilot program began, offers four years (eight semesters) of instruction, and two years are offered at Dearborn High School, the language remains an emblem of “foreign” community.

While Arabic is taught as a foreign language in Dearborn Schools, and is offered to any student who wishes to learn it, it is in fact a heritage language being taught to the children of a mainly immigrant ethnic group. More than 95 percent of students involved in the program are of Arab background (Harp, 1999). These students and their parents
have their own set of expectations from the program. For the parents, it is the hope of cultural continuity; for the students, it is, perhaps, placating parents and becoming initiated in their ancestral language. However, in addition to these sets of priorities, the Arab American community, as a corporate body of institutions and people, has a vested interest in the pedagogical process of Arabic. It is in fact a significant emblem of community empowerment that Arabic is now taught at the schools, and it testifies to a political presence in the wider community that the “leadership” circles among Arab Americans wish to expand.

Furthermore, the host society may have an interest in the teaching of Arabic. In fact the observable lack of interest constitutes a “vote of no confidence” in the program or its raison d’être. Traditionally, the wider Dearborn community has been very adamantly a bastion of “English-Only” partisans. That perspective necessitates a negative view of teaching Arabic in the schools, (even though significantly it does not extend to other foreign languages). Add to an already complex set of interests and perceived needs, the schools’ general mandate of educating and socializing students into becoming productive citizens in the future. Also, one finds a professional need on the part of administration to educate at high standards, and to support teachers as much as possible in carrying out their professional tasks. However, that same administrative regime may espouse an ethos and an ideology that may not support the presence of Arabic as a discipline in the schools.

1.1.2 Educational System in Dearborn Public Schools

In this dramatic milieu of multicultural conflict, one locates Arab American students in an educational system whose purpose and mandate is to “Americanise”
them—a system whose structures and content are devised to assimilate that student population into the “American mainstream” while “rejecting” their presence in the community. In this same context we locate the Arabic language with its varied guises: Firstly, it is a cultural icon of a community; secondly, as a symbol of “foreign-ness” to others in the Dearborn community. Thirdly, as a “language barrier” and/or an “obstacle” for children in their process of English acquisition, and, fourthly, as a discipline taught in the schools.

The local school district has a student population of more than 17 thousand students (DPS Student Services, 2000). However, the Arab American student population is estimated at least 50 percent of the whole student body (DPS Compensatory Education Department, 1998). The reason for the lack of solid numbers on this community is because, according to traditional American data collection procedures, Arabs (as other “Middle Easterners”) are categorized as white persons and therefore are not counted separately. Interestingly however, many within that community have rebelled against that label. Some have done so because of issues related to minority/majority power struggles, others because of the identification of the United States as an ally of Israel (and other issues related to Middle Eastern politics), and still others because of a belief in cultural/racial “distinctiveness”.

Whereas the student body is highly multi-ethnic (Arab and non-Arab), a minority of teachers and administrators are of backgrounds similar to the students’. In fact, at least 90 percent of school staffs are white. This ethnic and cultural homogeneity of teachers and other staff members, (reflecting a unitary worldview), clashes in reality with what is on the ground, namely, a student body whose cultures are very different. The outcome of
this state of things is the development of a school culture, whose underpinning is an ideology of a dominant class. It is the basis from which ideas about how things ought to be sprung into action within the classroom. Teachers possess an ideology of variant values, beliefs, and attitudes that necessarily differ from the majority of their students. These values, beliefs and attitudes “essentialise” the students by expecting them to perform and behave to norms not their own.

1.1.3 Arabic Pedagogy in America

A century before American independence, Arabic began at Harvard University its career as a discipline, and later, gradually but steadily, at other institutions of higher learning, according to McCarus (in Rouchdy, 1992), noting that its introduction to academe was theologically motivated. It was considered a cognate language of Hebrew and Aramaic, and, therefore, a tool for examining other Semitic languages—all in the name of biblical studies. McCarus adds that the second phase of the language’s career was philosophically oriented—as a corollary of secular scholarly interest in Semitic studies, and as a result of an increased interest in the world of the East, something that came to be known as Orientalism, or the study of the East. However, this incipient Orientalism held non-white, non-Euro-Anglo culture as inferior to European civilization and cultures (Said, 1979)^1.

During both phases, the dominant if not the only purpose of learning Arabic was to decode classical text, a need which shaped the approach of instruction that relied

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^1 Orientalism is defined as a style of thought based upon ontological and epistemological distinction made between “the Orient” and (most of the time) “the Occident.” Thus a very large mass of writers, among whom are poets, novelists, philosophers, political theorists, economists, and imperial administrators, have accepted the basic distinction between East and West as the starting point for elaborate accounts concerning the Orient, its people, customs, “mind,” destiny, and so on. . . . The phenomenon of Orientalism deals principally, not with a correspondence between Orientalism and Orient, but with the internal consistency of Orientalism and its ideas about the Orient . . despite or beyond any correspondence, or lack thereof, with a “real” Orient (1-3.5)
heavily on the traditional reading-grammar-translation method that taught emerging scholars medieval Arabic. Clearly, such a “classicist” approach was uniquely proper for pre-industrial revolution mentalities regarding education and foreign language learning, which was the monopoly of the well to do.

During both phases, the dominant if not the only purpose of learning Arabic was to decode classical text, a need which shaped the approach of instruction that relied heavily the traditional reading-grammar-translation method that taught emerging scholars medieval Arabic.

Arabic at Colleges and Universities

Reportedly, Arabic was introduced at Harvard University between 1654 and 1672, whereas it was instituted at Yale University in 1700, at Dartmouth and Andover colleges in 1807 and Princeton Theological Seminary in 1822. Gradually but steadily, other institutions of higher learning began adding Arabic to their collection of courses and programs.

The industrial revolution, with its changes that highly effected production of knowledge, shaped the 19th and 20th centuries. The growth in the social sciences and the need for fieldwork, coupled with increasing governmental intelligence and diplomatic imperatives during the last two-thirds of the twentieth-century led to a shift from language-centered instruction to communication-based learning to fit those practical needs. This period saw a development for Arabic across many American campuses and it came about during a time when foreign language study was seen as yet another area of competition and need based on the exigencies of the Cold War. Currently, in light of the September 11, 2001 attack on the American World Trade Center and the subsequent

2 Today there are many universities, colleges and junior colleges that offer Arabic courses.
destruction of the twin towers, already there has been talk among Arabic language teachers of a renaissance of Arabic at the university campus because of an increased interest on the part of students in learning more about the world and mind of the terrorists who succeeded in striking at America’s territory.

Arabic is not readily a foreign language that is taught at the primary or secondary levels in non-Islamic lands. Certainly, for a variety of reasons that will be covered elsewhere, Arabic is not likely to be a favourite foreign language of study in America. However, the growth of the Muslim community in the United States has led to the establishment of religiously oriented primary and secondary schools. Of these institutions almost to the last are privately owned or are community owned and operated. According to Hasan (2000:145) quoting Haddad and Lummis (1987), as early as the late 1980s, there were more than 200 such schools in the United States. Hasan adds: “At least forty of these schools are through the twelfth grade according to the Council of Islamic Schools in North America” (ibid.). Depending on the locale (and, therefore, the state and regional regulations are taken into account), these schools are directed by religious endowments and institutions as private schools, or as foreign-sponsored religious schools such as the Saudi Academy in Arlington, Virginia, or, possibly, as charter schools—that is state chartered academies. The purpose of these schools is essentially either religious inculcation or heritage and cultural maintenance or both. Yet, all of them, in order to operate, are required to teach the general secular curricula as mandated by the state and region along side any other specialised programming they offer (David and Ayoub in Haddad and Smith, 2002:134).
Arabic is offered in such schools for two main reasons: first, for religious purposes, such as reading the Qur’an, the Muslim Scriptures, and, second, to preserve ethnic culture, for those who are of Arab background, (or both for those who are Arab and Muslim). Hasan states: “Islamic education is the same as any other school’s curriculum except that it emphasizes principles based on the Qur’an and the sunna [habits] of the Prophet, including learning Arabic and Islamic practice and prayer” (2000:145).

1.1.4 Arabic as an Immigrant Language

Despite the fact that the United States is a society composed of multiple immigrations and varied ethnic backgrounds of its citizens, nationals and residents, as a society and polity, America seems to reject language variety. According to Dutcher,

“English is the de facto official language [of the United States] and plays an all-pervasive role throughout society. All other languages, variously called ‘minority,’ or ‘ethnic,’ or ‘native,’ (sic.) including the Native American languages, play roles limited to home, church, community or tribe. The exception is Spanish, which is widely used in Florida and the Southwest. Its speakers have developed considerable political power” (1995:12).

Accordingly, two elements can be gleaned from Dutcher’s assessment of the status and role of first, second and/or native or heritage languages of people considered non-mainstream (read, non-white) in American society. First, English is the primary language of the land, despite the lack of any legal support to make it so and, second, the need for political power to support the efficacy of language in the United States. Of the many immigrant languages present in America, only Spanish is becoming more accepted because of the increased numbers of native speakers who are voting American citizens and able to affect the political process in their areas of concentration.
Clearly, Arabic is among the many other native and immigrant languages not powered by big numbers behind it. Arabic-speaking immigrants remain a small minority group whose numbers cannot support their language through any political power as developed in the American Hispanic community:

“Spanish is being maintained in the Hispanic community by speakers who are reluctant to give up their cultural legacy. The available evidence suggests that the majority of Spanish speakers seem to favor the use of Spanish…. The popularity of Spanish in the United States is the direct result of the Hispanic community’s large population…. Although similar attitudes towards culture and language are found among Arab Americans, their numbers are fewer, and they do not live in concentrations (with the exception of Dearborn), which hinders cultural and language maintenance efforts…” (Tayash and Ayoub in Rouchdy, 1992: 178).

What is more, Arabic is thought to be doubly handicapped. Not only does it lack the support of big numbers, but also it is viewed with suspicion and fear by non-speakers because of associations with Islam, Arabs, and the phenomenon of terrorism (especially after the 11 September, 2001 tragedy), leading towards shift and erosion:

“…[T]he factors that contributed to total shift from Arabic to English among early immigrants are still at work and are likely once again to result in the gradual disappearance of Arabic as the language of Arab-American immigrants. This trend could be reversed if Arabic speakers and their English-speaking hosts experienced profound changes in their attitudes and behaviors toward ethnicity. Such changes are not currently evident. Unless minorities control their own cultural boundaries and maintain a degree of compartmentalization in their family, religious, and educational institutions, current language maintenance efforts are likely to end the same way they did among early Arabic-speaking citizens” (Sawaie in Rouchdy, 1992: 95).

While Sawaie seems to be unduly overly pessimistic regarding the maintenance and survival of Arabic among contemporary Arab Americans, in my assessment he is current in identifying the underlying antagonism in American society towards things foreign, particularly Arabic, because of its associations with categories of people and ideas considered to be unwholesome in American life.
1.2 Background of the Problem: Socio-cultural Context

Academically speaking, Arabic can be situated in the American context since the earliest days of American higher education. However, because of its association with historical Islam, the Arab world, and, throughout the latter half of the 20th century, as the other side of the Arab-Israeli conflict (in which Americans favoured Israel), and more recently with radicalised Islam, Arabic has become synonymous with terrorism and violence in American popular culture, lending false credence to a misleading view of Arabs, Arabic culture and language and Islam. As an icon of a prejudiced group, Arabic, clearly, is not a favoured language in American secondary or tertiary education, because it is conceived as belonging to a people “unlike us”, which explains its limited offering. Nonetheless, this prejudice that stems from an historical background also explains American xenophobia of Arabs in society, shedding light on anti-Arab sentiments in the city of Dearborn. These themes are explored below in this section.

1.2.1 Arabic as a “Less Commonly Taught Language”

The expansion of the social sciences and fieldwork research, and an increase in governmental intelligence and diplomatic necessities during the last two-thirds of the twentieth-century led to a shift from language-centred instruction to communication-based learning to fit those functional needs. This revolution in purpose of learning impacted Arabic at the government special language schools, and later, by osmosis, through the sharing of ideas, goals and faculty, at the university level as well. As early as 1948, Hyneman reports that the requirements of United States government foreign language learning concentrated on the colloquial form with less emphasis on grammar. The new phase of practical communication skills ushered in by modern needs created
serious pedagogical issues for the teacher and learner of Arabic alike. The new paradigm necessitated the learning of Modern Standard Arabic (MSA)³, the descendant of the classical variety of Arabic, and the vehicle of formal culture, along with colloquial Arabic, which is dialect- and regional-based, if one is truly to be considered competent in the use of the language. However, this constituted a monumental task given the increased volume of the register to be the base of the syllabus, and due in large measure to the psychosocial attitudes that maintain the "foreign-ness" of Arabic, as well as the nature of the language itself.

1.2.2 Arabic as an Icon of a Prejudiced Group

In a world where ethnic signifiers become liabilities to personal advancement and social progress, Arabic in the United States is a significant ethnic marker that can hinder self-actualisation and collective community growth. This assessment is born from experience. In a society where Orientalist visions of Arabs and Muslims coupled with ideological tendencies (e.g., support of Zionism) and religious commitment (e.g., Christian Fundamentalism) conspire to create a hostile context for Arabs and Muslims in the United States, and Arabic becomes an icon or symbol of prejudiced group, that is to say, its speakers, especially those who have heavy accents in their English usage, become visible targets for discrimination.

1.2.3 American Xenophobia

Prejudice and discrimination in the United States emanate from American xenophobia, which can be expressed in milder forms of bias or in full-blown racial

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³ "Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) is used as the medium of learning because it offers the basic foundation for non-native learners in any further language learning, involving one or more of the colloquials." (Mahdi Alosh, 1989: 1).
hatreds. American xenophobia of Arabs stems of historical tendencies that will be visited at length in the following chapter, but suffice to say that it springs from America’s fount of Orientalist beliefs about the Arab world, and the Muslim world at large. The most apparent culprit in modern American life that can be indicted for fomenting anti-Arab bias and prejudice can be found in the popular culture landscape of America. Here, I mean cultural production media output. These productions and influences in society create the context upon which feeds those currents of Orientalism, religious bigotry and political antagonism, which come together to conspire against things and persons Arab.

Arab immigrants and ethnics, depending on various degrees of their visibility into the mainstream of American life, have experienced the full range of American prejudice and stereotyping. Michalak (n.d.) maintains that the Americans are not ignorant of the Arab world, rather the “…problem is that so much of what is known is wrong” (p.3). Michalak adds:

“The Western image of the Arab is a fascinating one—arguably more interesting than the Arabs themselves. It is not that Arabs are uninteresting. Quite the contrary, the Arab World is a diverse and interesting place, and Arabs have made important contributions to Western civilization. However, when we consider the Western image of the Arab—Ali Baba, Sinbad the Sailor, the thief of Baghdad, the slave merchant, the harem dancer, the curse of the mummy, horsemen in flowing robes attacking the Foreign Legion outpost, and so on—we have to admit that, at least in the case of the Arabs, fiction is stranger than truth.

“This American stereotype of Arabs is important for two reasons. First, the Arab Stereotype interferes with our understanding of a vitally important area of the world and its people…. Second, the Arab stereotype, while it teaches us little about the Arabs, teaches us a good deal about mechanism of prejudice” (ibid.). Therefore, we learn from these stereotypes more about the society that produces them than we do about the people it attempts to essentialise and limit in boundaries of its own manufacture, having nothing to do with objective reality. Nonetheless, this general state
of affairs explains the context of American xenophobia against Arabs in America to the
degree that it permits further anti-Arab prejudice, leading to potential disempowerment
and further marginalisation. This effect will further be discussed in Chapter Three in
more detail (in sections 2 and 3 in particular) and this topic will be visited also in Chapter
Four (especially, in sections 1 and 3).

1.2.4 Limited Appeal of Arabic

For the reasons stated and implied above, Arabic remains to have limited appeal
in the United States. Primarily, mainstream society members’ interest in Arabic is a
usually generated from two motivating principles: First, academic interest in the region or
civilisation (both Arab and Islamic), which ultimately is a response to some political
event that may have raised one’s consciousness of the region and peoples, and triggered
the motivation for further exploration and study. Or, secondly, no less an important
reason is one that has to do with inter-ethnic marriage, where a spouse, usually a female,
wishes to accommodate or enhance a marital relationship with Arabic language fluency.
Although, in the experience of this teacher, the latter is a highly motivated student, but
often because of additional concerns will not reach the desired goals, whereas the first is
a more likely prospect given scholarly discipline and methodical approach. However,
beyond these two main models, Arabic remains a captive of stereotypes and prejudices
that surround it in American society.

1.2.5 Anti-Arab Sentiments: The Significance of Dearborn

In the city of Dearborn, an older and well-established suburb of Michigan’s
largest metropolis, Detroit, there is to be found a large Arab American community whose
origins are traced to the early decades of the twentieth century. However, as a major
settlement for Arabs, it reached that point after the 1970s—the civil war in Lebanon and later the Palestinian *intifada* in the early eighties, and later, still, the Second Gulf War—are all major factors leading to increased Arab arrival to the area. Significantly, the community is currently conservatively “guesstimated” (lacking any results from the 2000 national census) at a third of that city’s population. Dearborn is said to have 87 thousand residents according to the US Census Bureau (1990). According to another more contemporary guesstimate, “Arab Americans comprise about 25-27 percent of Dearborn’s population. About 60 percent of the Arab-American community is Lebanese” (Kaffer, 2000).

Dearborn Arab Americans are composed in the main of Lebanese, Yemeni and Iraqi Arabs (Dika, 2000). There are other Arab groups in the city; however, their numbers are not as large as the previously mentioned communities. The oldest group is the Lebanese, arriving in the city to work in the manufacture installations. They were followed by the Yemeni group, which for the longest time was composed of mainly bachelor men who came to the United States as merchant marines and remained to work in the industrial sector in hopes of generating savings and to return home when the opportunity presented itself. But beginning in the mid-eighties, a shift occurred within the Yemeni community as more immigrants chose to stay and raise families in Dearborn as full time residents. The Iraqis, who arrived in Dearborn in the mid-nineties, came as refugees, seeking safety in the already established Arab settlement. Iraqis in the main migrated from other American cities where they were settled originally to Dearborn in order to be within proximity of other fellow Arabs. The city also has denizens whose origins are from other parts of the Arab world. They are from Palestine, Jordan, Syria,
and Egypt, among other places. However, their numbers are small in comparison to the other groups.

Historically, Dearborn has been recognized as a mainly “white” (i.e. European background) community which staunchly resisted the penetration of non-whites into its midst (Faires in Hathaway, 1989). Some have argued that Arabs were allowed to settle in the area (as Ford Motor Company factory workers) in an effort to prevent less desirable elements coming into the city—namely African Americans and Latin Americans (ibid). One of the late Dearborn Mayor Orville Hubbard’s political maxims, “Keep Dearborn Clean,” was a euphemism taken to mean, “Keep Dearborn white.” Hubbard, who ruled in Dearborn for nearly three decades, represented an already extant ideology of race relations whereby non-whites were segregated from whites. When Arabs began to constitute a visible presence in Dearborn, starting in the mid-eighties, one mayoral candidate, Michael Guido, ran a political campaign whose hallmark was anti-Arab racism. In one of his campaign fliers, he attacked Arabs as a foreign presence in the city, under the headline, “Let’s Talk about the Arab Problem in Dearborn.” Guido won his election and has been mayor of the city for several terms. His original win is directly attributed to his willingness to take on the “Arab problem” in the city. Although, with the steady increase of Arab Americans, Guido has made overtures to the community for political benefit, many are not comfortable with his “about face” change on both sides of the larger community. Consistently however, Dearborn has not welcomed with open arms its Arab American population, but dealt with the community as a transient presence, one that will eventually disappear. Such an attitude represents a psychological dimension of
the dynamics of the relationship between the city (its white population and authorities) and the Arab American population.

Nonetheless, this is the context from which springs a dynamic of conflict between a city establishment and a large segment of its society. City Hall, a Mayor and an elected Board of Education that caters to the larger community, which perceives the increasing Arab presence in the city as a “cultural danger”, represent this establishment best. On the other side of the divide, there is to be found a growing community, less-immigrant in nature and more native, asserting itself culturally, economically and politically. To put it succinctly, there is to be found in Dearborn an ethnic enclave that constitutes a viable subculture in a less than welcoming host society (David and Ayoubi in Haddad, 2002).

1.3 Theoretical Perspectives

This work is highly informed by Edward Said’s theoretical critique of the phenomenon of Orientalism, (which is about narratives that explain more of the narrator than the object of the narratives), something, which the writer believes, is manifest in American society. Moreover, through the prism of W.E.B. DuBois’ understanding of race and prejudice as operant factors in American society, especially his conception of “double consciousness”, is applied to the case of Arab Americans in this research. This double consciousness is understood by the writer through the mediating influence of Frantz Fanon’s understanding of the colonial relationship between the dominating and the dominated, which explains the binarism of “white superiority” and “coloured inferiority”. Thus, placed within the paradigm of “conflict in society”, resulting in social inequity and discrimination, this writer’s understanding of the American context, locally and nationally, stems from applying Said’s Orientalism to DuBois’ “two-ness of being” to
Fanon’s “neurotic orientation” thereby constructing a sense of the present in which he and his subject(s)/object(s) of study exist.

“The most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed,” according to the late South African Black Consciousness activist Stephen Bantu Biko. Thus, in order for oppression to be successfully operationalised in society, a partnership of oppression between the dominated and the dominating must exist; the cornerstone of which must be the acceptance of the oppressed individual’s or group’s place in the social order. Therefore, in order to maintain a system of oppression, among other institutions, the schoolhouse becomes a necessary fulcrum of societal indoctrination and control, having immense implications for a stigmatised group (e.g. minority students) involved in public education.

A locus of power, the schoolhouse, is not only a significant mediator of identity formation (including character-building), but also not only a tool of cultural inculcation, but of culture-making, as well—all of which can promote the cause of oppression, liberation or any combination that might exist, depending on the extant factors in the social context. Consequently, it is not astonishing to learn that the schoolhouse is naturally a contested space whose control is an imperative prerequisite of any long term project of individual and group integration, especially for those who control or wish to control content and format of curriculum and instruction. Therefore, understanding the contested nature of the schoolhouse spotlights the experience of Dearborn Arab Americans (students and parents, who are engaged in identity formation, culture making and surviving as an ethnic group in the context of white power in the city of Dearborn).
In order to understand the placement of Arab American students, parents and community members in their socio-cultural and educational matrix, this writer found it necessary to draw on the *liberatory* educational thought of critical pedagogues such as Paulo Freire, Henry Giroux and Peter McLaren in order to comprehend and explain a relationship of power and domination between the group under study and the larger society. Giroux believes in a *critical pedagogy*:

“…in which teaching and learning are committed to expanding rather than restricting the opportunities for students and others to be social, political, and economic agents. As agents, students and others need to learn how to take risks, to understand how power works differently as both a productive and dominating force, to be able to ‘read’ the worlds from a variety of perspectives, and to be willing to think beyond the commonsense assumptions that govern everyday existence” (1993)

Also, Giroux suggests that any Critical Pedagogy theorising must take into account the world of the affect of the student:

“Engaging education as a productive and performative force suggests taking seriously those maps of meaning, affective investments, and sedimented desires that enable students to connect their own lives and everyday experiences to what they learn. Pedagogy in this sense becomes more than mere transfer of received knowledge, an inscription of a unified and static identity, or a rigid methodology; it presupposes that students are moved by their passions and motivated, in part, by the affective investments they bring to the learning process” (2000).

Freire does not believe in a de-politicised educational model; rather he understands the education process as fundamentally a politicising practice. Offering an alternative way to viewing the depoliticising models of American education today, Freire suggests that,

“[t]he pedagogy of the oppressed, as a humanist and libertarian pedagogy, has two distinct stages. In the first, the oppressed unveil the world of oppression and through praxis commit themselves to its transformation. In the second stage, in which the reality of oppression has already been transformed, this pedagogy ceases to belong to the oppressed and becomes a pedagogy of all people in the process of permanent liberation. In both stages, it is always through action in depth that the culture of domination is culturally confronted. In the first stage of this confrontation occurs through the change in the way the oppressed perceive
Freire’s *emancipatory* pedagogy is inherently culturally and educationally critical of the socio-cultural and political environment in which it exits. Drawing on this heritage, Giroux defines critical pedagogy as “…as an attempt to alter experience in the interest of expanding the possibilities for human agency and social justice,” suggesting that traditional teacher-centred educational environments have not problematised the learning and teaching process that “…has shaped [the students’] perceptions of power, learning and identity” (1993). Giroux (ibid) believes that teaching is not an unproblematic practice that utilizes a neutral method of knowledge transmission, and that teachers are disinterested and unbiased figures; rather, teaching and teachers are contextualised in socio-cultural and political setting, where they play an active and major role in either supporting the standing order or in potentially de-centring authority and power.

1.3.1 Conceptual Framework

This research effort draws its conceptual framework from synthesising the worldviews of Edward Said, as set down in the critique of Orientalism, the race critique of W.E.B. DuBois as applied to minority *double consciousness*, the critical pedagogy of Henry Giroux and Peter McLaren and the liberatory educational thought of Paulo Freire. The following section describes the modalities of this framework that inform the methodology of this research.
Critical Pedagogy Model

Peter McLaren (1995) in his work, *Critical Pedagogy and Predatory Culture* offers a view of critical pedagogy, stating that,

“...pedagogies should constitute a form of social and cultural criticism; that all knowledge is fundamentally mediated by linguistic relations...; that social facts can never be isolated from the domain of values...; that language is central to the formation of subjectivity...; that certain groups in any society are unnecessarily and often unjustly privileged over others...; that oppression has many faces...; that mainstream research practices are generally and unwittingly implicated in the reproduction of systems of class, race, and gender oppression” (230-1).

In this he articulates a position on criticism of the American educational system. What is more, he travels beyond the accepted multicultural, pluralist model of educational criticism extant in American academic milieu and somewhat sanctioned by the system that it seeks to ameliorate.

Henry Giroux (1999), in like fashion, defines critical pedagogy as,

“...a cultural practice that must be accountable ethically and politically for the stories it produces, the claims it makes on social memories, and the images of the future it deems legitimate. As both an object of critique and a method of cultural production, it refuses to hide behind claims of objectivity, and works effortlessly to link theory and practice to enabling the possibilities for human agency in a world of diminishing returns” (1999).

In turn, Giroux advocates a political education of students in order that they may learn the skills to cultivate capacities for personal judgment, and pedagogy of decentred power in the classroom. From this position emanates a theory of activism that resorts to challenging the status quo in the classroom, the school system and social structures through critical inquiry that is based on democratic ideals and liberty of choice.

This tradition of American “critical pedagogy” is not new. W.E.B. DuBois, an African American social critic and philosopher of the early twentieth century, argued for
a liberatory potential in pedagogy. For DuBois, a philosopher of liberty and a “critical pedagogue”, education represented to him his people’s only potential for “conscientisation” towards freedom (Hufford, 1999). In this, DuBois foreshadows Freirean liberatory pedagogy of later in the century.

Paulo Freire holds in his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) that education of the masses is the road to permanent freedom, but must go through two stages. First, the masses must be conscientised regarding their oppression, which must be followed by empowerment; and, second, a permanent process of liberating cultural action that builds on the first stage. Freirean Pedagogy admits to a highly inductive form of research that is viewed as a form of social action. The Freirean model of thematic and participatory research challenges the academic research approach of objectivity and neutrality. That is to say, it denies the existence of objectivity, claiming that that which is studied is objectified. The better approach is to re-structure the subject-object relationship of researcher and “focus of study” to a subject-subject relationship whereby the process is participatory to both sides and the goal of which is to affect liberatory change.

*Orientalism and Essentialism*

Edward Said’s work *Orientalism* (1979) provides a theoretical model for understanding the relationship between an oppressor and the oppressed. Certainly, he frames his thinking in terms of a specific relationship: the Euro-American west and the Arabo-Muslim world. Within the purview of this planned study, the work of Said is highly relevant given that the Arab American community is in a state of “in-betweeness” sandwiched on one side by a dominant, western host society and on the other a background of “Arab-ness” and Islam. Indeed, Said, himself an Arab American, through
utilisation of his work, can illuminate the subject-object relationship of western perception of the east and its cultures.

Essentialism is the latent form of this Orientalism in which the Arab east is reduced to a prototypical model that is expected to conform to an ideologically-driven sense of authority of “making meaning” of what the Arab is all about. This essentialist approach, so evident in the ways the west approaches the east, and how Americans approach Arabs and their Arab American compatriots, becomes a theoretical background for understanding the relationship of Arab Americans in Dearborn to their host society, and provides for the context of this study. Thus, the effects of the homogeneity of school staffs, their essentialist perceptions of the “other” and their ideologies can be interpreted through this framework.

Multicultural Model

According to Nieto (1992: 207-24), multiculturalism in education is characterised by seven features. Multicultural education is:

- Antiracist
- Basic
- Important for all students
- Pervasive
- For social justice
- A Process
- Critical pedagogy

The purpose of multicultural education is to combat discrimination in general, thus a multicultural education is expected to bring “…both teachers and students to take a long, hard look at everything as it was and is, which also means considering the effects and interconnections among events, people, and things” (op cit., 209). In this sense, multiculturalism must foster a clear sense of truth in examination of the current
backgrounds of all students, systems and societies, presenting and commenting on all aspects of prejudice and discrimination. Multiculturalism is also basic education because it has to be intimately connected to the core curriculum of studies. Its absence means the presence of monocultural education, which is “…reflective of only one reality and biased toward the dominant group” (op cit., 211).

Nieto goes on to add:

“Monocultural education is the order of the day in most of our [American] schools. What students learn represents only a fraction of what is available knowledge. Those who decide what is most important generally reflect the dominant view and make choices that are of necessity influenced by their own background, education, and experiences. Because the viewpoint of so many is left out, monocultural education is at best a partial education. It deprives all students of the diversity that is part of our world” (ibid.).

As such, it is possible to recognise that multicultural education is not a luxury but a necessity in a polyglot and multi-ethnic society because its absence necessarily means the presence of prejudice and discrimination in all sectors of life, especially education, the engine of social, political and cultural reproduction.

Another feature of good multicultural education is its presence in all aspects of education—the curriculum, the school setting and the tone of administration:

“A true multicultural approach to education is pervasive. It permeates the physical environment in the classroom, the curriculum, and the relationships among teachers and students and community. It can be seen in every lesson plan, curriculum guide, unit, bulletin board, and letter that is sent home; it can be seen in the process by which books and audiovisual aids are acquired for the library, the games played during recess, and the lunch that is served. Seen in this way, multicultural education is a philosophy, a way of looking at the world, not simply a program or a class or a teacher…” (op cit., 215).

Nieto (p. 216) suggests that the implication of multiculturalism as a philosophy in the schools is varied but proposes that minority groups will be more empowered as school personnel and policies begin to reflect the diversity of the student body and the
community it serves. Even more, such a school is likely to offer students in the
lunchroom foods that are of their backgrounds, organise sport games from other parts of
the world, and “[c]hildren would not be punished for speaking their native language; on
the contrary, they would be encouraged to do so and to teach their classmates and
teachers as well” (ibid.).

In short, multiculturalism is about social justice. Multicultural education is also
about social justice in the school setting, and the rest of the world. As a philosophy,
multicultural education seeks to instil in students a sense of practicing learning in the
service of justice for all. It is an empowering education, giving students a sense of their
individual and collective political, social and economic powers, especially for those who
are from disenfranchised and marginalised groups. Nieto observes:

“The connection of multicultural education with students’ future rights and
responsibilities in a democracy is unmistakable. However, many young people do
not learn about these responsibilities, about the challenges of democracy, or about
the important role of citizens in ensuring and maintaining the privileges of
democracy. …This is precisely where multicultural education can have a great
impact. Not only should classrooms allow discussions that focus on social justice,
but they should in fact welcome them…” (op. cit.: 218).

Largely, this aspect of education is ignored in most schools, especially in educational
institutions where there are members of disenfranchised minority groups, who are
expected to toe the line of the standing political order and not to question it. However,
this element of multicultural education is in a real sense the most dangerous to any
monocultural education tendencies because it teaches students to verbalise dissent in a
rational and orderly fashion, something that does not readily offer an excuse for the
political suppression, manipulation or co-optation.

Nieto points out that multicultural education is processual in its nature:
“First, it is ongoing and dynamic. No one ever stops becoming a multicultural person, and knowledge is never complete. Thus, there is no established ‘canon.’ (Sic.) Second, it is a process because it involves relationships among people…. (And) [t]hird, and most important, multicultural education is a process because it focuses on such intangibles as teachers’ expectations, learning environments, students’ learning styles, and other cultural variables that are absolutely essential for schools to understand to be successful; with all of their students” (p. 218).

In other words, the significance of this feature of multicultural education lies in its emphasis on interaction between all the stakeholders in the school community, and placing high value on the importance of exchanges between students and teachers, particularly, especially in mentoring and guiding relationships, which often may exceed in importance any content-based learning. Moreover, this characteristic of multicultural education features the importance of individualised and flexible learning and teaching in order to better serve the students and the greater community. Significantly, this approach implies a need to actively adjust one’s views of the objective reality of people, places and situations where a multiculturalist may find one’s self. This means that such an educator will be willing to unlearn “….conventional wisdom as well as dismantling the policies and practices that disadvantage some students” (ibid.).

While critical pedagogy is sometimes seen as its own stand-alone approach to education, and, perhaps, an answer to multiculturalism, Nieto suggests that the latter must have its own critical pedagogy, too:

“It is important to understand that as teachers, all the decisions we make, no matter how neutral they may seem, may impact in unconscious but fundamental ways on the lives and experiences of our students. This is true of the curriculum, books and other materials we provide for our students. State and local guidelines and mandates limit what particular schools and teachers choose to teach, and this too is a political decision. What is excluded is often as telling as what is included. Because most literature taught at the high school level, for instance, is heavily male and Eurocentric, the roles of women, people of color, and those who write in other languages are thus diminished, unintentionally or not” (p.219).
The core then of critical pedagogy is the recognition that education and educational decisions are fundamentally political resolutions to community needs. The absence of a variety of political voices in the life of the mainstream necessitates their absences in the educational arena, which reproduces and reinforces the context of mono-culturalism.

Thus, critical pedagogy, according to Nieto, is about knowledge production, reflection and action, where ideals are kept and their contexts are critically examined, leading to the ‘exploding of myths’ based on the experiences, learning and knowledge that students bring to the educational process and not imposed from the outside (ibid.). The aim behind critical pedagogy is to free students to think about their situations in context of the world around them:

“Critical pedagogy is based on the experiences and viewpoints of students rather than on an imposed culture. It is therefore multicultural as well because the most successful education is that which begins with the learner. Students themselves are the foundation of the curriculum. Nevertheless, a liberating education takes students beyond their own limited experiences, no matter what their background” (ibid.).

Therefore, critical pedagogy is about teaching students to be critical of the world around them, and to equip them with the tools to be able to do so properly. However, the only possible way to that end is through the adoption of a similar approach by the pedagogues themselves as suggested by McLaren above in this chapter. Thus, critical pedagogy is a liberatory pedagogy methodology for the teachers and a thinking process for students.

Analysis in this research effort, therefore, will be guided by the precepts of multicultural education as expounded upon above. First and foremost, the writer considers himself a critical pedagogue who has the responsibility to teach students to understand the world around them critically based on understanding their backgrounds, and empowering them to think about their contexts. Moreover, as a critical educator, he
deems it his responsibility also to engage in critical assessment of his practice and the context in which it is reviewed, and to look at the problems and the opportunities that obscure, obstruct or enhance service delivery. As a critical teacher, it is necessary to offer a clear analysis of the context and its problems, and, via collaborative efforts, offer evaluations and solutions for extant issues and problems.

Conflict as Basis for Interaction

My theoretical perspective is eclectic. It is informed by the anti-Orientalist critique that Said offers. Also, the liberatory perspectives espoused by Freire inform my theoretical understanding. Emanating from a critical pedagogical background as presented by Giroux and McLaren, believing in the role of the teacher as guide and agent of change, the writer approaches the research with an understanding that the context of the problem under study is multicultural and must be perceived and interacted with in the sense proposed by Nieto.

Appreciating the complexity of life in a society characterised by diversity, one must come to understand that the salient truth in such a place is the multiplicity of interests, which often may be at odds. This realisation leads one to understand that conflict among the various groups becomes a natural aspect of the pluralism of the social order. Therefore, any understanding of the overall issues of such a society must take into account the nature, role and function of conflict—as an agent of change, in the positive sense, and, potentially, as a factor in negative social interactions and as a result outcomes of diverging interests.

Thus, in the writer’s view, conflict as the basis of social interaction provides a context for the study of Arabic learning and teaching in the locality of Dearborn. Through
the prism of conflict, we may come to understand the background, situation and reasons for the extant socio-political structures that impact upon the educational system in the city of Dearborn, and affects the different interests and needs of all stakeholders in the greater community, but, particularly, the Arab American community, but especially the student body, and among them learners of Arabic as a foreign language.

1.3.2 Specific Problem

Research Question

Arabic is a new discipline in the traditional American public high school context. My study would be the first of its kind, and I believe it would be an innovation in that sense. There is only one research study that was conducted on Arabic in Dearborn Schools (Kenny in Rouchdy, 1992) when the program was young in the late 80s, culminating in a chapter in one book, *The Arabic Language in America*. Since then, there has been nothing surveyed on the subject in Dearborn. As a school discipline, it has grown phenomenally since its beginnings in the middle of 1980s. The reason behind this growth is directly attributable to the growth in numbers of the Arab American community, and the incipient political strength of that group. Even though it is a phenomenon highly worthy of study, Arabic in the schools has not found any scholarly advocate to explore its state, the needs of its students, their community and its teachers. In order to do so, a political will is needed to address Arabic as a subject of study at the institutional level—a will that is lacking given a general indifference to its assumed aims.

In terms of the community itself, the need for “research-for-improved-practice” is not a concept that has currency. Moreover, the general environment in which Arabic is to be found, while conducive to scholarly and practitioner research, other issues have
dominated—particularly, matters related to English language acquisition. In addition, the program has not attracted any research academic interest on the part of the local universities where Arabic tertiary programmes are flourishing. Therefore, if there is to be a genuine research effort to document the history of the program, its current state, significance and future potential, it must originate from within the structures of the school district or with researchers intimately aware of its nuances and are interested in its success.

In order to investigate this issue, I propose to address the social and political context of schooling in Dearborn. That effort entails some detailed inquiry into the life and organizational structure of the Arab American community in Dearborn, its history and the history of the greater community in the United States. Also, I plan to research the background that is related to matters of curriculum and instruction as set policies on the part of the school district. Additionally, I will investigate school relationships within and without the school setting and how they inform or impact Arabic pedagogy, whether in educational or political terms. I plan to investigate the relationship between the issue of bilingual/bicultural education (with its emphasis on English acquisition) and the teaching and learning of Arabic. Also, related to the matter of political context is the issue of teacher recruitment, competence and “credentialisation” and certification as professional instructors. This matter, having immediate bearing on the quality of instruction, will be addressed in terms of state requirements and local district practices.

These are therefore the four areas of focus through which I will study the issue of Arabic in the schools—namely, a historical perspective on the community, internal structures and policies of the district, relationship to bilingual education and the legal
requirements for practicing teachers. My priority is to describe the program, its relationship to other school structures and policies, in relationship to the greater community that constitutes its context. In doing so, I will “filter” my understanding of the program through the four areas already established.

Essentially, my research questions set can be put this way:

- To what extent the Arabic language program in Dearborn Schools meets the requirements (i.e., needs and expectations) of Arab American heritage learners that they serve?
- By extension, to what degree the same program supports the language/cultural maintenance efforts (if they exist), of parents and other community members?
- Does this program, being governed by the ethos and policies of the school district (those that are enunciated or sub textual), take into consideration the needs of these heritage learners and their community?
- Does the presently extant pedagogical philosophy to which the school system subscribes run counterpoise to the needs of students or parental efforts at cultural maintenance?
- How does the program fit into the overall culture of the school district?

Therefore, the focus question of my research is to learn to what extent the Arabic language program in Dearborn Schools meets the needs and expectations of Arab American heritage learners and their community (parents and other stakeholders). The secondary issues in this research process are related to exploring the school district’s policies and structures as they relate to AFL education, that is, whether they serve as help or hindrance, and how these issues impact Arabic pedagogy in the district. The other salient matter is Bilingual education in the district because of its reputation as a program which teaches Arabic (even though it is not an objective assessment), and because of the program’s intimate connection to the Arab American community, given that more than 90 percent of its students are of Arab background, learning English. The last subsidiary
issue of concern here is the legal requirements of becoming an Arabic language teacher in
the context of state certification of teachers.

Specific Questions

Clearly, the Dearborn experience is not only a unique undertaking in that sense
but is also a pioneering project with pitfalls and problems. However, the following
questions pose themselves:

• Whither this project?
• What is its purpose?
• What is the pedagogical framework with in which it is conducted?
• What are its successes, aside from its continued longevity, if any?
• What do teachers expect from their students, their students’ parents and
community, and their school settings?
• Are teachers adequately prepared to give instruction in this discipline and/or
do they receive adequate in-servicing support and continued professional
education?

These are essential questions that frame the problem. But, in terms of the students, we
may ask:

• Given that any Arabic skills the students have are shaped and coloured by the
social setting of Dearborn, what are their learning needs?
• Why do students learn Arabic?
• Is it because they want to continue their connections to their ancestral culture
or is it because they want to be different in their new setting?
• What does Arabic mean to them, their parents, their sub-community, the
community of educators and the wider community?

These are some of the major issues to be investigated in this study.
Hypotheses

Building on the educational, sociological and humanities based theoretical constructs and modalities in the review above, some hypotheses are proposed to test them in relationship to the Arabic language education of Arab American students in Dearborn schools.

Hypothesis 1:

The greater the degree of assimilation and integration among Arab Americans in the mainstream of Dearborn society, the less Arab American students, parents and other community stakeholders will perceive the role and importance of the Arabic language and its maintenance effort in comparison to those who are assimilated or integrated at lower levels. In other words, the more integrated will value Arabic less than the less assimilated.

Hypothesis 2:

Despite the degree(s) of assimilation/integration, Arab Americans (parents, students, and community stakeholders) will express and maintain a high level of support for Arabic language maintenance efforts in all forms, including the teaching/learning of Arabic in schools. Put differently, regardless of assimilation status, Arab Americans highly value the learning and teaching of Arabic.

Hypothesis 3:

Because of the high profile of Arab Americans in Dearborn, Arab Americans will value Arabic language study and other cultural maintenance efforts in their community because the language and the maintenance process symbolically represent their resistance to assimilation into extinction as a separate cultural group. In other words, regardless of how they feel about Arabic, Arab Americans will support maintenance efforts in order to keep important ethnic marker vis-à-vis non-Arabs in the city.

Hypothesis 4:

Within the city of Dearborn, Arab Americans feel uneasy in their relationship with non-Arabs, and, conversely, non-Arabs are uneasy about Arab American presence in the city, leading to strained relationships in the schools, expressed in many aspects, including curriculum, administration and other school related matters.
I propose that of these stated hypotheses, the research study is likely to produce findings that are a mixture of the issues presented above. Of the four hypotheses, I would predict, based on personal observation and informed interaction, the last three suppositions are the likely reflection of objective reality. However, I would not be surprised to find a more nuanced topography to emerge, reflecting the reality on the ground. This issue will be addressed later when presenting the outcomes and findings of the research throughout Chapters Six and Seven, but particularly in section 2 of Chapter Seven. However, now, I will focus on presenting a context for Arabic in the Dearborn schools.

Arabic in Dearborn Schools is problematic both a heritage and a foreign language. In either instance it is treated as a foreign language that is foreign to the whole context of schools. Being the native or background language of more than fifty percent of the whole student population, it impacts the school district in many ways. For one thing, it makes Dearborn Schools the largest school district in the state with the biggest number of Limited English Proficient (LEP) students, which necessitates special expenditures (Ayouby, 1999; 2000). From the perspective of the schools, that is, the official stance as well as the unspoken prejudices of staff members, Arabic is problematic on multiple levels. First, it is language that interferes in the acquisition of English; secondly, it is the tongue of a minority group whose background is suspect because of the overall mindset of the greater community towards Arabs; and thirdly, any language-maintenance efforts on the part of Arabic-speakers are perceived as a move in the wrong direction—that is, away from “Americanisation”.
In order to explain this mindset, it is telling to recount the content of a message that appears regularly on the bumpers of many cars in the region, “Welcome to America! Now Speak English!” At face value, the maxim welcomes the foreigner to this new land, but admonishes him or her to speak English, requiring the person to lose the old self for a new one based on the language and culture of America. One can easily substitute the word English with “white.” “Speak White!” becomes the subtext with which a foreigner is to contend with, especially if he or she is not of white background, or is not perceived to be white or still does not perceive himself or herself as white. This is the mentality that suggests itself as the subtext for Arabic in Dearborn or any foreign language in the United States. The context is one of nativism versus ethnic self-assertion or liberation.

The problem to be researched is one related to needs and interests. As of yet, Arabic as a program does not have a pedagogical direction other than simply “to teach it.” This is to say that the program has been run by the whims of the teacher or teachers who taught the discipline. Each teacher who took on the task saw fit to instruct in accordance with his or her own pedagogical theory and/or preferences without any regard to a structured approach. This was the case until 1998 when I took the position of teacher and transformed the program by adopting a structured approach. However, since I left, the program, the curriculum structure that I established has allowed it to function uniformly across the district but without any strategy or goals. An outcome of this state of affairs is a set of questions that need to be addressed in order to map out the contours of the program’s current needs and potential future. Whereas other languages have wide ranging research pedagogy in support of their teaching and learning at the elementary and secondary levels, Arabic lacks that scholarly tradition in the American context.
1.4 **Research Methodology**

As a proponent of critical pedagogy and as a critical teacher and professional, the writer is obliged to adopt a methodology that is in harmony with the basics of his theoretical grounding, which, as Nieto described earlier, “… is about knowledge production, reflection and action, where ideals are kept and their contexts are critically examined” (ibid.). Thus, the aim behind critical pedagogy is not only to free students to think about their situations in context of the world but also to free critical pedagogues to assess the environment around them. Therefore, critical pedagogy is not only about students and teachers being critical of the world in order to achieve understanding but also to affect positive change. To do so, the best possible way, in the opinion of this writer, is to adopt a liberatory pedagogy that is conducive to a participative and emancipatory research methodology that befits teachers engaged in seeking social and professional change.

Quantitative research approach can be defined as the use of statistical constructs to make sense of the world: “the process of collecting data in a systematic way and making decisions based on these data,” according to Runyon et al (2000: 3). Essentially, statistics is the manipulation of numbers to represent some characteristic of data (Frey et al., 1991: 253), which, as a stand-alone research strategy, may not be appropriate for this research effort. However, qualitative methodology in research, according to Stafford (n.d.: 35), is based on people observation or involving interaction with people. According to Kellehear, a qualitative research effort is about developing “…categories from the data which might reflect the culture and its people” (1993: 33). Qualitative methods can be defined as listening to people: “A distinctive feature of qualitative work is its reliance on
the words and voices of the people being studied” (Judd et al, 1991: 300). Qualitative methods revolve around fieldwork and participant observation to varying degrees, where the researcher is immersed in the lives of the people under study (ibid.).

Thus similarly, a post-structuralist approach in research is defined as an extension of the basic premise of hearing the voices of others. According to Kellehear, a post-structuralist approach looks “…for omissions and oppositional symbols which may reveal one or several hidden agendas. …The idea…is to uncover the ‘rules’ or ‘mentality’ behind a certain set of texts, images, object-relations or behaviours” (1993: 33-34). In that tradition, the post-structuralist method makes use of the voices within. Those who have experience are empowered to share their experience in a myriad of ways—which may be in the form of consciousness raising or other feminist tools of personal knowledge and empowerment. (Please, refer to Chapter Two, Section 2.1 for added discussion).

1.4.1 Practitioner Qualitative Research Method

Practitioner Research Model

In order to pursue research on Arab Americans and under the rubric of Arab American studies and because of the nature of this area of study, my approach to research would mix and match methodologies. However, my basic tools of choice would favour qualitative methods over all others. Qualitative research generally aims to answer research questions that are rather different from those addressed by quantitative research. Qualitative research is essentially “exploratory,” setting out to describe, understand, and explain a particular phenomenon (Gantley et al., 1999:7).
Anderson et al. (1994) define qualitative practitioner research as “…taking place in educational settings that reflects a society characterized by conflicting values and unequal distribution of resources and power” (p.3) According to Anderson et al, the hallmark of practitioner research is a critical spirit, adding, “…if practitioner research is not done with a critical spirit, it runs the risk of legitimating what maybe—from the perspective of equity considerations—unacceptable social arrangements” (p.26). They also distinguish between qualitative research and qualitative practitioner research, suggesting:

“Although the standards for qualitative inquiry are different than those used by quantitative researchers, they may not be appropriate for practitioner researchers. This is partly because qualitative researchers tend to be outsiders studying settings in which they are not true participants; practitioner researchers are insiders studying their own setting” (p. 27).

Anderson et al name five criteria for the validity of practitioner research: 1-Democratic validity; 2-Outcome validity; 3-Process validity; 4-Catalytic validity; and, 5-Dialogic validity.

Practitioner action research not only often develops the skills and confidence needed to identify and address one's own problems, but can also set into motion a counter-hegemony of critical analysis that can make new topics and questions approachable for the first time. Effective practitioner research finds solutions for a local problem through the inclusive incorporation of the positions of stakeholders. In that way, it achieves a democratic validity. The outcome validity criterion is met when the research frames the problem(s) in a more “complex way” (i.e., against a backdrop of other issues) and sets the stage for additional questions about the nature of things, leading to a spiral of activity. It also provides a way of working which links theory and practice into the one
whole: ideas-in-action. This activity involves others and may lead to change, thus, again, confirming the democratic criterion.

The process criterion is achieved through various data collection strategies including participant observation, field notes, interviews, and surveys. A variety of tools are used to attain dependable data, to guard against over-simplification of a problem, and to ensure the inclusion of multiple voices and sources in the data gathering process.

The catalytic validity criterion is met when the research process enables the participants (researcher and informants), the chance to keep the issues under focus. This entails a commitment to a continual appraisal of the direction of the research process. The dialogic criterion is accomplished through a peer review process by engaging a colleague or a “critical friend” in a reflective discussion of one’s findings, conclusions, and tentative analyses. The colleague asks questions about the analyst’s values, conjectures, and decisions, hence reinforcing the collaborative nature of this research.

*Case Studies Approach*

Case study research is a common qualitative research method. Although there are numerous definitions, Yin (1994) defines the scope of a case study as follows:

"A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (Yin 1994: 13).

Case study research can be interpretational, structural, and reflective (Gall et al.1996). The Case study research method will be visited at length in the following chapter of this dissertation (see Section 2.1.2, Chapter Two).
Informant Participation Description

Primarily, students involved in learning Arabic in Dearborn Schools will be the pool from which to seek informant participation. Originally, it was planned to survey and interview students from both Fordson and Dearborn high schools; however, because of Dearborn High School’s principal’s intransigence regarding his refusal to allow his students to be surveyed or interviewed, it was decided to focus on Fordson High School’s students. Nonetheless, focus groups of students from Fordson will be formed to gauge their opinion of their language training and other issues at Fordson.

Additionally, parents of Fordson students as well as other interested community stakeholders will be surveyed for this study by means of interviews and focus groups. Moreover, teachers, of Arabic and other subjects, will be interviewed, seeking out their input and views regarding the teaching and learning of Arabic in the schools, but particularly, Fordson, since it has become the focus of the study given that Principal Louis Guido of Dearborn High School refused permission in academic year 2000-2001. (Although Principal Paul Smith, a supporter of research, permitted the research process at Fordson in the 2000-2001 school year, and despite the fact that Principal Guido was replaced the following year, and there was a chance to survey the Dearborn High School students, tension with the interim principal (Judith Coebly) erupted, delaying the project. Thus, it was decided to forego research in that school because the time difference will affect an imbalance in the research sampling).
1.4.2 Data Generation and Collection

*Data Generation*

Data will be generated through a combination of interviews, focus groups, survey questionnaires, and consultation of district archival material. Data will be collected in accordance with procedures and processes described below. (See Sections 2.2 and 2.3 in Chapter Two for a full discussion of implementation).

The aim is to seek understanding of the relationship between each constituent group and the AFL program. Cultural factors and other dynamics will be taken into consideration for the purpose of data generation for this study. In addition, the researcher will make use of personal accounts and observations.

Personal observations are one of the most common approaches for collecting data in qualitative inquiry (Morse and Field, 1995) as they create the ability to reveal otherwise unavailable data. Within the paradigm of practitioner research, there is validity to bring one’s own experience and personal knowledge to the research agenda. In this vein, I will utilize my own notes, memoranda, reports and accounts of personal interactions with staffs as raw data for analysis and by relying on Mason’s system of “noticings”, an approach that rewards personal development and professional awareness (1992). (See Section 2.2.1 for elaboration).

Interviews and focus groups will complete the data gathering techniques. Interviews will take place in one-on-one format along with in-focus group settings. The interviews will be semi-structured in nature, utilizing some standardized questions in an attempt to have participants relate their experiences and express their own views. Informants will be selected primarily from the student body engaged in AFL study. All
teachers who are teaching Arabic will be interviewed. Additionally, an appropriate number of students will be interviewed in like fashion to obtain their views. Moreover, student focus groups will be conducted to generate data regarding what students consider as the importance of the Arabic program, and what other issues they deem to be important. (See Section 2.2.1, Parts A and B of Chapter Two for discussion of implementation).

In addition, a survey questionnaire will be administered at two high schools to determine a general profile of the student population engaged in learning Arabic. A similar type questionnaire will be constructed for use with parents of program students. Parents as research informants will be selected using a combination of convenience samples, and snowball samples (See Chapter Two, Section 2.2.1, Part C).

Other data will include archival material available at the district, ranging from technical reports, grant proposal narratives, and detailed memoranda to official communications, press releases, letters, and other non-classified publications. Additionally, established research on the Arab American community in the form of books and journal articles as well as unpublished monographs will be utilized. Other works illuminating the progress of this project will be consulted regardless of source (See Chapter Two, Section 2.2.1 Part D).

Data Collection

A general survey questionnaire will be given to all students involved in the AFL program. It is expected that approximately 200-250 pupils will participate. The process will begin in September 2000 when students return to the classroom, and by middle of the semester of the 2000-01 academic year, a statistical profile will be generated. In addition,
two focus groups of students (not exceeding 10 per group) will be conducted during the same period. These students will be selected from the 12th grade level because they would have had three years of Arabic tuition by then and because their level of maturity will enrich the research process.

A focus group of parents will be conducted and selected parents from the focus group may be interviewed at a later time if information from the focus group warrants further in depth look at some issues.

In line with this approach, all Arabic language teachers, administrators or other support staff members, as well as leading members of the Arab American community, will be identified and selected for interviews to obtain data regarding their views of the Arabic program, their assessment of AFL program, and their expectations of the school system and program.

Data Analysis and Reduction

The basic unit of data analysis to be utilized here is the “mentions” in discourses of students, teachers, parents, and community members and other school personnel. Mentions are the common themes emerging as subjects elaborate on issues relating to their environments and estimation of things. Data will be analysed using interpretational, structural, and reflective perspectives. This process is to be conducted in a descriptive setting that draws heavily on the historical context of the problem. (Please, refer to in-depth discussion in Section 2.4 in Chapter Two, dealing with implementation and interpretation).
1.4.3 Research Sources

In regards to the print sources, the writer’s initial choices served only as a springboard into further research on the community. What is more, his choice in using the sources mentioned below has to do with the fact that, as scholarly works, they are multi-disciplinary and inter-disciplinary in nature. Naff’s work (*Becoming American: The Arab American Experience*, 1985) is essentially social history of Arab Americans. Its method derives from classical historical research (Ary et al. 1990: 453-55), (combining archival material with oral history—a method derived from anthropology and ethnomethodology). Additionally, Abraham’s and Shryock’s edited book (*Arab Detroit: from margin to mainstream*, 2000) also combines many essays, running the gamut from solid demographic (statistical) work to essays characterized by their historical method, to some employing sociological interpretations along with ethnographic studies.

Equally, the volume edited by Suleiman (*Arabs in America: Building a New Future*, 1999) includes many chapters that offer similar analyses like Abraham and Shryock’s work on the Arab American condition. Thus, overall, the research value and efficacy of the writer’s choices here lie in the fact that—given the nature of a potential study that he might do—these sources offer a foregrounding of the research effort. No research can be conducted without providing a context for it. Relying on printed sources for establishing a context, especially in regards to recreating a historical niche for the object of study, is a classical way of beginning a research. Indeed, such a process would be part and parcel of doing a comprehensive literature review. Ethically speaking, there is nothing to warrant any impediments to the full application of the use of such research tools—as long as their use is confined to proper utilization as delimited by means of referencing and crediting original sources.
No doubt the use of newspapers, though less scholarly in nature, is indeed a great resource to depict the condition under study or its context in the proper conduct of one’s research. Hence, the use of newspapers as sources affords the researcher a valuable tool to augment the validity of the research project through establishing corroborative material to support any hypotheses, or to support one’s assumptions, conclusions, evidence and other data through material readily available in the form of journalistic articles and features—which in essence represent social archival material. The ethical use of newspapers, as books or other print material, must be subject to proper crediting of authorship and referencing of sources.

**Material Culture Sources**

The use of material culture as sources in this research study would have to do with the setting of the subjects (rather, the actors) whose lives are/would be under study. To illustrate the best use of material culture in the writer’s potential work would be focusing on the city in which the subject Arab American population resides, its culture—politics, economics and social organization—and its institutions. Thus, the latter moves us into the area of examining the Dearborn Public Schools, an institution that would be of great concern when considering the condition of Arab American youth. In general, the use of material culture in this instance will depend highly on organizing a description of life and society on the level of the city and the institution of schools. Thus, in all, use of material culture as a tool here is providing the essential basis for the conduct of research by locating it into a specific context. In that sense, there cannot be a more ethical or moral approach than to place a research problem in its own ground in order to produce valid data, deriving from well-studied context.
People, as sources, are the most important element in any good research in this researcher’s estimation. The researcher is interested in applying the following tools in a research process:

1. In-depth interviews and focus groups with stakeholders
2. Surveys of students and parents/community members
3. Simple observations
4. Participant observation

In-depth interviews constitute a tool of major importance in social inquiry. The purpose of this tool is “…to learn what the respondents know (facts); what they think, expect, feel, or prefer (beliefs and attitudes); or what they have done (behaviours)” (Judd et al, 1991: 229). Such interviews are of several kinds, like the focused (on experience and its effects) interview, and the clinical (focusing on feelings and motivations) interview and the nondirective interview that leaves the initiative in the hands of the respondent (ibid: 261-63). The writer would rely on the non-directive interview as a tool for the research effort. An extension of the interview process, the focus group will be an additional tool of discovery that generates data on larger scale.

Since the writer’s focus would be on the schools and students, he will survey a sample of the student population. Surveys are an important tool in the hand of the researcher. The survey is a form of data collection (whether in the form of questionnaire or interview), when questionnaires are standardized—that is, the same questions are given to all to write/complete—then, it is a self-administered questionnaire that asks respondents to give answers to prearranged questions. On the other hand, in the interview the researcher keeps the record of the event (Sanders & Pinhey, 1974: 127). The general purpose of the survey-questionnaire is to reach a maximum number of a sample with a set of questions in the fastest possible time frame in order to reduce data and extract
information in the most equal of terms among the members of the sample. This is its basic strength. The writer will use it in order to develop a profile of the student body he wishes to study. Since he would want to research the “Arabic as a foreign language” programme, whose constituency is the students, he would use a survey questionnaire to learn their motivations to study Arabic, and their attitudes towards learning the language.

Certainly, the main ethical issue here is obtaining permission to engage in this research at the school setting. In order to deal with the ethical issues of my thesis, I plan to obtain permission to engage in this research process at the school setting. Since this can be dealt with by means of an ethics review process conducted at the Central Schools Administration level (through the office of the Superintendent of Schools and the Testing and Assessment Office), I plan to request such a review, explaining the purpose and goals, as well as the structure of the research effort, particularly the questionnaire (which is to be administered to students) in addition to elaborating on the nature and purpose of the study. Thus, the review process will be equipped to make an informed decision regarding the propriety of the research effort. The review process will ensure transparency, propriety and safeguards against any potential subjects' abuse—whether students or other stakeholders. In the event that approval is granted, and because part of the research deals with minors, a mechanism will be developed to contact parents/guardians in order to seek their permission for their students' participation, (necessitating requesting support from school professionals to ensure credibility). Furthermore, when involved in any research work that will be conducted at the school level, whether working with students or other stakeholders, additional clearance will be obtained from the building principal to assure transparency and
propriety. (Issues of ethical conduct of the research effort will be addressed fully in Chapters Six and Seven in terms of outcomes relative to what happened throughout the research process).

Simple observations and participant observation are the hallmarks of qualitative research work. Participant observation is immersing one’s self in the subject matter of the research. This may take on many forms—such as the anthropologist/sociologist studying a group. This can lead to what is termed *practitioner research methodology*—that is, based on Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, applying a *liberatory* approach to research, where the researcher is not an outsider (etic perspective), but an active insider (emic viewpoint), an agent for change (Anderson et al., 1994: 1-7). This process, whether one remains on the outside or one joins in for the purpose of affecting a spiral of change, must begin with simple observation as a primary principle of beginning qualitative research. To this end, simple observation (noticings) leads to understanding of the “insider’s” perspective as lived by the participants—allowing and even celebrating subjectivity for participant and researcher (Ary et al, 1990: 445).

Additionally, the writer will use his own sense of the context of which he is a part, and affirm his experience (noticings) as a relevant source of information. The most important issue in ethical terms in this process is assuring and maintaining the privacy of the informants/consultants. Once information is gathered the physical traces of the process, i.e., tapes and transcripts will be housed in an academic setting for use by future researchers, depending on the pleasure of the review process. A potential location in this instance is the Department of Student Services and Special Programs of Dearborn Schools.
1.5 Purposes and Significance of the Study

In this section, the significance of the research problem will be discussed in terms of its importance to the constituents of the study. Also, justification of the research questions will be offered in part 1.5.2, addressing the issue of the survival of Arabic as a language in the American context. And, in part 1.5.3, delimitations of the study will be visited and discussed, suggesting the overall focus of the research effort in terms of participants and areas of attention.

1.5.1 Significance of the Problem

The significance of the problem of Arabic as a foreign language in Dearborn Public Schools lies in defining it as a heritage language that is important to a subgroup of society in Dearborn. Arab Americans fought hard to bring that language into the schools. As mentioned earlier, it represents to them a symbol of their ethnicity and their culture. Its continued survival in their adopted land signifies to them their continued presence as an identifiable subgroup. We may speculate as to whether this phenomenon may or may not have originated elsewhere; however, we can be sure that factors in the context of the city of Dearborn elevated Arabic to the status of a symbol and not just a language of a subculture. Perhaps, if the attitudes of the host society in Dearborn were less negative towards the community, Arabic would not have assumed this status, and may eventually succumb to extinction in light of the pressures of language shift. This has happened before in the greater national community earlier this century (Naff, 1985).

The problem is significant because it is important to members of the community. It is the living language of no less than 25 thousand people in a city of less than one hundred thousand. Many in the community can live their lives transacting their daily
affairs using Arabic as the medium of communication. It is in a real sense a language with an economic base supporting its survival. As a whole, the community is aware that the pressures of the dominant culture are in favour of their cultural extinction. This is a fate they dare to combat, hoping to assert their survival as a distinct subgroup in the city, and consequently serve as a model to the whole of the Arab American community across the United States.

1.5.2 Justification of the Research Questions

It has been thought that Arabic language maintenance effort in the United States are doomed to fail as previous generations of Arab immigrants failed to preserve their cultural traits and language (Sawaie in Rouchdy, 1992). The eventual death of Arabic in America is perceived as a consequence of rampant assimilation processes and factors. One must only look towards the history of Arab Americans to discover that, as Naff (1985) suggested, the original Syrian Arab community assimilated itself nearly out of existence, and with that Arabic language skills were lost to subsequent generations. But, this seems to be the over-riding model in American life, according to (Dutcher, 1995). However, regardless of doom prophets, Arabic is still alive in the United States as new immigrants arrive into the country due in large measure to political and military strife in Arab regions, as well as economic hardships (Suleiman, 1999).

In Dearborn, Michigan, an Arab American ghetto exists, which sustains an interesting experiment in Arab life in America (David, 1999). This experiment consists of a viable community of more than thirty thousand Arab background inhabitants in a suburban city whose population size does not exceed 100,000 people (adjacent to the metropolis of Detroit—more than ten times its size, in a metropolitan area that is the
home of at least three million people). In this city, Arabic is freely used as a viable second language for many people, and it is the first and only language for others more. Here, one can live a full life interacting in the main, using Arabic for the necessities of daily life—anything from buying home and personal needs, to seeking medical attention, to interacting with private and public concerns. However, while this seems to suggest a paradise for Arabic in North America, it is in no way to be construed as such. In fact, the only reason it exists is because of sheer numbers that allow it as a phenomenon: it is the product of chain migration, which resulted primarily because of instability and hardships in the Arab regions. The question that presents itself in broad terms here, however, is whether this phenomenon continues. Will Arabic survive and stay a second language among Arab Americans in the city or the area? To that end, this research is designed to understand the relevance of Arabic to these migrants and ethnics, and to understand the significance of learning and teaching Arabic in Dearborn Schools, where immigration meets the assimilation and integration project in American society.

The school is the eye of the storm of the Americanising project. The centre of cultural, social, and political reproduction of American life, the school is the battle ground in which Arab immigrants must accept or reject in some fashion or another the challenge of American living. American society in Dearborn expects them to assimilate on its own terms, whereas Arabs seem insistent to integrate by their own accord. More and more, it is becoming apparent that Arab Americans intend to integrate into American life based on their own pace and needs (David and Ayoub in Haddad and Smith, 2002), leaving researchers to ask about the “hows” and the “whys” of this process. This study is
an attempt to answer the “hows” and “whys” and the “whos”, “wheres” and “whats” of Arabic language teaching and learning in Dearborn.

1.5.3 Delimitations

This study will be limited in scope, dealing with school community stakeholders within the boundaries of the Dearborn educational authority district. Particularly, it will focus on Arab Americans and their children in the city of Dearborn. Although one aspect of this study is the analysis of data collected from stakeholders, (students, teachers, administrators, parents, community members, and other school staff members); however, primarily, it will focus on recording the educational experience of Arab American students to the degree it is possible to do so. This study does not attempt to address every educational issue relevant to Arab Americans in the city, but focuses only the learning and teaching of the Arabic language, and the context of that process, as well as any immediately pertinent issues that inform the topic at hand. Secondly, the research aims at developing a sense of the Arab American community in Dearborn regarding the meaning and significance of the Arabic language as a component of their ethnicity.

1.6 Organisation of the Study

This study is divided into seven chapters. As is evident already, the first chapter presents the background of the study, states the problem, addresses the theoretical perspectives that inform the conceptual framework, and posits hypotheses. In addition, this chapter provides a clear view of the methodological approaches that have been used in this study, suggesting their implication and purpose in light of the significance of the problem, while justifying the research modality in terms of the questions posed, and addressing the limitations of this study.
Chapter Two is an extensive discussion of the methodological approaches engaged in this study. It provides a general overview of practitioner research methodology, and a description of the case study approach utilized in this study. Moreover, the instrumentation and sample selection methods of data generation are presented. Data collection methods relating to validity and reliability are discussed, as well, culminating in addressing issues pertinent to data analysis and reduction. In the latter part, data analysis procedures are explained.

In Chapter Three, the writer addresses the topic of “Arabs in America”, treating the subject from socio-historical perspectives, and providing an overview of background, immigration and settlement in the “New World”. The fourth chapter is an extension of the third, and deals with Arab American life in its myriad facets, touching on issues of racism and prejudice, religion and culture, identity and political activism, stemming from the general immigrant/ethnic experience and the struggles of the national community. What is more, this chapter offers a generalised profile of Arab Americans throughout their known/recorded history, commenting on some of their basic features and issues. It calls attention to the pattern of Arab settlement in Michigan, the metropolitan Detroit region, and the city of Dearborn. Furthermore, this section deals with the impact of instability and turmoil in the Arab East on the growth of the community in state, region and city, while narrating an account of Arab activism in the city of Dearborn, which includes grassroots politics and organisation-building with reference to establishing economic installations.

Chapter Five focuses entirely on the educational system in the city of Dearborn, providing a historical capsule of its origins and development, the impact of Arab
American presence in the city, and its accommodation of specific ideological and curricular goals, and addressing the issues of accommodation (or lack thereof in certain instances) of the interests of Arab Americans in the city.

In Chapter Six, aggregate results of research instrumentations are presented. This includes the results of surveys, interviews and focus groups, as well as other findings. The focus of this chapter is presenting findings as represented by the voices of the participants in this research effort. Chapter Seven is the final chapter in which a general discussion and a summary of the findings are offered, along with the opinions and conclusions drawn by the researcher as based on the evidence of the data. As well, the chapter addresses the issues of limitations of this work, possible alternative approaches of future studies in addition to recommendations for future projects pertinent to this area of research.
Chapter Two
Description of Research Methodology

2.1 Methodological Approach

Although this study makes extensive use of the historical approach, (i.e., placing the issues in their historical context, while documenting the background and the realities of Arabic as a Foreign Language (AFL) programme of study in Dearborn Public Schools, in addition,) it is a research effort that is rooted in the qualitative paradigm. What is more, it makes choice of a practitioner and participant research model that obtains from personal experience and involvement. At the heart of the effort is the aim to produce documentary evidence that facilitates programme and community development and change. Not only it is intended as a record of achievement of those who are involved in founding and sustaining the programme, but also as a testimony to the will of a community that worked to have the AFL programme instituted as an academic option in the public schools system in Dearborn, Michigan.

Placing the study in the context of power relations and inter-ethnic rivalries in the Dearborn community, thus, the theoretical approach essentially determines the methodological conduct of this study. In other words, by referring to the AFL programme in its communal context, and by focusing on the historical background, placing the whole object of study in its socio-cultural and political environment, taking into account the fact that no educational system and/or product (e.g. outcomes) can be divorced from the ideological underpinnings of institutions and the society they serve. Consequently, Paulo
Freire’s ideas of pedagogies of freedom and of the oppressed, along with Henry Giroux’s critical pedagogy of curriculum, school and society, and Edward Saïd’s critique of Orientalism form the theoretical position of this study, in addition to conception of race as provided by W.E.B. DuBois, thereby informing the choice of the methodological approach, and the subsequent collection and reduction of data.

Emanating from a critical spirit, therefore, this study’s approach is democratic, concerned with issues of equity, social justice and respect for human rights in school and society. Thus, it marries the critique of Orientalism, with its identification of anti-Arab, anti-Muslim racist stereotyping and systems of othering to emancipatory pedagogy concerned with freedom and development and the critique of power relations through their application to the school setting and its social context. As such, the whole study is a critique of racism and racist effects on the AFL programme, its constituents, its school context and its community.

2.1.1 Method Overview

Method cannot be divorced from theory. Rather, it is the outcome. This research effort is rooted in the qualitative method paradigm, wherein, “[t]heorizing and analysis are tightly interwoven” (Virnoche, n.d.: accessed August 8, 2004). It is not about “numbers”, rather it is about “states of mind”, personally shared and dissembled, publicly enunciated and privately held, and conscious and unconscious. Because of the writer’s ideological understanding and position, and since he is an educational practitioner and a community stakeholder, his choice of research methodology is accordingly impacted by his socio-cultural and professional placement.
A former AFL teacher in the school system, a former community relations liaison for the public schools and, throughout the period of this research and writing, a student services provider in the school system’s central administration, and an Arab American resident of Dearborn, his socio-cultural placement and professional standing bear, if not demand, a practitioner’s approach to conduct of research on his chosen area of study. Moreover, given his democratic-based ideological position, he is equally demanded to choose an action-based form of research that entails the potential and possibilities for social and professional change. Thus, again, his choice of research tools is equally based on and facilitated by personal conviction and opportunity. Therefore, the researcher’s choice of participatory research, in which he is an active subject/object of study, and in which other participants (e.g. informants, consultants, respondents and “conversants”), are equal in the process of discovery and partners in a platform for change, is a natural outcome of his ethno-political location and his ideological stance.

Descriptive and explicative, below is an account of the basic contours of the research process. It defines practitioner research as pertains to this study, dealing with its nature and means of utilisation, and discusses the use of the “case study” method and its appropriate application in this effort. Also, a review of the research course of action is offered, giving account of the process and procedures of interviews and focus groups, as well surveying of AFL students, parents and other concerned members of the community. As well, use of archival material, documentation that is available in the school system, is addressed. Equally, matters of data gathering, generation, reduction and analysis will be visited, referring to outcomes.
2.1.2 Practitioner Research

Practitioner qualitative research is a broad term that encompasses a variety of approaches to interpretive research. Each approach is often unique in its focus, research methods, strategies for data collection and analysis, as well as specific ways of communicating results. Kemmis and McTaggart (1982) suggest that practitioner research is “…a form of collective, self reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own social or educational practices, as well as their understanding of these practices and the situations in which these practices are carried out….” (p. 6). McKernan (1988) defines practitioner research as “a form of self-reflective problem-solving which enables practitioners to better understand and solve problems in social settings” (p.6). Additionally, McCutcheon and Jung (1990) provide this definition:

“Systematic inquiry that is collective, collaborative, self-reflective, critical, and undertaken by the participants of the inquiry. The goals of such research are the understanding of practice and the articulation of a rationale or philosophy of practice in order to improve practice” (p. 148).

De Schutter and Yopo (1981:68) suggest the following characteristics as mainstays of practitioner/participatory research:

- Macro level social forces form the context of social events that are viewed from a specific perspective.
- Social processes and structures are understood within a historical context.
- Theory and practice are integrated.
- The subject object relationship is transformed into a subject-subject relationship through dialogue.
- Research and action (including education itself) become a single process.
- The community and the researcher together produce critical knowledge aimed at social transformation.
- The results of research are immediately applied to a concrete situation.
Anderson et al. (1994) define practitioner research as “…tak[ing] place in educational settings that reflects a society characterized by conflicting values and unequal distribution of resources and power” (p.3). According to Anderson et al., the hallmark of practitioner research is a critical spirit, adding, “…if practitioner research is not done with a critical spirit, it runs the risk of legitimating what maybe—from the perspective of equity considerations—unacceptable social arrangements” (p.26). They also distinguish between qualitative research and qualitative practitioner research, suggesting:

“Although the standards for qualitative inquiry are different than those used by quantitative researchers, they may not be appropriate for practitioner researchers. This is partly because qualitative researchers tend to be outsiders studying settings in which they are not true participants; practitioner researchers are insiders studying their own setting” (p. 27).

Practitioner research operates from the position that “societal conditions are historically created and heavily influenced by the asymmetries of power and special interests [and that there is an] emancipatory interest in knowledge” (Alvesson and Kaj Skoldberg, 2000: 110), as it “promotes a social science capable of stimulating autonomy, clarification, a sense of responsibility, and the democratic process” (Ibid. 123-124).

Situated in the qualitative practitioner research tradition, this investigative effort accordingly is a self-reflective and collaborative enquiry on conditions of a specific professional practice (namely, AFL teaching) and its socio-cultural and political milieu (of Dearborn, Michigan), where the focus is on insiders’ perspectives, in order to produce an account, serving the cause of democratic change through the agency of emancipatory knowledge. (Please, refer to earlier description of theoretical perspectives in Section 1.3, and research methodology in Section 1.4 of Chapter One that validate the utilisation of qualitative methodology).
2.1.3 Case Studies

Case studies are a type of qualitative research in which the researcher “explores a single entity or phenomenon (the case) bounded by time and activity (a program, event, process, institution, or social group) and collects detailed information by using a variety of data collection procedures during a sustained period of time” (Creswell, 1994: 12). A case study is conducted to shed light on a phenomenon, be it a process, event, person, or object of interest. According to Gall et al., “researchers generally do case studies for one of three purposes: to produce detailed descriptions of a phenomenon, to develop possible explanations of it, or to evaluate the phenomenon” (1996: 549).

After defining a specific focus for studies, a researcher then gathers data from a wide variety of sources to present a description of the phenomenon or experience from the perspective of the participants, often by spending time with them and by becoming personally involved with the people and phenomenon being studied. Kirk and Miller, 1986 (cited in Gall, et al) described the process as “watching people in their own territory and interacting with them in their own language, on their own terms” (1996: 547). Other data collected can be in the form of words, images, and quantitative data. The totality of this data then is analysed and a determination is made for subsequent data collection activities. Gall et al (ibid.) describe three approaches to analysing case study data: Interpretational, structural and reflective analyses.

Interpretational analysis refers to examining the data for constructs, themes, and patterns that can be used to describe and explain the phenomenon studied. Structural analysis refers to searching the data for patterns inherent in discourse, text, events or other phenomena, with no reference made as to the meaning of the patterns. Reflective analysis refers to using primarily intuition and judgment to portray or evaluate the
phenomenon. The final report often takes the form of a rich descriptive narrative that attempts to reconstruct the participants’ reality. Adler and Adler (1994) recommend that case study researchers use a “style of writing that draws the reader so closely into subjects’ worlds that these can be palpably felt” (p. 381). Consequently, it is assumed that a personal intimacy with the focus of study is necessary.

No doubt the case study approach is highly appropriate for this research effort. AFL in Dearborn schools is a programme and a phenomenon worthy of description, exploration and evaluation in context. As such, as a member of the group category under study as well as a participant, the research exercise is consequently an endeavour in sensitively portraying people, places and mindsets in their own terms. In doing so, emergent themes are interpreted, patterns are identified and described and their meanings are sought in their institutional, local and national context—in historical and contemporary times. The case studies approach is utilised across this study to paint an intimate portrait of the Arabic language situation in Dearborn, Michigan through reporting on stakeholders and their context(s).

2.2 Data Generation

Data is generated through several means. Along with archival material that is available at the school district (in the form of memoranda, letters, reports and other similar resources), the researcher uses interviewing techniques and survey questionnaires to establish a database of information. Interviewing is used to acquire data from various sources and informants, including teachers, parents, students and other community stakeholders. Also, focus groups are convened to produce raw data for this study. Additionally, use is made of the researcher’s own personal resources, which included
notes, memoranda and personal reports that have been collected through years of service at the school district. Moreover, personal observations of the circumstances (i.e., culture, policies and regulations) of the school system are tapped as a source of data for the study. The following section explains in some detail how the data is generated and collected.

2.2.1 Instrumentation and Sample Selection

Within the paradigm of practitioner research, there is high validity in bringing one’s own experience and personal knowledge to the research agenda, conducting the effort in light of personal intuition. In this vein, the researcher utilises his own notes, memoranda, reports, and accounts of personal interactions with staff as raw data for analysis while relying on Mason’s system of “noticings”, which is an approach that rewards personal development and professional awareness (1992). Naturally, consulting available archival data, including reports, spreadsheets, curricular materials, memoranda and the like constitute a treasure trove of data that are used in helping elucidate the historical and socio-cultural background of the study.

In addition to personal observation and consultation of archival information, focus groups and interviews are to round out the data gathering techniques, along with surveys. Several focus groups were planned for students and parents but eventually this course of action was abandoned due to unforeseen events, impacting the overall course of the research (which is addressed later below) Nonetheless, the focus group concept constitutes a major tool in this researcher’s arsenal, which, ultimately, yielded a lot of good data in the three small focus groups that were convened. In terms of the focus groups, they are conducted in hopes of generating data on what students, community members and parents consider of note in regards to the AFL programme, and its school
and community contexts. Questions that are used in the focus group process reflected the same question agenda that was developed for the interviews; they are general questions and designed to elicit the views of participants.

Interviews are conducted in one-on-one format. They are conversational in nature, utilising some standardised questions in an attempt to have participants relate their experiences in some common fashion. Therefore, questions are general so that the participants could structure their responses with a high degree of freedom and latitude. Interviewees are drawn from the school setting, teachers, administrators, support school personnel, and students, particularly AFL students, parents and other community stakeholders.

Surveys of parents/community members and students are also conducted. AFL students at Fordson High School comprise the pool of student participants, totalling 216 respondents, ranging from 9th to 12th secondary grades, constituting the near total population of the AFL programme in the high school and nearly two-thirds of the whole school system. In terms of parents and other stakeholders, ultimately, data from 96 respondents were collected, enlisting the aid of community activists in three locations, namely, a local university, a community centre and a high school. The surveys and their conduct are addressed in detail below.

A. Interviews

The interviews constitute the mainstay and the “meat” of this research effort. Participants include nearly all the Arabic language teachers in the school district, past and present, constituting a trove of data covering the history and development of the programme along with personnel assessments and descriptions of teaching/learning and
working conditions, including relations with peers, students, parents and other
community members. AFL teachers consist of six teachers who currently or previously
taught Arabic in the school system. Also four Bilingual Education teachers are
interviewed and who add value to the research through their impressions and assessments
in regards to the programme and other matters of concern. In addition, a total of five
administrators are interviewed to shed light on their views of the programme, the school
system and community. Also, five school support staff members are interviewed, (e.g.
student services providers of various levels and types of professions). (Although the
researcher conducted quite a few conversations with parents and community members
and students, not all constituted quality-level interviews: some may have become
threatened by the interview process and “shut down” in terms of responding to questions,
making the information they supplied basic and un-useable, or simply consciously refused
to interact with the interviewer more meaningfully). In some measure, this is likely due to
the events of September 11, 2001, which threatened the peace and security of Arab
Americans, as well as non-Arabs. Nonetheless, in terms of parental and community
members interviews, the researcher considers he interviewed six parent and community
members, as well as, four AFL students. Interestingly enough, while all the interviews are
of good quality, yielding highly valuable information, the least satisfactory or least
productive of them, however, are those provided by some of the parents/community
stakeholders’ category. On the other hand, the interviews that are given by teachers and
students on the whole were remarkably insightful and highly impressive in terms of data
that they yielded.
B. Focus Groups

Although the researcher’s intentions are to develop a lot of data through the use of focus groups, he was unable to do so, given his inability to pursue the original plan of securing ten participants for each focus group. The reason for this change, again, is due to the events of September 11, 2001 that changed the socio-cultural and political landscape of the country, effecting potential participants. Ultimately, the researcher convened three small focus groups—two parents and community members (respectively, each had three members), and a third one constituted of six former AFL students.

Below are some specific objectives this research study aims identify:

- Potential importance of Arabic as a heritage language to members of the stakeholding community;
- Issues of relevance to the needs of Arab American stakeholders in relation to Dearborn educational system public policy and service provision;
- Barriers faced by members of the stake-holding community;
- Opportunities presented to members of the ethnic community and the community at large;
- Potential attitudes, expectations and aspirations of the stake-holding community;
- Relative priorities of issues as identified by informants and consultants;
- Determine implications of the findings the design and conduct of the overall research;
- Validity of the research process.

Although the initial aim of the research effort is intended to develop many focus groups, the events of September 11, 2001 created a whole new socio-cultural environment to which the researcher had to accommodate, necessitating some changes in the approach and conduct of the focus group process. Although at first, the thinking behind the original design was broad in that bigger numbers of people would be inducted in focus groups, later events, which had a “chilling effect” on members of the community, had caused a downsizing of the process in order to adapt to the new exigencies. Nonetheless, the
researcher believes he has kept faith with the original intent of using appropriate research methods and approaches to the study that included the focus group format.

Methodology:

To undertake the focus group process and achieve the relevant research aims, the writer used the following methodology:

- General desktop research, an exercise that aims to place the context of the study in a strategic, methodological and theoretical framework in order to maintain validity of the research and keep sight of the goals. This included forming a coherent understanding of the composition of the community under study, and review of relevant research on development of focus groups.

- In identifying and recruiting participants of focus groups, I took into consideration the following elements in an attempt to better reflect the community understudy: First, to reflect a variety of sub-groups within the community; second, to draw members from various areas within the city (south-end, east-side and west-side) and, third, to reflect the diversity within the community.

My research design requires that opinions be polled from a cross-section of the Dearborn community in order to reflect diversity that includes in particular the views of the “non-visible” (or less visible) members of the community (e.g. students, women, and new immigrants). Therefore, my aim was to ensure participants are from different backgrounds, something that was accomplished by boosting the numbers of women, students, and newer immigrants to effect adequate representation. Since the centre of attention of the focus groups is primarily the non-white, Arab American community category, interest groups included students, parents, and stake-holding community members, whose highlights are captured in the research process.
C. Survey Questionnaires

A survey questionnaire to determine a general profile of the student population engaged in learning Arabic is constructed and administered in all classroom sections at Fordson High School. Questions involved identification of vital information (e.g., age, grade, year of studying Arabic, etc.). However, the emphasis of this process was to gather socio-linguistic and cultural information about the students in order to gauge attitudes. There are statements to which respondents are able to answer on a continuum from strongly agree to strongly disagree. However, the survey’s strength lies in its corroborative function to data (themes, patterns) that emerged through other means. In essence, the survey data provided the scope of issues, while other instrumentation provided depth.

Nonetheless, this portion of the research had been dogged with unforeseen problems. Originally, it was intended to be a canvas of students involved in Arabic as foreign language programme throughout the Dearborn Public Schools system. This would have included students in Dearborn High School, as well as Fordson High School. However, because the principal of Dearborn High School objected, despite the approval of the then Superintendent of Schools, Dr. Jeremy Hughes, and the Director of Testing and Assessment Department in the school District, Dr. Shereen Arraf, who functions in the capacity of Human Subjects Research Approval monitor, Mr. Louis Guido, the then principal of Dearborn High School, objected on grounds that the research would interfere with students’ learning.

Although at face value, this is a legitimate concern, the principal failed, the writer believes, intentionally, to recognise the potential importance of such study to generate
outcomes-based data that can benefit the programme curriculum, the students and the district as an academic institution, as well as adding to corpus of research on Arabic language pedagogy in settings other than tertiary education. Primarily, from my point of view, the reason behind his objection is two fold: first, because he was locked in a conflict with central schools’ administration over his authoritarian style of leadership in the school, an institution considered to be the “flagship” school on the west-side of the city, and secondly because he did not value the programme to the degree that he would want its improvement, as we shall see, later, from evidence given by members of his school community, who have witnessed the devaluation of the discipline in the school.

On the other hand, Fordson High School, under the leadership of the then newly appointed principal, Mr. Paul A. Smith, a man who genuinely cares about the students, the community of stakeholders and the curriculum the school offers, was very accepting and supportive of the research project, enabling this researcher to gain access to some teachers, students, and other support staff in his building. It was left to these stakeholders to decide the level of participation they wished to be involved in. Ultimately, in terms of students, this research is a Fordson High School study. However, there are other voices that can be heard from within and outside this academic institution that have fully contributed to this research and have enriched its outcome.

In addition to this problem, one has to invoke the impact of the tragic events of September 11, 2001 as a major factor in determining participation on the part of students, teachers, support staff, parents and other community members who are legitimately stakeholders in this research effort. The events of that day and the impact they had subsequently on the Arab American community in terms of the free exercise of speech in
a context rife with general anxieties and fears cannot be minimised or under-estimated, thus, affecting the outcome of the research course. This is discussed further below in relation to each segment of the informant population whose opinions are surveyed.

During the ensuing period after the 9/11 attacks, this research process all but stopped. In fact, all throughout 2002, I was unable to pursue a course of action for the study in terms of developing major contacts to interview or survey. People were afraid to talk about anything related to Arabs and Arabic, given an environment that was increasingly viewing them as suspect. This general anxiety has delayed the conduct of the research to a great extent. Even much later, it is still hard to fulfill the original research plan of talking to a maximum number of teachers, parents and other community stakeholders. While the writer is not satisfied with the numbers of research participants, he recognises that it is a sign of the socio-political times, as well as it being a reflection of the overall issues faced by members of the Arab American community. Although sometimes the quality of participation of individuals is somewhat limited, it is itself a representation of the current stressors affecting many members of this Arab American community.

In terms of a Parents/Community Questionnaire, a simple questionnaire is constructed for use with parents of programme students/community members. Parents as research informants are selected using a combination of convenience samples, and snowball samples. Non-probability samples such as these are especially useful when a study is being conducted under certain conditions, such as limited resources, problems identifying members of the population under study (including participants/informants/consultants), and a credible means of establishing the existence of
a research problem (Henry, 1990; Payne, 1992). Two conditions apply in this case (limited resources and inability to identify readily members of the parent group). The third is the matter of identifying parents. While theoretically they can be identified from the school rolls, their participation cannot be assured, therefore, in this sense, the procedure applies to that segment of the population. As such, convenience and snowball samples are the most practical ways to recruiting participants.

Conduct of the research on parents and community stakeholders is equally affected. Under the title, “Arabic as a Foreign Language Parent/Community Views and Attitudinal Survey,” a simple questionnaire (see appendix) is developed to gauge some basic views and attitudes regarding Arabic language learning and teaching in the school district. This research effort was begun in early February of 2004, ending in April of the same year. Parents and community stakeholders are surveyed in order to find a means to corroborate and validate the findings reached by other means, including student surveys, interviews and focus groups. A simple survey is devised, more for the purpose of checking results than for finding new information, and survey forms are randomly distributed at three locations via concerned professionals and interested volunteers. The first location was at Fordson High School (FHS) through the office of the Student Services Liaison, a professional who works with stakeholders in the Arab American community. The other location was through members of Arabic as a foreign language (AFL) classes at the University of Michigan-Dearborn.* Self-identified students who are from the Dearborn area and were in AFL classes are enlisted to hand out surveys to their parents and other parents and community members. Also, surveys are randomly

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* The University of Michigan-Dearborn attracts high number of Arab Americans from the Detroit metropolitan area, especially Dearborn, however, there are no official numbers because they are considered a subset of the Caucasian (i.e., “white”) population.
distributed via the main office of the ACCESS (The Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services) in the south end of the city to adult members of the community. Choice fell on these three locations because they represented a variety of subset populations ranging from poor to middle class stakeholders.

Three hundred surveys are distributed through the three locations. Each location is supplied with one hundred surveys. The rate of return was minimal. Of the three hundred surveys, some thirty three percent were returned, the majority of which came from the University of Michigan-Dearborn (UM-D) group—with a fifty-eight percent return rate. The FHS group yielded a return rate of 27 percent. The ACCESS group provided 15 percent. A total of 103 surveys were returned of three hundred issues, making for a rate of return that is a little more than thirty-three (33) percent.

Reportedly, UM-D AFL student participants (altogether five in number) had the most success because, in representing the research effort, they used their credibility with their informants. The least success is achieved by the ACCESS effort because, according to the consulting member at ACCESS, **there is not adequate interest or there is a sense of apprehension (if not fear) to give out one’s opinion on such matters. The middle of the road results achieved by the FHS effort is attributed to a lack of understanding of the over-all purpose of the research, and because some did not want to share their opinion publicly—even though confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed, according to the Student Services Liaison who led the effort. The student services professional noted that he is not surprised at the results, adding that this is a common attitude among the parents**

**Personal Communication with ACCESS Drop-in Unit Assistant Supervisor, Ms. Batoul Ayouby-Karam, suggested the assessment with regard to her experience with potential research informants (personal communication March 18, 2004).
who are afraid to share their views or do not believe their views matter or simply do not care.***

D. Archival Materials

Archival material available at the district ranging from technical reports, grant proposal narratives, detailed memoranda to official communications, press releases, letters, and other non-classified publications are consulted to generate narratives for analysis, and to determine official stances and policies of the district. Additionally, as a matter of course, established research on the Arab American community in the form of books and journal articles, as well as unpublished monographs are utilised. As well, works illuminating the progress of this project are consulted regardless of source, but primarily this constituted the use of newspaper articles. Practically, archival material use is the only thing not directly effected by the tragic events of 2001, which had allowed the writer not to lose too much of his momentum towards bringing this study to fruition.

2.3 Data Collection

All students involved in AFL learning programme at Fordson are given the general survey questionnaire. The number of participants is 216 pupils of a total set of not larger than 225. (On an average day, always there will be few students who are absent). The questionnaire is administered after approval is obtained from the Superintendent’s office and his designee, high school administration, and classroom teachers. The process of obtaining clearance began in September 2000 when students returned to the classroom. By the end of the second semester of the 2000-01 academic year, the survey was conducted, weeks before the devastating tragedy of September 11, 2001. Naturally, this

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***Personal Communication with Mr. Tahsine Bazzi, Student Services Liaison at Fordson High School, February 12, 2004.
event altered the course of this research process, given the development of new fears and obstacles in gaining follow-up data.

As had been noted before, the parent/community member survey effort was equally dogged with problems. The new socio-political realities necessitated re-adjustment of plans and to re-strategise a process, seeking information from parents and community members. In order to maximise the potential of acquiring data, it was decided to seek participants at three sources, namely, Fordson High School (primarily parents of students, AFL and non-AFL pupils), parents and community members (through the connexion of university students to parents and community members at the University of Michigan in Dearborn), and through the ACCESS community centre (primarily lower class parents). The effort is conducted in the spring of 2003 with the assistance of personnel at the high school and the community centre and college students at the university. Although 300 surveys are generated and distributed, ultimately, 94 participants returned viable surveys.

However, in addition to the student (2001) and parent/community surveys (2003), two focus groups of students were planned (during the 2001-2002 period). It was thought preferable that each group should not exceed ten students in order to keep the conversation and interchange at a proper level whereby all participants can engage fully in the process. Later, that thinking was abandoned in favour of smaller groups where the general climate is more intimate and because it became much harder to recruit young people to participate in venues where sharing their views might taint the research effort through skewing data one way or another, or because they may have felt the process might get them into some trouble. Given the new political realities of the United States
after September 11, 2001, Arab Americans became targets and suspects from all quarters, and this attitude had taken a toll on the community, among them the students, of course.

Although it was planned to select students from the 12th grade level and former programme students because they would have had three to four years of Arabic tuition by then and because their level of maturity is high, thus enriching the research process, ultimately, the researcher was able to recruit a few former AFL students for the focus groups in 2003. Originally, prior to the events of September 11, 2001, the selection of students was dependent on their school involvement and the level of their socio-political awareness in order to draw a more informed pool of students. To this end, classroom teachers were to be invited to select twenty candidates for the focus group and the subsequent choice of ten students was to be made by lottery. Naturally, again, the political events of the day thwarted these plans. However, eventually, personal contact on the part of the writer of previous students in the AFL programme proved the most effective measure in recruiting them for the focus group. They had become university students in 2003, something that added value to their assessments and views, but also may have skewed the data as well in favour of a more intellectually minded direction. In the end, one focus group is convened mid-year, involving six participants, former AFL Fordson students. The focus group consisted of five males and one female.

The original plan called for school administrators and teachers to recommend the names of parents who are involved in their students’ academic progress, and were thought more likely interested in the research process. Once a pool of names was collected, a neutral location would be chosen and participants would be invited to form the focus group. It was thought that ten parents would be ideal to generate data. Also, it
was planned, based on the outcome of the focus group, to identify and select a number of parents for an in depth interview on the issues. In the end, two small focus groups of parents/community members are conducted, utilising support from the researcher’s colleagues in the school district at the university to develop contacts with potential participants. Both groups were convened in early December 2003. Although the first group was composed of six participants, only three women honoured their commitments out of the mixed group. And, the second group, favouring in its composition the category of community stakeholder, three participants of whom two were women, gave their views at the meeting.

In terms of interviews, nearly all the Arabic language teachers, current and previous teachers, who are still employed with the district (to the extent it was possible), are interviewed regarding their practice, expectations of students, school system, and community, and their hopes for the programme. In line with this strategy, additional staff members, whether teachers, administrators or other support staff members, are interviewed in order to ascertain their assessment of AFL program, their involvement with it, and their estimation of its worth. The interviewing process began in 2000; however, it was interrupted by the events of September 11, 2001 and was re-started in mid-2003. One major issue with the interviews is the dwindling access to potential interviewees in light of the Tragedy, especially among Euro-Anglo background teachers and school personnel.

2.3.1 Validity

What is research validity? According to Runyon et al. (2000: 185), in the world of statistical measures “[v]alidity is the extent to which a test measures what it purports to
measure.” Thus, a test instrument gauging a certain quality must be able to assess that quality. Ary et al (1990: 268) hold that validity is not a characteristic of a test measure but “…is specific to the particularistic job that one wants a test to do.” Payne (1992), having accepted the possibility of varying (and competing) definitions of validity, notes that they are all credible definitions, while offering this explanation:

“…Why? Because validity is a very particularistic, specific, and individualistic concept. A test is not valid in general, but for a particular interpretation in a specific application. One needs, therefore, to test the test’s validity before one can accept the inferences to be drawn from the test results” (292-3).

This means that in general terms, validity has to do with the appropriateness of the test instrument for the purpose it was devised, provided that the instrument has been subjected to some testing of its own.

In the realm of qualitative practitioner research paradigm, as alluded to earlier, the concept of validity takes on added dimensions of complexity. Anderson et al. (1994) understand validity in terms that allow for broad range of testing. They name five criteria for the validity of practitioner research, which are: (1)-Democratic validity; (2)-Outcome validity; (3)-Process validity; (4)-Catalytic validity; and, (5)-Dialogic validity.

For practitioner research to be efficacious, it has to be democratic and to attempt finding solutions for local problems/issues, through the inclusion of the views of as many stakeholders as possible, which are appropriate to the context of the study. By doing so, the research effort achieves democratic validity. Accordingly, this study has consulted no less than four hundred individual informants in many settings, (including students, parents, community members, school professionals and others), constituting widely varied sets of interest groups, whose voices the researcher sought out to include in this effort to explore their understandings of the problems/issues and to report their views.
regarding appropriate change. In doing so, the researcher believes he has met the
democratic validity requirement.

The outcome validity criterion is met when the research frames the problem(s) in
a more “complex way” (i.e., against a backdrop of other issues) and sets the stage for
additional questions about the nature of things, leading to a spiral of activity. This activity
involves others and may lead to change, thus, again, confirming the democratic criterion.
The researchers believes he has met this validity requirement, as well, by information
sharing and consciousness-raising (e.g. information sharing from one participant to
another via the conduit of the researcher; through focus group interactions), resulting in
increased sensitivity and a higher level of willingness to engage in efforts of social
change, which, additionally, confirmed the democratic criterion. The researcher in
particular invokes in support of meeting this requirement the case of AFL teachers’
willingness to pursue organising in favour seeking professional status with the state as
one of the results of this research effort.

The process criterion is accommodated when a variety of methods are used in the
research process in order to attain dependable data. This means using observations,
interviews and surveys among other tools to guard against over-simplification of a
problem, and to ascertain the inclusion of multiple voices in the data gathering process.
The researcher accommodated this criterion in using a variety of methods to guard
against over-simplification, (e.g. interviews, focus groups, surveys, conversations,
mentions and noticings, and documentary evidence, etc.).

The catalytic validity criterion is accommodated when the research process allows
participants, (researcher and informants), the opportunity to re-orient their focus on the
issues under study. Consequently, this criterion means a commitment to continuous re-appraisal of the trajectory of the research process. In this study, the researcher took pains to maintain his position as subject and object of study, interacting with participants as an observer and as a catalyst for change through articulating the issues, at times echoing participants, while in others focusing the message, thus, overall sensitising participants and assisting them in personal consciousness-raising, which meets the outcome validity requirement.

The dialogic criterion is achieved when the process of doing the research is laid open to critique; the practitioner researcher engages in reflective dialogue with a “critical friend” in order to ascertain “goodness of research” (ibid. pp. 30-3). In other words, the dialogic criterion reinforces the collaborative nature of this type of research, both at the academic and processual (data gathering) levels. The writer believes this requirement was faithfully accommodated by means of continued discussions and input from colleagues, and, especially, of engaging a “dialogic partner” and a “critical friend”, Ms. Madona Mokbel, a researcher and fellow graduate student (at York University in Toronto, Ontario, Canada), who acted as an outside assessor of the “goodness of research” effort, and carried out the function of “conscience” for the project.

2.3.2 Reliability

What is reliability? “Reliability refers to the consistency with which a measurement technique produces the same outcome” (Runyon et al., 2000:184). Therefore, a testing instrument is reliable if it tends to produce the same results in a consistent manner when all things are being equal, that is, standardized manner. According to Ary et al. “[t]he reliability of a measuring instrument is the degree of
consistency with which it measures whatever it is measuring. This quality is essential in any kind of measurement” (1990: 268). Payne defines reliability as: “…a complex characteristic, but generally involves consistency of measurement. Consistency of measurement might be judged in terms of time, items, scores, examinees, examiners, or accuracy of classifications” (1992: 99). In short, reliability can be judged in many ways as long as it signifies consistency. Reliability is an important element because it allows for the ability to replicate results in the event material conditions are substantially similar.

In the world of qualitative practitioner action research, the concept of reliability is a little more than mercurial in achieving than it is in the traditional parameters of qualitative inquiry or statistical measurements. In the area of practitioner research, reliability necessarily must be a flexible concept that carries credibility and trustworthiness as explained by Ary et al (1990):

“Qualitative inquirers use a variety of procedures to check the credibility of the data being gathered and to confirm their developing insights or hypotheses. Among these techniques are prolonged engagement at the site and persistent observation to provide sufficient scope and depth to observation. Triangulation—the use of multiple sources of data, multiple observers, and/or multiple methods—is another technique that is used to enhance the probability that hypotheses and interpretations are credible. Periodic debriefing with the inquirer’s peers and member checks (submitting the inquirer’s interpretations to members in a setting for their validation) are other important procedures.

“To enhance the dependability (roughly equivalent to the reliability) of the study, a qualitative inquirer often maintains an audit trail of materials that documents how the study was conducted, including what was done, when, and why. The audit trail contains the raw data gathered in interviews and observations, records of the inquirer’s decisions about whom to interview or what to observe and why, files documenting how the working hypotheses were developed from the raw data and subsequently refined and tested, the findings of the study, and so forth. Using the audit trail as a guide, an independent, third-party auditor examines the inquirer’s study in order to attest to the dependability of procedures employed and to examine whether findings are confirmable, that is, whether they are logically derived from and grounded in the data that were collected” (p. 449).
In the end, in research such as this, dependability of the study is achieved through continuous reflection on the problems and issues at hand, and through continued dialogue with stakeholders in the various settings that have bearing on the study, and through continued dialogic discussions with peers who are able to help steer the researcher in the direction of formation of logical conclusions, in addition to grounding them in the data of the research.

Therefore, reliability of this study not only rests on unimpeachable documentation and third party auditing, but also, and equally important, is the employment of a dialogic partner—someone who is an auditor of data gathering and processing and conscience of the effort. In the end, however, reliability (meaning, trustworthiness, credibility, and dependability) was achieved through continuous reflection on the problems and issues of the research, and through continued dialogue with stakeholders and peers in various settings, enabling this writer to form reasonable conclusions that can be grounded and explained by the data.

2.4 Data Analysis and Reduction

The qualitative methods that inform this research obtain from a holistic understanding of the historical, sociological/anthropological, and educational contexts of the study. It is axiomatic in this kind of approach to determine that the human being, in his or her context, is the unit of measure because human behaviour is always bound to historical, social, cultural and pedagogical contexts (Ary, et al, 1990). This study utilises qualitative paradigm concepts to analyse and reduce available data. “Data reduction refers to the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming the data that appear in written up field notes or transcriptions,” according to Miles and
Huberman (1994). Thus, reduction is a basic part of the analysis process that allows for manageability based on the principle of selectivity.

2.4.1 Data Analysis Procedures

As has been noted earlier in this chapter and in the first, this study is designed to explore the views of community stakeholders in regards to the learning and teaching of Arabic in the school district of Dearborn. This research, a form of applied educational anthropology and sociology, aims at providing information about the significance (if such existed) of Arabic to members of the Arab American community (parents, children and other stakeholders), along with non-Arab Americans (to the degree that one could detect). The collected data is in the form of simple questionnaires, taped oral interviews, taped focus group discourses and other textual material (e.g. field notes, personal accounts and documentary evidence from archival sources). In focusing on themes and patterns, the researcher trains his sights on observing elements of beliefs and actions in the discourses of participants, particularly interview and focus group respondents. Mentions and noticings constitute important tools in capturing and analysing data.

What are “mentions”? In simplest of terms, mentions are ideas and themes that are generated (mentioned) by research participants in the course of responding to research questions or through regular dialogue. Mentions are important because they begin to establish a pattern of thought regarding issues at hand; they introduce basic notions and ideas that are held to be important by the research informants and respondents. In other words, mentions become “guide posts” along the way of triangulating on some issue or issues, which the research aims at focusing. Consequently, mentions were the basic unit of data analysis that are utilised in this study to mine the discourses of students, teachers,
parents, community members, and other school personnel among others. In doing so, mentions constitute the themes that were repeated by individuals in their elaborations regarding their environments and assessment of them.

The researcher employs the mentions tool to analyse the data from an interpretational, structural and reflective perspectives. This sense-making process is achieved in a descriptive framework that draws heavily on the historical context of the problem from a critical perspective (as stated in Section 1.3 in Chapter One). Mentions are an important tool in “zeroing in” on certain ideas, patterns or motifs that are presented in the discourse of research participants (e.g. interviews, focus groups, casual discussions). Although this is an educational issue, its sociological and anthropological dimensions are not ignored; that is to say, the emergent themes are placed in their historical contexts as functions of social problems and cultural issues with their educational impact scrutinised. In other words, the seeming cultural clash between the two protagonist groups (Arab Americans and non-Arab Americans in Dearborn) is observed through the prism of a sociological conflict paradigm.

But, what are “noticings”? In a sense, they are the other side of the mentions’ coin—that is, they are a way of perceiving the focus of the research in a systematic way. Noticings are an invaluable tool in is the researcher’s arsenal because they equip him/her with a valid and credible (reliable) way of assimilating the research environment. John Mason (1992) of Open University in the UK developed this methodology of research in which he advocated the disciplined way of narrating experience of professionals, calling it “noticings”. According to Hardy et al. (1995), “[t]he intention [behind noticings] is to be able to turn unexaminable experience, in the sense I have described, into enterable
moments, recognisable by colleagues as resonating with their experiences. It is about articulating and symbolising experience, and by working with that articulation” (Online access).

Daniel Hunter (2000) suggests that noticings are observations without judgement, adding:

“Noticing is a tool for examining something non-judgementally and openly. It can be useful when self-reflection or analysis is useful — for example, in conflicts, trainings, strategy sessions, or when feedback is called-for. Noticing can be an elicitive and democratic way of exposing issues, insights, questions, or confusions — which all enhance learning. Noticing can help keep us from falling into stereotypes or assumptions…”

Pointing out that it is a tool developed in Philadelphia (building on Hardy, Hanely and Wilson, 1994), Hunter suggests that noticings allow for the following: 1-promotion of respondent feedback; 2-establishes a learner-learner relationship between the researcher and respondent; 3-transformation of criticism into supportive assistance; and, 4- encouragement of open-ended speculation (ibid.).

Noticings, therefore, are the appropriate cornerstone tool to generate, categorize, and assist in analysis of raw data for this research. As a system, it provides the opportunity for the researcher to develop an on-going relationship with respondents and stakeholders alike, to draw on their expertise, and to enlist their assistance in developing a trajectory for the ideas of the study. As Hunter pointed out, there is the potential for an on-going loop of feedback that is predicated on partnership of learning on both sides, creating a supportive environment that encourages more speculation about the needs and issues of the community of focus. This tool is employed in particular during the focus group and interview processes that this researcher conducted as well as other contexts.
The nature of qualitative inquiry is that it permits the investigator to reflect on the material while in the process of gathering the research. It, therefore, allows inductive analysis as the mainstay of the project. Inductive analysis proceeds from the data to hypothesis to theory. As the researcher reduces and reconstructs the material through coding and categorization, an attempt is made to develop grounded theory, a theory that is directly applicable (grounded) in the material of the research about the phenomenon under study (Strauss, 1987). This is achieved in any one or all of the following ways:

Interpretive Analysis: Generally speaking, qualitative practitioner research is an umbrella term that covers variety of methods that use interpretive, structural, and reflective research analysis in approaches. Not unlike the case study methodology addressed earlier in this chapter, interpretive analysis is utilised in deciphering data other than what is yielded through the case study. Interpretive analysis thus refers to the idea that a researcher will seek out constructs, themes, and patterns in discourses and cultural material, regardless of source, to describe and explain these phenomena. That is, in a sense, “…to develop categories from the data which might reflect the culture and its people…” (Kellehear, 1993: 33). This is a method that has been applied in the process of generating data and creating significance from it for this study.

Structural analysis refers to looking for patterns in discourses, texts, events or other phenomena, with no explanation of the meaning of such patterns. In a sense, it is the most positivist approach within the qualitative research paradigm. The object here is to document for patterns. Structural analysis approach was also utilised to ascertain patterns in the discourses, texts and event among other phenomena that were examined for the purpose of this study.
Reflective analysis, on the other hand, is the most practitioner research paradigm-friendly approach of the three named so far. While all three approaches are very paradigmatically qualitative, reflective analysis is the one that most fits the action research model that is mostly adhered to in this research effort. In effect, reflective analysis is, in common parlance, the “gut-reaction” of the individual researcher to the research environment.

Reflective analysis supports the use of personal judgement and intuition in examining and depicting the human condition within the focus of the research environment. One important aspect of this form of analysis is that it allows for the researcher to accept becoming intimately aware of the focus of research, and, later, in presenting the outcome of the research, and may be able to draw those interested in the subject matter to become equally interested. This research study makes maximum use of reflective analysis, exploiting the researcher’s personal judgement and intuition in examining the issues and settings of the research.

To summarise the principle behind the approach of this study, qualitative data analysis tends to be “primarily an inductive process of organizing data into categories and identifying patterns (relationships) among the categories” (McMillan & Schumacher, 1993). Also, qualitative analyses tend not to follow a linear procedure as statistical analyses do. Instead they tend to occur in several cyclical, overlapping phases in which the researcher moves back and forth between different levels, making it a unique process for each study. Furthermore, there are numerous overlaps among the different approaches and sometimes seemingly few distinct boundaries between them. Nonetheless, the
distinct components or combination of components identifies each approach as being part of the qualitative tradition.

In sum, qualitative research is a calling for words and images inspired by qualitative and critical inquiry, and reflections on those inquiries. Papers, poems, and paragraphs; fragments, figments, and well-formed arguments are put together in an attempt to create a journalistic form somewhat in the shape of collage: "To write...on the model of collage would be to avoid the portrayal of cultures as organic wholes or as unified, realistic worlds subject to a continuous explanatory discourse" (Clifford, 1988:146).

The hope behind this study is to provide insights into the conditions of Arab Americans in the city of Dearborn, mollifying a need for more information and research on this ethnic community in the context of education, Arabic as a Foreign Language learning and teaching, and Arabic as a heritage language education. The outcomes of this research study might also prove useful for comparative work with similarly-placed ethnic communities—in addition to furthering the cause of better understanding of the Arab American community in Dearborn, in Michigan, and in America.
Chapter Three
Historical Perspective on Arab Americans

3.1 Arabs and America

Arabs have been part of the American social fabric for at least a century before the dawn of the third millennium. Even so, this fact has been ignored by the American social imagination because somehow conceiving of Arabs as a group from which to draw citizens for America runs counter intuitive to ideas held about the peoples and cultures of the region. Thus undiscovered, Arabs remain outside the pale of genetic makeup of American society. Largely, this is due to history of prejudice and racism that impacts America’s view of that part of the world. Therefore, in order to understand the Arab (and to an equal extent, the Muslim) experience in America, such an effort has to be placed in the framework of American understanding and definition(s) of the categories “Arab” and “Middle East”.

3.1.1 The Arab World and the Middle East

The Arab world and the Middle East, although they are not the same region, are often interchangeable synonyms in the American popular mindscape. To Americans, Arabs are Middle Easterners and conversely the same is true, reducing a rich diversity to monolithic proportions, while assigning negative significance to the cultural traits of these peoples, and minimising their contributions to world history and culture. This conflation and devaluation are largely due to deep-seated tendency towards othering and generalised Orientalism that defines the Arab and Muslim worlds in simplistic and
unattractive terms. While the Arabs inhabit parts of southwest Asia and North Africa, in the main the roots of Arab Americans spring from the Greater Syria (and parts of Iraq) region, and to lesser extent southern Arabia and Egypt. Due to this historical fact, it is wise to investigate the history of the region as it pertains to Syro-Arab immigration to the Americas.

3.1.2 Land and History

In order to understand the Arab immigrant experience, it is necessary to gain a perspective in some general way on the history of Greater Syria, whence the early Arab immigrants came. The purpose of this chapter is twofold: first to acquaint the reader with the general contours of civilisation which produced Syrian life, and second, to set the stage for the reasons of emigration. Being limited in scope for the purposes of this dissertation, a general view of this history is offered below as a way to access the background which formed the Syrians and prompted them to travel abroad to establish new lives elsewhere.

3.1.3 Syrian Geography

Greater Syria is a geographic region bounded in the west by the Mediterranean Sea and in the south by Egypt and the Arabian Peninsula. In the east, Syria meets Iraq, ancient Mesopotamia, and in the north the Anatolian Plateau. Greater Syria today is home to several states: the Syrian Arab Republic, the Lebanese Republic, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, the State of Israel, and the Palestine National Authority, presumed soon to become the State of Palestine. Additionally, both Turkey and Iraq have parts of their national territories in what is considered historical and natural Syria. “Natural Syria” is a phrase used to designate a certain territory that is marked by natural boundaries,
namely: the Sinai Desert and the Arabian Desert in the south, the Mediterranean Sea in the west, the Taurus Mountains in the north, and the Syrian Desert which spreads into Iraq in the east.

Geographically, Greater Syria can be conceived of in terms of three regions: the coastlands, the mountains, and the valleys and plains whose beyond is the desert. Mediterranean Syria is a narrow plain of fertile territory bounded in the east by mountain ranges. It is the home of Syria’s ancient seafarers—such maritime cities dotting the coast as Latakia, Tartus, Tripoli, Byblos, Beirut, Sidon, Tyre, Jaffa, Acre, and Gaza. This area is home to ancient agricultural settlements, merchant towns, and seaport trading. Petran describes the mountain regions as follows:

“A succession of river gorges and plains cuts the coastal mountain range into separate blocks…. Southward, where the Nusayriyah and Lebanon ranges hinder east-west movement, there are only two easy routes inland: the Tripoli-Homs gap between the Nusayriyah and Lebanon ranges and the Esdraelon plain at the southern end of the Lebanon range. The chief invasion and trade route from Egypt and the coast led through the Megiddo (Armageddon) pass in the Carmel range across this plain to the Jordan and on through to the Yarmuk valley to inland Syria. The isolated valleys and ravines of the Nusayriyah and Lebanon ranges have always offered a refuge to the heterodox” (Petran, 1972: 18).

The adjacent mountain ranges (beyond the valleys to the east) stretch from south to north meeting the highlands of the Kurdish Dagh that move east towards the Euphrates River. The Anti-Lebanon starts in the area under the plateau of the ancient cities of Homs and Hamath, and extend southward to Mount Hermon. The Zabadani depression in the environs of Damascus is a natural corridor, separating Mount Hermon from the range, descending in the south into the Hawran and Golan Plateaux. The barren and high Anti-Lebanon branches out into the northeast into the desert, while the valley between the
mountain ranges forms the Biqaa’ Plain in central coastal Syria (now in Lebanon). In the south, the land literally sinks into the Dead Sea.

Greater Syria has several major rivers; however, unlike the Nile or the Tigris and Euphrates in Egypt or Iraq, they did not promote geographic unity, nor were they utilised for extensive transportation. Rather, Syria’s rivers constituted natural barriers, providing sources for irrigation and, along with other topographic features, creating sub-regions. The Orontes (al-‘Aasi, in Arabic, meaning “the Rebel”) is one such river, originating in central Lebanon, moving northward into modern Syria, then reaching the sea near the ancient city of Antioch, now in Turkey. Not far from where the Orontes springs, the Litani River (Leontis) also originates in modern southern Lebanon, travelling through the Mount Lebanon range, reaching the Mediterranean nearby the city of Tyre, emptying into the sea. To the south, the Jordan River, springing from the slopes of Mount Hermon, flows through the Jordan Valley, culminating in the Dead Sea, one of the world’s saltiest waters. The Yarmuk River flows in the Syrian Golan Heights region along the border with the modern day state of Jordan, while the Jordan River separates the Kingdom of Jordan from Israel and Palestine. The Barada River flows in the Damascus Oasis, while the Khabur and Balikh rivers flow from the north into the great Euphrates River that originates in the Anatolian Plateau, which in turn moves eastward into Iraq, eventually washing into the Shatt al-Arab waterway in the Arabian/Persian Gulf (Petran, 1972: 21-23).

The region’s famed Fertile Crescent western half belongs to Greater Syria. This semicircle constitutes the grasslands, which hosted civilisation from ancient times to the present. Beyond the mountains, sandwiched against the barrenness of the interior deserts,
there lie the cities of Damascus, Amman, Homs, Hama and Aleppo. In the south, Amman (ancient Philadelphia) and Jerusalem are to be found. They are more or less founded in parallel to coastal cities on or nearby oases that served as transit points to the interior and the gateway to the desert trade throughout history. Syria’s share of the Fertile Crescent, aside from the coastal region, is composed of the plains of Hawran in the south, the Ghoutah of Damascus, the plains of Homs, Hama, and Aleppo, and in the north, al-Jazira (the Island, it being in a sea of sands) in the northeast. To the south, the fertile plains of the hilly Palestinian terrain are to be found, extending in what is now called the West Bank. East of this area is the location of Ghawr al-Urdun, the Jordan Valley.

3.1.4 Ancient Syria

Historically, Greater Syria’s segmented and blocked terrain, unlike the openness of Egypt and Mesopotamia, prevented the rise of political unity (Petran, 1972:21). Rather, its topography promoted the establishment of city-states. However, Greater Syria’s city-states were more often than not united on a cultural plane—and in this feature, they resembled their neighbours later in time, the Greeks. Throughout history, the Syrians were bound to each other by linguistic affinities, deriving from their mainly Semitic heritage. A succession of peoples, whose heritages were similar, inhabited Syria and later combined to form from its various peoples Syria’s population. Invariably, political unity in the region was superimposed from outside Syria, whether from Egypt or Mesopotamia, or later from powers of the Greco-Roman world (Goitein, 1974:1). Nonetheless, if ancient Syria did not have a native unifying local government, indeed, Damascus served as the first city among equals, and a central point for the greater region.
The Syrian people from ancient times to the present constituted a mixture of many ethnic backgrounds. Syria is home to major manifestations of early settled life and its succession of peoples, who always intermingled, contributed to the rise of civilisation in the eastern Mediterranean, influencing the early Greeks and through them the rest of Western civilisation. Syria’s Phoenicians gave the Western world its alphabet system (Cheilik, 1969: 36), while its Hebrews offered a peculiarly moral conception of life (Johnson, 1987: 30; Cantor, 1994: 8-11). Later, its Hellenised Aramaens and Byzantines imprinted the world with their forms of Christianity (Cheilik, 1969: 229-30). Subsequently, Syria’s Arabs consolidated a state that made the spread of Islam to the ends of the known world possible (Saunders, 1972: 77-85, 188). Syria’s contributions to the train of civilisation is unequivocal, and its imprints very remarkable.

Syria’s people come from many origins and linguistic backgrounds (Mansfield, 1991:1-5). However, one aspect of this country’s history is certain: Syria is the central home of the Semitic peoples. The earliest inhabitants of Syria may have spoken languages other than Semitic ones (likely Sumerian as well as others), but circa 3000 BCE pastoral groups ascended from the inner fringes of the Fertile Crescent and increasingly encroached onto the plains (ibid.).

This pattern seems to have repeated itself every thousand years. At first it was the Amorites who arrived in Syria’s north, then an offshoot of the Amorites, known as the Canaanites, settled the coastal lands, giving birth to sea traders, whom the Greeks called Phoenicians. The Hebrews and Arameans arrived into Syria during the second millennium, while the Arab advances (the Nabateans) from the desert arrived in waves in the first millennium, establishing petty kingdoms in the Syrian Desert and its fringes.
Later, the Arab Muslims arrived in the seventh century of the Common Era, creating from Syria a centre of an Arab Empire (Hitti, 1990:147-52; Hourani, 1992:22-5).

Although no one can claim certainty as to the origins of the Semites, it is certain that they eventually made Syria, Iraq, parts of Egypt, and the Arabian Peninsula their home. They may have originated in Arabia or perhaps in Syria and Iraq. Nevertheless, the so-called Near East is their natural home, from which they grew and expanded into many similar cultural groups (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1969, Vol. 20: 208). Along with the Semites, another group also flourished, perhaps originating from Arabia’s islands of Bahrain: the Sumerians, who established a great civilisation in Iraq and ventured into Syria. Their ancestors are likely to be the Dilmun of Bahrain.

Although Syria’s historical people are of mixed Semitic and Sumerian origins, many peoples invaded the country to establish it as part of one empire or another. First there were the Hittites, Hurrians, and Hyksos of the north, then the Egyptians from the south. From the east came the Assyrians and the Babylonians, and later the Persians. From across the Mediterranean came the “Sea Peoples”— and later the Greeks and Hellenes—only to be succeeded by the Romans. The eastern Romans of Byzantium, an Hellenic civilisation, gave way to Arab control and later to Turkic and Ottoman sovereignty over Syria. This ended early in the twentieth century CE, giving way to European mandatory powers, which was and is regarded as reminiscent of the presence of the Crusaders a thousand years earlier.

3.1.5 Arab Syria

When the Muslim Arabs arrived into Syria as conquerors (634 CE) although Byzantium was militarily superior, it did not inspire the Syrians to loyalty (Hitti, 1970:
In fact, the majority of Syrians viewed the Arabs, whom they identified as neighbours and of kin stock, as deliverers from Byzantine religious oppression (Lewis, 1966: 49; 57-8; Saunders, 1972: 46). Syria’s hinterlands had been the home of many Christian heresies that Byzantine emperors were obliged to obliterate in upholding the orthodoxy of Church beliefs. In this milieu, Islam was accepted, if not as a new faith, at least then as another “heresy” of one more “sectarian” group. The Arabs did not impose Islam on the population. Rather, the new conquerors were satisfied to rule the country with least interference with the varied ethnic and religious groups, provided they did not rebel against the new political order, and satisfied their obligation of paying poll taxes in exchange for their defence (Hitti, 1970: 97-8, 137-9; Lewis, 1966: 57, 68). This policy in time attracted Syrians to Islam and gradually led the country into a process of cultural Arabicisation, abandoning its former Aramaic language (Lewis, 1966: 93).

The Arabicisation of Syria did not fully Islamise the country (Mansfield, 1991: 15-6). And it was only until a few hundred years later that Arabic took hold in the Muslim provinces, and Islam remained the faith of the major cities of the coast and interior (Lewis, 1966: 132). The mountainous regions remained the refuges of ancient and new heresies and sects. Syria’s liberation from Byzantine rule and its incorporation into the Islamic state and later empire established it as an epicentre of political and economic power. When the core of the Islamic Empire shifted east to Baghdad in the eighth century CE, Syria remained an economic power linking the western parts of the empire with its eastern flanks. Moreover, Syria was not only the gateway to Islam’s two holiest cities of Mecca and Medina in Arabia, but also the seat of its third holiest city of Jerusalem.
The weakening of the Arab element’s control of the Abbasid Empire’s administration led to the introduction of new ethnic elements that vied for political enfranchisement and control throughout the sprawl of the Arabo-Islamic state (Lewis, 1966: 92). The weakening of the Abbasid dynasty, and, later, the Mongol invasions and the sacking of Baghdad in 1258 CE, and consequently the gradual loss of traditional Arab power in favour of Turkic elements, led to the creation of a variety of petty dynasties within the Muslim empire. This culminated in the rise of one such dynasty to rule over the vastness of Mediterranean holdings of the Muslim world. The Ottomans sprang from the Asian steppes, finally delivering the coup de grace to the Byzantine Empire in 1453 CE, establishing a new order in the region that was to end only early in the twentieth century CE.

3.1.6 Ottoman Syria

Syria’s Ottoman age began in 1516 CE, inheriting a province of great importance politically and strategically from other Turkic rulers. It was still the gateway to Arabia’s holy shrines, the seat of Islam’s earlier capital, Damascus, and the crossroads of a new and future empire, reaching westward beyond Egypt, eastward into Iraq and the borders of Persia, and northward into Anatolia and eastern Europe. The Ottomans established a decentralised martial state whose capital was old Constantinople, and organised its political structure along confessional lines, where religious communities of all stripes enjoyed self-governing status in accordance with their religious laws and customs (Hitti, 1970: 727). The Ottoman Sultan exercised power through his governors (pashas) and sub-governors, who were supported by, and whose powers were checked by military garrisons stationed in key regional cities (Petran, 1972: 41). The Ottoman State was a
feudal autocracy (Lewis, 1966: 160-2). The Sultan or his provincial governors farmed out territories to subordinate local lords and chiefs, who theoretically were dismissed at will, but in practice a large number of them became hereditary rulers (Hourani, 1992: 251). In large measure, these ruling elites were given a great deal of latitude in matters of local rule and tax collection. This system remained operative until the latter part of the seventeenth century CE as new international and local forces emerged, forcing some changes (Petran, 1972:42).

The Ottomans were stopped in 1683 CE at the gates of Vienna, marking the end of Ottoman power and a turning point in the long history of the Empire’s retreat. It also signalled the rise of European power in its many guises, which had a profound significance and impact for Syria and other parts of the region (Mansfield, 1991: 34).

The Ottoman Empire was gradually ensnared into a series of Treaties of Capitulations with Western powers, beginning with France and Britain in the sixteenth-century, and later, virtually with every European state (Mansfield, 1991: 35-8; Hourani, 1992: 258-9). Under these agreements, the Europeans paid low customs on products imported into the Empire (Petran, 1971: 42). The net effect of European encroachment into the region led to disruption of local economies as the new trade competed against local goods, their manufacture installations causing hardship to local enterprises (Hitti, 1990: 727-8). Significantly, Ottoman gold began to flow outside the Empire into Europe, impoverishing the local economies and perhaps preventing the rise of Ottoman capitalism (ibid.). Moreover, a local elite developed around the European trade, which had two effects: first, encouraging dealing with the West, and second, alienating that segment from the rest of the population, especially since they were of minority backgrounds.
Petran suggests that “[t]he indigenous mercantile bourgeoisie which developed as the broker and agent of European trade was almost exclusively Christian and Jewish, and enjoyed virtually the same extra-territorial privileges as did foreigners” (1971: 42-3).

Thus, the new global politics of the times and the resultant shift in power allowed the Europeans to embed themselves deeply in Ottoman political and economic affairs, including and most notably in Syria.

During the eighteenth century CE the Ottoman Empire was retreating before the mounting military and economic strength of the European states. At this time, the Europeans took the initiative against that Muslim state, acquiring one victory after another on all levels—militarily, economically, and politically. Mansfield states:

“The European Christian powers went decisively over to the offensive. During the eighteenth century the Ottomans suffered defeat three times at the hands of the Russians and in 1774 a turning point was reached when the Sultan was obliged to grant political independence to the Tartars and hand over substantial territories to the Empress Catherine The Great. The most important clause [in the treaty] from Turkey’s point of view was the one which allowed Russia to claim the right to protect all Orthodox subjects of Turkey…” (1990: 103).

That the Sultan had allowed a foreign sovereign the “right” to “protect” Ottoman subjects was a capitulation that betrayed true weakness, something which was to be repeated again elsewhere in the Empire (e.g., Mount Lebanon). However, the most striking contour of the new situation was the Ottoman sovereign’s acquiescence to release the Muslim Tartars from his protection into the hands of a Christian power. Yet as grave as the circumstance appeared, it consistently grew worse, from the perspective of the Empire, leading to further losses. Initially the friction, which marred the Euro-Ottoman relationship, can be contextualised in terms of historical Christian-Muslim rivalry and struggle for religious primacy. However, the rise of Europe this time signalled a new
dimension to this relationship—modern European imperialism, which grew from inter-European political and economic competition.

Napoleon Bonaparte’s invasion of Egypt in 1798 not only proclaimed to the Ottoman Muslims the degraded nature of their strength, it heralded a new stage in their history—one characterised by foreign domination and loss of decision-making power, even to this day. The Bonaparte expedition was an attempt by the French to acquire Egypt as a stepping-stone towards India in order to drive out the British. Control of Egypt’s Isthmus of Suez would force the British to navigate around the Cape of Good Hope in southern Africa (Breunig, 1977: 57). Unsatisfied with his conquest of Egypt, Breunig reports, Napoleon invades Syria where he meets with successes only to retreat because of disease into Egypt (ibid.). From this we can deduce that the region’s significance to Europeans is that it is no longer of spiritual concern with ancillary economic benefits. Rather, the primary focus is economic—where the “real-estate” of the region served as a staging ground for further adventures east (Lewis, 1966:168-70).

Beginning with the nineteenth century CE, the decline of the central authorities of the Muslim regions gave rise to increased interest in the Arab world as a source of economic exploitation. Although the Napoleonic expedition into Egypt alarmed the British and other Europeans, their concern was for protecting their imperial interests in the area. No sooner had the French left Egypt, and as it progressively became an autonomous province under Muhammad Ali and his successors, they returned in force with other Europeans seeking commercial enterprise, facilitating its breakaway from the Empire. The most important European project in Egypt was the construction of the Suez Canal, which ended in 1869.
The new economic realities of a rising Europe relegated Syria to a dependent agricultural province. European manufacturers competed against local craftsmen and artisans, while at the same time, agricultural products flooded Syria from Europe. This left Syrians only one major economic outlet, namely, a reduced agricultural sector that was heavily competed against from the outside. Additionally, taxation increased in order to replace lost revenues from trade and, consequently, incomes decreased, leaving lower end farmers perennially in debt, and ripe for rebellion.

This turn in fortunes left Syrians with a feeling of ill will towards their ruling elites and their Ottoman masters, as well as the Europeans who acted on their lives behind the scenes. Hence, increasingly it can be observed that Syrian agriculture suffered throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries because of foreign trade, local insecurity, and foreign intrusion into their affairs. The Syrians were literally sandwiched between oppressive taxation, dwindling resources, and lack of security, while Arabian Tribesmen attacked, robbed and devastated the Syrian countryside adjacent to the desert (Petran, 1972: 43). This general trend promoted the abandonment of arable lands and the move into cities, thus affecting negatively the state of agriculture. As the volume of cultivated lands shrank, increasing pressure grew in urban areas where economic difficulties already existed. By the middle of the nineteenth century, the Syrians were ready for some change in the status quo.

3.1.7 Egyptian Interlude

Significantly, Egypt—an autonomous province of the Empire under the leadership of Muhammad Ali and his son Ibrahim—began to entertain ideas of separating from the Empire and forming its own Arabic-speaking enlarged state, as has happened many times
throughout the region’s history. Syria was a prize that Muhammad Ali wanted, and, as Egypt’s strength increased through political alliances with Europe, it challenged Constantinople for primacy in Syria (Petran: 1972: 45-6; Mansfield, 1990: 108-10). In this, Europeans who wanted to break Ottoman hold on Syria aided Egypt. Therefore, in 1831, Ibrahim invaded Syria and defeated the Ottomans, gaining the province to a newly enlarged state (Hitti, 1970, 725-6; Mansfield, 1985: 108-9). The Syrians, tired of their losses economically and politically, hailed the arrival of Ibrahim’s forces as “liberators” from the Ottoman Sultan (Petran, 1972: 45).

Ibrahim soon pursued a program of complete restructuring of the body politic of Syria (Mansfield, 1991: 55-9). Having some support of European powers, he introduced secular changes and a centralised government that soon offended the sensibilities of the majority of Syrians. Ibrahim ended the role of “feudal tax lords,” appointed local governors and rulers responsible directly to him, formed local councils that included minorities and Christians, and instituted a system of direct taxes (Petran, 1972:45-6). In short, the new regime alienated most of the local elites and irked the general population. Syrians saw minority members, previously relegated to minor roles, becoming more invested and power-wielding in the public arena, especially in light of the fact that these minority groups had acquired, under European “protection,” more privileges than the majority exercised (Hourani, 1992:274-5). What is more, Ibrahim introduced conscription, which the Syrians generally disliked, but from which the Christian population was exempt.

These secularised reforms antagonised most, especially those Syrians who had benefited from the status quo ante and resented the increasing empowerment of religious
minorities at the majority’s expense. These religious minorities, mainly various Christian sects and Jews, benefited from European tutelage as “middlemen minorities,” enjoying privileges that alienated the Muslim majority, leading to the birth of animosities, and taking on religious overtones (Hitti, 1990: 735-6).

Petran adds that “...Ibrahim facilitated European intervention in Syrian affairs by encouraging foreign missions, schools, and consulates to establish themselves in the hinterland, even in the holy cities of Jerusalem and Damascus” (ibid.: 46). In many ways the Syrians experienced a psychology of siege that first began under the Ottomans because of the capitulations, and then was exacerbated under the Egyptian interlude. Ibrahim’s reliance on minorities made his regime suspect and hated:

“The fact that Syrian Christians were already under the protection of the European powers, especially France, meant that Ibrahim would rely upon and co-operate with Christians. In fact, he gave his administration a most secular style. His efforts to remove the disabilities under which Christians and Jews laboured troubled the Muslim majority. . . . Ibrahim, however, not only enforced equality of status; he was even pro-Christian. He employed many Christians in his administration, rearmed the Christians of the Lebanon, and used Christian troops to suppress Druze and Nusayri rebellions. These measures alarmed and angered Muslims, particularly because special relations tied the non-Muslim communities to the Christian European powers which had assumed their ‘protection’” (Petran, 1971: 46).

Syrian disaffection with Egyptian control, fuelled by British and Ottoman agents, culminated in several rebellions throughout the period of Egypt’s rule over Syria (from 1831 to 1840). Increasingly, Muslims in Syria felt that their way of life was under attack and the beneficiaries were members of communities estimated to be a “fifth column” in their midst. This general feeling allowed for an environment hospitable to a return to Ottoman sovereignty. Moreover, European pressures forced Muhammad Ali to withdraw his troops into Egyptian soil (Hitti, 1990:725; 733-7). Hitti explains that the Egyptian
presence in Syria had strengthened the British hand against the French, as well as the Ottoman Porte. The British used their power to aid the Ottomans against the Egyptians, and thus the Ottomans returned with the help of Anglo-Austrian troops (Petran, 1972: 46).

At the time (1840), the area of Mount Lebanon, an autonomous district under a local Emir, boiled against Ibrahim’s measures of increased taxation and conscription. The uprising, which began in Palestine in 1834, soon spread throughout Syria, particularly, its Lebanon region, and its instigators demanded a change in Egyptian policy. The rebels were not only supported by Ottoman agents, but by the British as well. The Lebanese demanded an end to conscription and refused to disarm, something which Muhammad Ali had ordered. In short, Europe had instigated Egypt to invade Syria in order to weaken the hand of the Ottomans; however, when Egypt threatened the very existence of the Ottoman Empire, it was to Europe’s, especially Britain’s, advantage to limit Egypt’s power in order to secure the European system, of which the Ottomans were a part.

3.1.8 Ottoman Restoration

The Ottoman restoration brought into Syria the Tanzimat, a series of reforms, like Ibrahim’s, which aimed at bringing Syria under a more centralised and modernised form of government (Hourani, 1992: 272). Lewis explains that Ottoman reform measures brought centralisation and professionalisation of government functionaries in the provinces, and the previously ruling elites were now relegated to dominance in “...economic and administrative life” (1966: 168). Ottoman rule, however, given that the balance of power had been in Europe’s favour, brought with it an increased Western presence in the province, and more “protection” of non-Muslim minorities (Hitti, 1970:
The Empire had signed yet another treaty of capitulation to Europe in 1838, which now applied to Syria, bringing that province’s economy under complete domination. Trade, the backbone of the mercantile cities, suffered immeasurably at the hands of European competition of goods (facilitated by local minorities). Gradually, Muslims found no other economic outlet other than the already devastated agricultural sector. Yet, this pressure necessitated new reforms, enacted in 1858, for the purpose of a more streamlined process of taxation of big landholdings (Petran, 1972: 47).

While Syria’s gold (money and resources) was being siphoned out, as elsewhere in the Empire, into Europe, its trade continued to lay in the hands of “middlemen minorities” (Zenner, 1987: 400-18). Its decision-making process was centralised in a weakened imperial government, and its shrinking agricultural lands had become part of great land holdings, benefiting a few, while many went unrelieved and sank deeper into poverty. This general environment of European encroachment on the everyday life of Syrians, coupled with rapid changes instituted by the Ottomans to salvage their crumbling empire, promoted anxieties, which eventually flared into open hostilities directed against Europeans and their local clients, and ultimately against the Sultan and his imperial government (Hourani, 1992: 277).

Likewise, Ottoman control in Greater Syria oscillated between two extreme ends: greater autonomy and centralised rule—all depending on the currents of European politics and the fortunes of the Ottoman sultans whose power and prestige increasingly dwindled, while the possessions of the Western powers were enlarging everywhere—in the Maghreb, Egypt, Iraq, Arabia, and Syria. Syria, whose chances ebbed and flowed in direct proportion to events in Egypt and Turkey, had been administered by the Ottomans
in portions allotted to governors who ruled the province for them. With European machinations in the background, petty governors in Syria endeavoured to increase their powers, at the expense of the Constantinople authorities, through local alliances and by means of securing backing from European sponsors. Such is the case with Lebanon, which at one point gained autonomy for its Maronite community and an occupation army from France in 1864, marking the establishment of *Mutasarrifiyyat Jabal Lubnan* (self-government of Mount Lebanon) (Hourani, 1992: 322-3) in order to help end the Lebanese Civil War of 1860 which Europeans helped instigate in the first place.

### 3.1.9 Mount Lebanon – European Foothold

Given the topic of this chapter, the history of Mount Lebanon has special significance. It is the region from whence the early immigrants came. During the last decades of the Ottoman Empire, the area of Mount Lebanon, mainly inhabited by Maronites (Eastern Rites Catholics) and Druze (an offshoot Isma‘iliya sect of Islam), had achieved special status within the Empire. This was due in large measure to increasing European involvement in the region, particularly the French, and because of the historic nature of the region which had always been a refuge of sectarian groups and minorities.

Mount Lebanon, the core from which the modern Lebanese state was later established, constituted an important region for French influence, both economic and political. Politically, the district afforded France (and other European powers) a foothold in the Empire to promote its interests. Chief among these interests was economic concerns—creating markets for European products, raw materials, and industrial products (Hitti, 1970: 728). As described above, Lebanon enjoyed special protections from
European powers because of its Christians. Hitti reports that the Ottoman restoration in Syria brought with it strife in the Lebanon region which he attributes to Ottoman instigation in order to bring Lebanon more firmly under the authorities’ hands (ibid.). Hourani explains that the general decline of the “world of Islam” coupled with economic dislocation expressed itself in violence by mid-nineteenth century. He adds that the traditional balance between Christians and Druze in the Lebanon area had been steadily disrupted since 1830 through Ottoman, British, and French interference (1992: 277).

In part, because of the general decline of the Syrian province, Mount Lebanon increasingly became a separate zone under European, particularly French “protection.” It achieved near independence from the Ottomans but replaced them with a European “protectorate” status which had great ramifications for the area’s cultural evolution, social integrity, political sovereignty, and economic well being. The price of European intervention on the side of the Ottomans culminated into the 1860 civil war in which Druze clashed with Maronite and Catholic Melkite Christians as part of the struggle in Syria between the Muslim majority and the European-sponsored minority groups (Naff, 1985: 28). This war brought untold misery on both sides, but it netted the Christian Maronites a stronger control of the region with the establishment of the Mutasarifiyyah government, which was headed by Christians, at the behest of the European powers (ibid.).

Yale suggests that the Lebanese violence was the result of the Maronites’ hope of expelling Druze from the Lebanon, believing that Europe would support them: “The Maronite ecclesiastical leaders, convinced that the European states under French leadership would come to their help, began to prepare for war against the Druzes...”
(Yale, 1958: 80). What is more, the unrest in Lebanon spilled into the rest of Syria with cries of retaliation against the European-sponsored Christians, leading to violence against Christians in Damascus. Yale describes the results in the following:

“Our invoking the Treaty of Paris, the French insisted that the Concert of Europe demand that the Ottoman government live up to its commitments with respect to its Christian subjects. Acting on a proposal by Russia, the Concert authorised France to send an armed force to the Lebanon. A contingent of 12,000 French troops landed in Beirut and proceeded to carry out their mission with the reluctant acquiescence of the Ottoman government. When security was re-established, a Great Power Commission was sent to Beirut to investigate the causes of the troubles, to see that the guilty were punished, and to draft a new political setup for Mount Lebanon.

“Although a marked cleavage between the French who supported the Maronites and the British who backed the Druzes soon developed, the European Powers, together with Turkey, drafted in 1861 a protocol for the Lebanon which served the purpose of a constitution from 1864, when it was put into operation, until 1914, when Turkey entered World War I. The Ottoman government under European pressure, following armed intervention, granted autonomy to Mount Lebanon. The process of imperial dissolution, which had begun in European Turkey during the first quarter of the nineteenth century, commenced in Asian Turkey in 1861 with the Lebanese Protocol” (ibid: 80-1).

As a result, the European powers attempted to seek a new political structure within the Ottoman system to which the Constantinople government could only agree. The subsequent peace of the region prompted prosperity unknown to other parts to Syria. Hitti writes that Lebanon was a special zone which had enjoyed more than some prosperity because of its economic relations with the West as compared with the rest of Syria (1970: 734-6).

Naff suggests that European involvement in Syria and particularly the Mount Lebanon province introduced the region to European influences in the fifty year period following the civil war, adding:
“...during fifty years of ensuing relative security and tranquillity, trade with and travel to the West, particularly by Christians, mounted; transportation and communications were improved or modernized with French capital; Western missionary schools proliferated; new intellectual ideas and ideologies were introduced; economic opportunities multiplied; consumption of staple articles increased; and health conditions improved. In Mount Lebanon, direct and indirect taxes were fixed at a much lower rate than in the rest of Syria and were, therefore, predictable; conscription was prohibited for Christians and non-Christians; and public security was more or less guaranteed by the Western powers (Naff, 1985: 29).

The Mutasarifiyyah regime instituted in Mount Lebanon favoured the Christian population over all others, and, therefore, as Naff says, could not erase deep communal cleavages created by European-sponsored favouritism, especially between the Druze and the Maronites. In fact, the head of this regime had to be a Christian. Nonetheless, the subsequent peace after the civil war was a time of prosperity in Mount Lebanon, but it was also a time of continued decline for the rest of Syria, whose fortunes were dictated by a weakened central government, and more European encroachment. Even though during the second half of the nineteenth century the sultans attempted to introduce changes to secure some semblance of stability, such measures were autocratic in nature and did not end political and economic turmoil in the rest of Syria. Increasingly, the Muslim communities in the other governorates felt that their fortunes were at the mercy of European powers that aimed at their exploitation.

Still, the Ottoman economic and political reform in the latter half of the century did not fail in obtaining some success in regards to establishing a modicum of security after political turmoil, and in improving the economic situation through subsequent order. Ottoman attempts at gaining a better grip on Syria through heavy-handed measures of tough local governors, yielded stability—or, at least, it prevented a downward spiral of social and political disintegration. The Ottoman state subdued the Bedouin tribes of the
fringes, who had for decades disrupted agriculture in the area, broke the back of renegade militias who operated on their own, and continued with its system of conscription of both Muslim and minorities—which was dreaded by all Syrians, who are unaccustomed to this notion of service to the homeland. However, Syrians of all backgrounds were allowed to pay “bedel” [Arabic: badal] (a heavy financial “substitute”) in lieu of military service, a measure which all preferred over military service (Naff, 1985: 31).

But the relative stability and prosperity of the Mount Lebanon region, as compared to the situation in the rest of Syria, led many Syrian Christians and Muslims to take up residence in that area in order to benefit from the better economy, thus, depriving the rest of Syria of tax revenues and manpower. In fact, many also migrated from Syria to Egypt, thus signalling a new trend towards immigration from Syria in general, and foreshadowing a migration trend from the Mount Lebanon area soon to follow. It should be noted, however, that the period from 1860 to 1914 was marked by general economic prosperity: villagers in Greater Syria expanded their cultivated lands, and, in Lebanon, cultivation of silk was spread, according to Hourani (1992: 292). But the increased mobility of the population, the new land-owning groups that drove smaller farmers out of business, and the general feeling of social, religious, and economic dislocation, pushed the Syrians to seek new opportunities elsewhere. It stands to reason that this new setting made for a psychosocial environment that was hospitable to migration.

3.1.10 Social Organisation

We have occasion at this juncture to introduce some common traits and trends that make up the social organisation of Syrian life during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The following is a composite of the basic elements of the social organisation of
Syrian life and are to be understood as gross generalisations, which as such will falter if over-emphasised. Nonetheless, the following outline proposes a general overview of relevant cultural patterns.

Clearly, traditional groups esteem highly the extended family as the backbone of social solidarity and public interaction. Traditional Arab culture is no exception, and, to a great extent, is an example of this form of social organisation, which has been refined through generations of agricultural and tribal living earlier in history. To a great degree, the Syrian family is the nucleus of social life. It is the first source of protection of the individual members of the family and the window through which the world is viewed, and from which interaction takes place. In a real sense, Syrian society in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries can be viewed as “confederations” of families. Hourani assesses this structure in the following:

“In pastoral and village communities alike, the basic unit was the nuclear family of three generations: grandparents, parents and children living together in village houses made of stone, mud-brick or whatever material was locally available... The men were mainly responsible for looking after land or livestock, the women for cooking and cleaning and rearing the children, but they would also help in the fields or with the flocks. Responsibility for dealings with the outside world lay formally with the men” (1992: 105).

The organisation of Syrian life revolves around the family. The concept of the family as the basic social unit, however, refers to the extended family. The nuclear component is a subunit of the extended family, and as such it is not viable on its own without the support systems available within the larger framework of the greater collective. As a form of social organisation, it is a common institution to the region from ancient times to the present. The basic background of this form of social organisation owes itself to the agricultural life of Syria. Moreover, the Arab background of Syrians
with its emphasis on tribal and clan affiliations lends further support to this order of social organisation.

Additionally, the extended family is part of a larger kinship unit, a clan. According to Hourani, this linkage of extended families into a clan deriving from common ancestry, whether real or claimed, is intended to offer the members “...help in case of need, and which would assume responsibility for vengeance if a member of it were harmed or killed” (1992:106). As important as the extended family and the larger clan group is to the general culture, the religious faith of individuals and groups is also an important socio-ethnic marker. Religion is a basic component of personal, social, and ethnic identity. For Muslims in particular, each individual person belongs to the Umma (Nation-Community of Islam) (Eickelman, 1981: 266). While this may be a theoretical construct for Muslims, it is a deeply felt connection—the essence of which cemented the relationship between the Ottoman rulers and their Muslim raeyahs (subjects). In institutional terms, the Muslim community was governed by the system of ulama’, the jurisconsults of the Ottoman Muslim Institution headed by the Grand Mufti of Constantinople, also called by the title, Shaikh-ul-Islam (the Elder of Islam), who constituted with the judges and jurisconsults an important system of “checks and balances” on the powers of the Sultan and his executives.

Moreover, the Ottoman system of the millet operated in accordance with Arab and Byzantine practice, according to Yale, who adds:

“...The Ottoman sultans granted their non-Moslem subjects a limited autonomy under the chief ecclesiastical leader of the different religious sects. All members of the Orthodox Church, whether Albanian, Arab, Bulgar, Rumanian, or Greek by nationality, were subject to the Greek Orthodox patriarch of Constantinople. The members of the Gregorian Armenian Church were subject to the Armenian patriarch. All the other non-Moslem religious groups were like wise subject to the
jurisdiction of their chief ecclesiastical officer. The *Millet* system conferred extensive powers upon the clergy, which made it possible for the priesthood to exert a strong influence over their lay communities” (1958: 19-20).

To speak of a family is also to recognize a religious faith to which that family belongs. As such, religious belonging is the spiritual dimension of the physical family. What is more, regional belonging, an extension of faith and family, constitutes an additional component of identity. The Syrian, first and foremost, is a member of a family, owning a particular set of religious values and practices, and identifies with a region, whether village or district, as the locus of his and her family and social life, constituting *in toto* a culture. A collective of families, sharing a faith and residing in one locale constitute a community.

Within one community one can observe the presence of a uniform class or a set of classes. Historically, depending on the community one belongs to, each group is maintained through the network of families that make up the social group. Traditional family organisation necessitates the presence of a family head, the male who is the *pater familias* of the family unit. Families are “ruled” by their heads to form a community, a clan, whether they are related by blood or through fictive kinship. Together, such communities of families, through their heads, exert their power to protect and promote the interests of members of the families and the group in general (Hourani: 108). Families belonging to the same faith will live in proximity of each other, forming a quarter or section of a village, town or city. In a village setting it is more likely that members of different groups intermingle on a regular basis given their geographic proximity. Inter-communal interaction in the city is limited generally to the quarter or the outer skirts of the locale. General dealings remain within the confines of the group unless there are
needs to be relieved or carried outside the group—which may necessitate the involvement
of the titular head of the family or someone who is of some moral stature. In addition to
this form of communal leadership, religious leadership must be added.

When it comes to religious leadership, a distinction must be made between
mainstream Orthodox Islam and various other religions and their sects. Mention has been
made earlier of the millet system prevalent in the Ottoman Empire. The *millet* (millah,
from the Arabic) means religious or ethnic group or “nation” or “race” in its archaic
sense. In the context of Ottoman structure, it refers to the political system of organising
the empire along socio-religious groups in which every religious minority is governed in
accordance to its personal statute laws which are religious in nature. Therefore, the many
Christian and Jewish communities were governed by their religious hierarchies in
addition to the state functionaries, among whom religious figures acted as intermediaries.

As to the Muslim groups, direct state government included them, given that the
state was run in accordance to *Shari’ah* (Muslim Law). More often than not, heterodox
Muslim groups such as the Shi’ah and their offshoots, as well as the Druze, were not
recognised as millets in the religious sense of the word. Rather, their status was as that of
other Muslims who have gone beyond the pale of orthodoxy and have earned distrust and
dislike of the mainstream establishment—if not outright hostility. Many times
unorthodox Islamic groups had more to fear from the state than did the Christians or Jews
who, in accordance with Islamic principles, were recognised as legitimate religions and
were owed protection as long as they remained loyal to the social and political order. As
has been shown above, the fortunes of minority groups within the Empire continuously
improved at the expense of the majority population. While there was a minimum standard
of protections afforded to Christians and Jews, in contrast to the absence of such protections for heterodox Islamic groups, their privileges were consistently on the rise with European sponsorship, especially in the Mount Lebanon region, disadvantaging the majority population.

In addition to clan, faith, and locale, another important component of social organisation is the occupational status of individuals. A person may be a merchant, a farmer/landholder, a peasant, a religious scholar/jurisconsult, or a government functionary, military or civil. All these vocations contribute to the essence of the individual and his social status within Ottoman society. Generally speaking, an alliance of interest among members of the Ottoman functionaries, the religious consults, and the merchant class, developed. Its purpose was the social grease that benefits all who belonged to the group or class through social relationship, whether by marriage or business.

During the Ottoman period in Syria as elsewhere in the region, guilds of craftsmen also flourished. Hourani notes that even members of the Janissaries, the Ottoman military corps, engaged in trade and crafts, “…and [even] membership of the corps became a kind of property, conferring a right to privileges and pensions, which could be handed on to sons, or be bought by members of civil population” (1992: 237). All in all, Ottoman society was a mixture of many groups, religious and ethnic, and of a variety of socio-economic backgrounds and interests. What brought all members of society together were the political structures that bound them. When the central authorities weakened, local interest and political machinations ruled the day. In the end, the social system of minority groups asserting their interests and needs outlived the
Empire and persisted in many ways in the inheritor states that succeeded the Ottomans and European colonialism.

3.2 Arabs in America: History and Context of Early Arab Immigration

Arab contact with the “New World” can be discussed in terms of two periods. The first is a time of “first contacts” through American or Arab presence in the Arab world or in the Americas, and the second is the period of Arab immigration into the United States. The period of initial contact can be divided into two categories: contact on American soil, and contact on Arab soil. Early history is laced with lore, but factual contours of this story can be discerned through the written record.

3.2.1 First Contacts

While there are claims of Arabs arriving onto the American continent prior to Columbus’s “discovery” of the new world, the first Arab contact with the American world is presumed to be that of an explorer who was a member of the Columbus voyage (O’Connor in Haiek, 1984:9). The sailor, a Moor known by his European name as Louis de Torre, is said to be the ‘linguist’ who was to communicate with Indians on arrival to land. O’Connor also reports that a Moroccan Arab named ‘Istifan the Arab’—who accompanied Fr. Marcos de Niza in an expedition to America in 1539, and may have been killed by Indians in the American southwest, made the Atlantic crossing. Hooglund notes that other Arabs joined Spanish expeditions in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, “[a]nd the oral histories of some Hispanic families who lived in the [American] Southwest for three centuries include Arab ancestors” (1985: ii). Hasan (2000) also reports that in 1717, a group of Arab slaves were brought to America but their fate is unknown.
The other contact is recorded in the early decades of the seventeenth-century. The annals of American history record hostile encounters with Maghrib Arabs as early as 1625, when Morocco seized a colonial American ship on the high seas. A scant twenty-five years later another American colonial ship engaged an Algerian vessel in battle—an incident touted as the first “American” naval encounter (Allison, 1995: xiv). Later in the eighteenth and nineteenth-centuries, the nascent United States clashed with the ‘Barbary States’, namely, Morocco, Algiers, Tunis, and Tripoli (Nevins & Commager, 1981:142). The conflicts were over tributes and commercial navigation in the Mediterranean (Hourani, 1992: 229, 251).

Morocco had been the second power (after France) to acknowledge American independence in 1778, although Americans did not seem grateful for this political recognition (Allison, 1995: 4, 110). Curiously, however, in 1785, three Arab Jews of Moroccan background ostensibly headed to Philadelphia, travelling on English papers, were deported from the Virginia commonwealth to their homeland after an investigation suspected them of being Muslims (ibid.: 5-7; 33). Although this fear was due largely to a potential “Algerian invasion” of the United States, an exaggerated fear that was exacerbated by political anxieties in the young country, it betrayed a sense of enmity to things Muslim and Arab. It was also during a time of political crisis with the Dey of Algiers, and the spectre of Islam, Ottomans/Turks, and the ‘Orient’ loomed large and menacing. But, once relations were somewhat normalised through diplomacy and treaty with some states of the Arab Maghrib, American commerce flourished in the Mediterranean and attempts at trade from the region to America were instituted. Indeed, the first Algerian merchant ship, the *Muqueni*, arrived in 1798 into the harbour of
Baltimore, Maryland (ibid: 156). However, the relationship with the Arab Maghrib tended to more martial then mercantile given the general tone of east-west relations as described earlier. An example of this ‘natural’ hostility to the east is the following account: In 1805, seven Tripolitanian (Libyan) captives were paraded in a New York theatre as real ‘Turks’ (read: Muslim/Arab/Ottoman/Oriental). The unfortunate souls had been imprisoned after a battle with an American ship on the high seas (ibid: 33).

This account, however, suggests that the potential for early Arab arrival to North America already existed. Arab American historical memory speaks of Maghrib Arabs coming to colonial America. One must remember that Maghrib Arabs being African and of a dark complexion may have arrived into America as slaves as well. According to Orfalea and Hooglund, one family, the Wahabs, in North Carolina, now a state of the United States, traces its origins to an Algerian shipwreck in 1779 (1988; Hooglund in Hooglund, 1985). Aida Hassan reports that,

“[e]vidence from 1790 supports this [Arab immigration and/or presence] as well as the possibility of other Arab travellers from North Africa settling in the Carolinas. The House Assembly of the State of South Carolina states “sundry Moors, Subjects of the Emperor of Morocco,” were to be tried according to the laws for South Carolina citizens and not by the codes for black slaves” (Hassan, 2000, Online; Orfalea, 1988: 47).

This legal and political differentiation may suggest that the phenomenon of Arab presence in the southern region reached numbers that necessitated a special categorisation in a race-conscious society.

In addition, Hooglund reports that in the early half of the nineteenth-century individual Arabs bought properties in various states, adding, “[o]ne example was Jeremiah Mahomet who, in the early 1800s, settled in Frederick, Maryland, where he raised race horses and was a successful real estate dealer” (Hooglund in Hooglund,
This may suggest that either descendants of earlier southern or south-western Arabs and/or new individual arrivals (of whom we have no records) may have moved into the northern interior. Haddad notes that, aside from explorers and unwilling slaves who arrived to America, “[a] few Yemenis came after the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869; others took advantage of the Homestead Act of 1862, especially in the West. Still others decided to remain in this country as traders after visiting the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia in 1876” (Haddad in Abraham & Abraham, 1983: 65).

### 3.2.2 Coming to the United States of America-Official Debut

The Philadelphia Centennial Exposition marks a special milestone in Arab immigration to the Americas. In a real sense, it is the spark that fired immigration from the eastern flanks of the Arab world into the United States. The Ottoman authorities, as part of their modernisation project, sanctioned their subjects’ involvement with the exposition in hopes of greater commerce with the West (Naff, 1985: 77). Already the Ottomans had participated in the *Paris Exposition Universelle* in 1867, and therefore people were accustomed to the idea of participating in another—even though this one had been so far away from home.

The Philadelphia Exposition was truly a world-class affair that celebrated the first hundred years of the American republic, garnering attendance from many parts of the globe. Along with the Ottomans whose delegation included Arabs from Syria-Palestine, Egypt and Tunisia (both semi-independent states, and nominally part of the Ottoman commonwealth) participated in the exposition, revealing to Americans some authentic images of the Arab and Muslim world of the time (Perkins, 1976: 8-13). Perkins writes that “in an effort to stress the multinational character of the Empire and remind the West
that the Muslim government ruled its minorities with tolerance, the exhibit included religious articles from Christian Arab shrines in Palestine” (ibid.:12). (Please, refer to Section 3.1.10).

The exhibits included a photographic display of Egyptian landscapes, an ancient mosaic artefact from the age of Carthage, oriental carpets, and clothing and metal works. Also, ‘bazaars’ were exhibited, featuring handicrafts and cafes where, “...visitors met Tunisians, Egyptians and ‘Turks’—who were almost invariably Balkan or Syrian nationals because of their greater familiarity with Western languages—and could observe some of the customs of the East in an environment which could be duplicated only by actual travel” (ibid.: 13). Perkins adds:

“The Bethlehem, Jerusalem and Palestine bazaars, staffed by Syrian Christians, were devoted almost exclusively to the sale of Christian religious articles from the Holy Land. Their most popular wares were polished olive wood crucifixes from Bethlehem and rosary beads and other mementoes manufactured of mother-of-pearl” (ibid.:13).

Significantly, Perkins suggests that even though the Arab/Ottoman participation attempted to present a more humane face of their culture, Americans remained distant in their appreciation of this cultural community:

“Many visitors came away from the Middle Eastern displays with their provincial view of these countries as strange lands inhabited by strange people unchanged. As one Ohio tourist said, he hurried through the Tunisian display because ‘there is not much to be learned here’—an American attitude toward the Middle East which was to persist, in some cases, right up to the time of the Bicentennial” (ibid.: 13).

From this very cursory account of the outline of the early American relationship with the Arab world, we begin to discern certain contours: first, a misunderstanding of what is Arab, Muslim, and Ottoman Turk, and confusion about whom is who regarding ethnicity and religion; secondly, an idea that the people of that part of the world are
'others’—exotic and their ways completely foreign and ‘un-Christian’; and, therefore, thirdly, that armed conflict is a legitimate form of interaction with them as can borne out from historical interactions up until the present time. These attitudes will be revisited later in other sections of this work.

Naff suggests that the first arrivals may have been from Palestine (southern Syria) but that Syrians from the north also came to the exposition. Among them, immigrants from the Mount Lebanon mainly Christian town of Zahle who, still, according to Naff, may have been the founders of the New York Syrian colony. She argues that the pioneers originated from urban or semi-urban settings where Christians accustomed to dealing with Europeans were able to make the leap to coming to America (1985: 77-8).

The Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia was the first in which Arabs participated in America. The second to attract Arab involvement was the Columbian Exposition of 1893 in Chicago (which celebrated the 400th anniversary of Columbus’ discovery of the ‘New World’). Already however, Arab immigration into the United States had begun to trickle. However, the significance of this exposition lies not only in attracting Arabs from Palestine to Chicago, but also its portrayal of Arabs and other easterners helped shape the American perception of these people for decades to come.

Hanania (2000) writes that Chicago was introduced to an Arab character, *Gamal El Din El Yahbi*, who was created by the sponsors of the exposition (styled a ‘Mohammedan) “...to help Americans experience the excitement and culture of the Arab world” (Online). El-Yahbi lived in a castle and projected an Orientalist image of what an Arab is.

The exposition featured a reconstructed ‘Arab city’ evoking the life style of Egyptian Arabs in the seventeenth-century. According to Hanania, the exhibit contained
sixty-one merchant shops, selling souvenirs. The exhibit also offered daily performances of dancing that included traditional sword and belly dancing, which Americans called the ‘Hootchie Coochie’, a charged reference to sexually libertine attitudes of Arabs and Muslims. Again, the perception of easterners that Americans owned reflected a sense of the exotic of things Arab. This “Orientalism”, a belief in the alien east, characterises the American imagination of the Arab and Muslim worlds, an attitude that indeed continues to persist at the beginning of the third millennium.

3.2.3 Early Immigration and the Influence of Western Education

European penetration of the Ottoman Empire must be credited for bringing the West and the Americas into the Syrian mindscape. Clearly, the presence of Europeans, and later Americans in Syria, especially Lebanon, created a potential destination for immigration. Through European cultivation of special relationships with Ottoman minorities, these communities became accustomed to looking towards the West for their development. Therefore, the impact of the West on Ottoman dominions cannot be underestimated, and the influence it brought to bear in the social and cultural fabric cannot be easily dismissed. Lewis suggests that the European influx into the Ottoman world brought with it new ideas, capital, and techniques which impacted the region’s outlook, affecting economic and social change (1966: 164-171).

Among the more enduring Western marks on the Arab world is the introduction of western-type educational systems in the region. Heretofore, education in the region consisted of traditional curricula that emphasised religious knowledge and law. Graduates of such traditional institutions were to assume positions in the administration of the Empire. However, the modernisation project of the Ottomans necessitated new
approaches to education, which were directly influenced by European knowledge. Consequently, Syria witnessed during the nineteenth-century reforms in educational institutions, which helped introduce new ideas to Syrians. Petran proposes that Ottoman modernisation of education (though minimal in terms of expenditures), coupled with the presence of foreign religious mission, especially in the Lebanon, “… created an audience for the many Arabic publications then becoming available” which alerted people to new potentials (1972: 50). Hourani asserts that traditional Ottoman educational institution, while still operative, no longer graduated personnel needed for the modernisation project, needing knowledge of a European language and skills. He adds that “[t]he graduates of the new schools found certain roles waiting to be filled in their changing societies” (1992: 311, 327).

Moreover, contact with Egypt, the Americas and Europe through translations of works and emigration promoted the flow of new ideas (Petran, 1972: 50). Not only education systems were increasingly following western models, indeed, Hourani suggests that “[m]uch of the education at secondary and higher level in Egypt was in the hands of European or American religious or cultural missions. This was true in Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine” (1992: 327). Petran suggests that Muslims and Christians differed in their response to Western influences: more than Muslims, the Christians [and Jews] accepted new ideas of nationalism and secularism, which were the predominant paradigm in Europe and the Americas. She adds: “Not a few Christians, uprooted by the new influences, identified with one or another Western country. And it was the Christians who emigrated” (1972: 50). It is therefore fair to assume that the early participants in the expositions in the United States were in the main Christians.
Therefore, these Western institutions disseminated ideas that oriented many towards the West—most notably minority members and some others who later formed local elites:

“From the beginning of the [nineteenth] century, the work of Catholic missions was supplemented in one sense and challenged in another by that of Protestant missions, mainly American, which created a small Protestant community, but provided education for other Christians and later for some Muslims too; at the apex of their schools stood the Syrian Protestant College in Beirut, founded in 1866 and later to become the American University of Beirut. Russian Schools for members of the Eastern Orthodox Church were also founded by the Imperial Russian Orthodox Palestine Society (Hourani, 1992: 303).

The presence of proselytising missions in Syria had the ancillary effect of introducing ordinary people to the idea of a vibrant outside world. Long before the American Protestant presence in Syria, the French Jesuits established the Université Saint-Joseph in Beirut, which remains a bulwark of French Catholic influence in Lebanon (Petran, 1972: 50). The currency of the Christian population with the West—educated in a European language, aware of Western ideas and oriented towards a new direction, found it conceivable to emigrate. Naff suggests that “...[w]estern-oriented Syrians, mainly Christian urban tradesmen, if they were not the first Arabic speakers to discover American economic opportunities at Philadelphia, they at least had the foresight to take advantage of them” (1985: 78). Thus, we can surmise that if the original exposition participants were not the ones who later settled in the United States then it is likely they are the ones who recruited from among their own people émigrés to America:

“By the 1880s, the chain migration was well under way. Nothing better confirms this than the reports of the vigilant, though not impartial, foreign consuls who wrote to their home offices in Europe... Lebanese emigrants had become a very important element in the passenger traffic aboard French ships and maritime regulations were being contravened because the migrants were being boarded beyond the anchorage and their numbers violated sanitation rules.... However, the movement so disquieted the Ottoman government that several times it ‘requested
the French Consul-General to take measures to debark its subjects from French ships anchored at Beirut” (Naff, 1985: 78-9).

This clearly shows that emigration from Syria, particularly, Mount Lebanon became a political issue along with it being a profitable economic enterprise for European passenger shipping. According to Hitti, the stability of Mount Lebanon under its regime of self-government in addition to growth in population resulted in emigration:

“The increase in its population found an outlet through emigration to Egypt, the Americas and Australia, where descendants of Lebanese colonists still flourish. Lebanon’s autonomy continued until the First World War, when it was destroyed by the Turks. To autonomous Lebanon, Western teachers, preachers, physicians and merchants were drawn as to no other land of the Near East. The fact that its population was preponderantly Christian rendered it more hospitable to European and American ideas and practices. More than in the days of Bashir and Fakhr [earlier local potentates] it became the window through which the Arab quadrangle looked westward into the outside world” (1990: 736).

Thus, the emigration of Syrian-Lebanese, already Western-minded, to Western parts posed a serious threat to Ottoman authority over the region. The Ottomans, alarmed at an incipient labour shortage and revenue loss, took measures to ensure that immigration was limited. The authorities instituted new regulations and established military police on roads leading to port cities to stem the tide of travellers. Certainly, human movement disrupted local enterprises in the area, creating a shortage of labour in the country and threatened the Ottoman tax base. Naff quotes the French Consul-General in Beirut reporting to his home office, that Lebanese immigration is creating a shortage of manpower in the country, suggesting that work in the ‘Mountain’ yields a labourer remuneration corresponding to earnings in France and fifty percent higher wages than what might be expected in the United States (1985: 79). This suggests that early immigration from the area was not related to economic self-betterment, although the
immigrants sought their fortunes abroad, rather in addition to economic pursuits other factors were involved in the decision to emigrate.

Although Lebanon was particularly stable among the other Syrian regions of the Empire, and despite economic growth matching population increases, the Lebanese felt restless in their homeland. This general restlessness must be attributed, at least in part, to the over-arching control of the religious establishment. Far from being persecuted as Christians in their country, their ecclesiastical hierarchy exerted influence in all matters, thus serving to limit freedoms, particularly, freedom of expression (Hourani, 1992: 307). One simply has to remember that the *millet* system gave the clergy the power to ‘rule’ within the community. Additionally, European protection afforded to the minority groups expressed itself in support of these religious establishments. Accordingly, French protection of Maronite and Melkite Christian institutions strengthened the hand of the standing order in interfering in all walks of life. Significantly, however, immigration to the Americas and elsewhere affected French interest in Mount Lebanon, since French silk industrial concerns were duly deprived of workers at lower rates of compensation.

### 3.3 Periods of Immigration to the United States

Aside from the period of sundry groups and individuals arriving into America earlier in colonial times, Arab immigration to the United States can be divided into four periods. The first period begins with the later decades of the nineteenth-century and ends with the First World War. The second period is directly after the war and is a time of dwindling number in immigrants due to changes in United States laws. The third period of immigration is post the Second World War, ending roughly in the late sixties and early
seventies. The last period is the contemporary one, which begins in the middle of the seventies.

### 3.3.1 Late 19th Century

The early period of Arab immigration begins in the 1880s and lasts through the years leading up to the First World War. Although immigration was theoretically possible during the years of the conflict, not many immigrants arrived from Syria into America. There are two reasons for that: first, Syria as part of the Ottoman system (which was going through great convulsions at the beginning of the twentieth-century), was in Turkish hands and at war against the Western allies; second, the United States, early in the conflict, had remained isolated from the world and made efforts to keep it at bay. During the war, not many had arrived.

Certainly however, the decades preceding the war—a timeframe of roughly thirty years—many Arab immigrants reached the United States. As stated above, this group of immigrants was in the main Christian and a majority of them from the Mount Lebanon region (Ameri in Ameri and Ramey, 2000: 3). The early immigrants seem to have acquired an “adventurer” quality in that, they left their homeland not in search of economic gain only but in quest for something else, perhaps, personal validation: According to research,

“The Syrian immigrants of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries did not fit the popular [American] impression of economically, religiously, or politically displaced peasantry who sought the American ideals symbolized by the Statue of Liberty. Although drawn from the lower economic levels of society, they had not been driven from their homeland. Like others who migrated to the United States, they came voluntarily and enthusiastically. Almost without exception, the pioneers of the first phase and many in the second came with the intention of returning home in no more than two or three years much wealthier and prouder than they came” (Naff, 1985:13).
The early immigrants, we can observe, came to America in hopes of generating personal wealth that would stand them in good stead when they return home. The initial phase of immigration revolved around the idea of sojourners who came to America for a while in order to achieve certain goals and return home. Their attachment to the homeland was real and deliberate. According to Naff, immigrants from several Syrian areas arrived into the heartland of America by the 1890s—some had arrived into the United States much earlier. Mainly Maronites and Melkites, they came from Mount Lebanon, the environs of Damascus and Tripoli, reaching into nearly every state of the Union (ibid.).

Immigration records at the turn of the century suggest that Syrians’ reported destination in forty-one states and several territories, and in 1910, such reports included all forty-eight states (ibid.: 81-2). The mother colony was established in New York, the major port of entry for immigrants at the time, Ellis Island. It is from there that gradually internal immigration spread more Arabs across America. Naff reports that by 1892 already there had been a vibrant Syrian community in New York:

“[The] Syrian community was described in the New York Daily Tribune as a ‘picturesque colony’ of Christians and a ‘few Muslims’ with shops of Syrian handcrafted articles, wholesalers and peddlers, coffeehouses and restaurants, societies and an Arabic-language newspaper. The article concluded that the community was ‘destined to become in the near future, under the leadership of men who are thoroughly acquainted with their capabilities and needs, a factor in the body politic which will make itself felt for good’” (Naff, 1985: 82).

This suggests a steady stream of Syrian Arabs arriving into the United States. However, what was the reason—that sense of adventure—that prompted them to come to America? Naff reports that the Syrian pioneers arriving before 1905, and a large percentage of those who immigrated after that date up until the War, came for the expressed purpose of making money and returning home. She adds: “Theirs was not an emergency or panic
flight; it was a deliberate and calculated choice made by individual families” (1985: 83). Syrian pioneers, as we have seen, did not escape intolerable economic, political, or religious conditions; rather they emigrated in search of the adventure self-made wealth. Many have attributed and likened this inclination of the Levantines to their ancient forbears, the Phoenicians, who travelled the known world in commerce.

Syrians learned that peddling, the business of selling wares door-to-door, was a good way to make profits. This trade, simple in its requirements and hard in implementing, created the phenomenon of chain migration, which initiated the second phase of the first wave of immigration. Now, Syrians came to America not only in search of adventure and wealth, but migrated for other reasons, as well. Once news spread about the potential of wealth from peddling, “American Fever” developed in Syria, especially Mount Lebanon, attracting new immigrants who had other causes for leaving. Naff informs that second phase migrants left Syria to escape official authority, or to strike out on their own away from parents. Many came to avoid military service and some disheartened by the political situation in the homeland, especially after WWI, also left Syria, but the majority came to rejoin with relatives who were already established in the United States (1985: 83).

The early immigrants had been Christians. By the end of the first decade immigration to the United States became an established practice, but for Muslims (among them the Druze), it had been something entirely new. Haddad suggests that Muslim migration to America around the turn of the century constituted small numbers due to apprehensions about living in a non-Muslim land, thus dampening their motivations. However, those few that did emigrate, at least some had by the end of the decade return
to Syria, providing the example for others and were the source of information about the possibility of life in that country (1983: 66).

Naff suggests that Muslims perceived Christian societies to be unfriendly and had feared Christian influences on their on their lives and families, something which prevented wholesale Muslim migration in the beginning, and stunted the possibility of a process of chain immigration later as had happened with their Christian compatriots (1985: 84-5). The ‘late’ interest on the part of Muslims with immigration to the United States is directly linked to political events in the homeland. Muslims, Druze, and Christians of Syria (other than Mount Lebanon) were obliged to serve in the Ottoman military. The opportunity to immigrate was a way to secure personal survival. The conscription evaders not only saved their lives but also enhanced the lives of their families' back home through remittances. The fact that America became a “known quality” to people back home through the efforts of the early pioneers, who sent word and news of the country to Syria, and in addition to the military draft, made for a Muslim immigration to the United States. Although Muslim chain migration did step up, Naff reports that, “... during the 1909 to 1914 period, when Syrian migration had peaked, Muslim and Druze constituted perhaps less than 10 percent of the Syrian total” (1985: 85).

3.3.2 Early 20th Century

The First World War interrupted Arab immigration to America. The Ottoman Empire crumbled, as the whole region fell into chaos. Turkey, allied to Germany, experienced a transformation, emerging from its republican revolution under Kemal Ataturk while the Arab regions fell into disarray, and later prey, to Mandatory powers,
namely, France and Britain. It was a time of great anxiety and expectations in the Arab regions. The Arabs before the end of the war, per the Sharif Husayn-McMahon Correspondence (1915), were promised, in exchange for alliance against the Turkish authorities, the establishment of an independent Arab State in the whole of Arabia, Iraq, and Syria. The Arabs revolted against the Ottomans in 1916 and helped the Allies win against Germany and Turkey. But the secret Sykes-Picot (Anglo-French) Agreement of 1916 had already divided the Arab regions into French and British spheres of influence.

In 1917, The British issued the Balfour Declaration that promised support for the establishment of a Jewish State in historical Palestine to influential European Zionists. By 1919, France and Britain, now victorious, initiated implementation of their secret agreement in contradiction to Allied promises to the Sharif Husayn, leading to the dismemberment of the territories of Arab lands.

According to Naff, the War temporarily interrupted Arab migration to the United States, adding that immigration resumed after transportation became possible. The new Syrian immigrants, experiencing starvation and other woes at the hands of the Turkish authorities during the War, came to America in hopes of a better life. Some new migrants made their way with them because of their resentment of the French overthrowing of the nascent and fragile Arab monarchy of the Sharifs (1985: 85).

Naff also reports that this migration phase coincided with the return of immigrants from Syria back into the United States after having gone back to reunite with families in order to bring them to America—plans which for many had been suspended by the War (ibid.: 86). Immigrants had hurried to reach the United States before American isolationism in the form of new immigration restrictions was enacted. This time a shift
can be observed: no longer the aim was to amass wealth and return home, rather, the intention of this group was to remain in the United States, given that the future in their homeland did not seem bright to them. This phase ends with the enactment of laws prohibiting immigration, marking the end of the first wave of Arab immigration into the United States.

Cainkar reports that by 1924, nearly 200,000 Arabs made America their home. She adds that laws passed by the United States Congress in 1917, 1921, and 1924 respectively all but halted immigration from all countries save northern and western European nations (2000: 36-7). She further explains the ramification of the quota system to Arab immigration:

“The 1924 Johnson-Reed Quota Act gave a quota…on immigrants to each country in the world except in northern and western Europe and in Asia. Countries in northern and western Europe had no limits and immigrants from Asian countries were banned.”

“Each Arab country received the minimum quota of one hundred new immigrants per year. Only the wives and dependent children of United States citizens could come to the United States without being blocked by these quotas. In addition to the quotas, the Great Depression of the 1930s…and World War II (1939-45) in the early 1940s discouraged people from immigrating to the United States” (Cainkar in Ameri and Ramey, 2000: 42).

Aside from the obvious racist intentions of the law, the quota system imposed on Arab immigrations could not possibly even replenish the then current numbers of Arabs in America. The near immigration ban did not even keep up with the mortality rate of the community. This intervening period, however, was a time of assimilation into the American social fabric. The Syrians and their descendants in that time frame nearly assimilated themselves out of existence as an ethnic community in the United States, according to some views (Naff in Abraham & Abraham, 1983: 23). This aspect of the
community’s history will be revisited later in comparison to newer immigrants and natives. (Refer to Chapter Four, Section 4.1.5; Chapter Six, Section 6.6; Chapter Seven, Section 7.2.4 and 7.3).

3.3.3 Mid 20th Century (1948-1965)

Post WWI immigration was reduced to trickle of Arab new comers, however, when United States laws were changed to accommodate refugees on humanitarian grounds, new émigrés arrived to America. The creation of the State of Israel in Palestine in 1948 gave rise to the Palestinian refugee problem, which made nearly 800,000 Arabs homeless. Spread across neighbouring Arab states, Palestinians were obliged to live in miserable conditions in makeshift refugee camps that still stand today. Cainkar reports that in 1953 the United States Congress enacted a refugee relief law that allowed admission of 2000 Palestinian refugees. The law was extended in 1957, allowing a little less than a thousand Palestinians to enter the United States between 1957 and 1963 (in Ameri and Ramey, 2000: 43).

The Arab-Israeli conflict gave renewed impetus to the idea of immigration as the Arab region experienced increasing dislocation, leading to a wave of immigration that picked-up momentum with new changes in immigration laws in mid 1960s. Naff suggests that the origin of the contemporary wave of immigration begin in 1948 as result of Israel’s creation, expansion, and its consequent dislocations (Naff in Abraham & Abraham: 1983: 24).

3.3.4 Contemporary Immigration (1970 to present)

Hooglund suggests that by the late 1960s a new wave of Arab immigrants began arriving to the United States, whose members were highly educated and fluent in English,
in marked contrast to the first wave of immigrants who were in the main illiterate or semi-literate (Hooglund in Hooglund, 1985: v; Naff, 1985: 115). Coinciding with the civil rights movement in the country, in 1965, the United States Congress reformed its immigration law (Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965), eliminating bans on immigration from certain world regions, and stopped favouring Nordic countries over others, leading to increased Arab immigration to America:

“More than 400,000 Arab immigrants came to the United States between 1965 and 1992. If we look only at the six Arab countries sending the most immigrants to the United States—Lebanon, Jordan/Palestine, Egypt, Iraq, Syria, and Yemen—the total for this period is 360,000 people. The remaining Arab immigrants were a combination of Moroccans, Libyans, Bahrainis, Omanis, Sudanese, Tunisians, Saudi Arabians, Algerians, and a handful of immigrants from other Arab countries” (Cainkar in Ameri and Ramey, 2000: 44).

With the exception of Egypt (and to some degree, Iraq) the new Arab immigrants largely came from the same regions as during the earlier ‘Great Migration’ era in which millions came to the United States. The Lebanese Civil War (1975-1989) contributed to channelling more immigrants to America—numbers reaching their peaks in 1977 and later in 1983 (as a direct result of Israel’s illegal invasion of Lebanon). Additionally, the great intifada in Palestine in the late 1980s with its subsequent stresses as a result of increased Israeli harassment of Palestinians brought about growth in immigration.

The Second Gulf War also contributed to Arab migration to the United States. Southern Iraqis who rebelled against the central government during the war to liberate Kuwait were crushed, forcing many of them to seek refuge in northern Saudi Arabia. By the mid 1990s many Iraqi refugee families were settled in several American cities. On learning of an Arab community in the metropolitan Detroit region, many Iraqi refugees came to Detroit, and particularly to Dearborn where an Arab enclave exists.
Immigration from the Arab World continues to grow. Continued and/or expected upheaval related to the political instability of the region suggests that Arab migration will increase, and chain migration to continue. In addition to immigration, births account for increases in the Arab American population. (Refer to Chapter Four, Section 4.1.6).

3.4 Arab Settlement Patterns

The United States is traditionally divided into several regions. For purposes of this discussion, the same system will be used. Eastern United States constitute the seaboard states, the South—the traditional home of seceding states during the American Civil War, the Midwest, constituting the ‘heartland’ of the nation, and the West (inclusive of the south-west) includes the sprawl of territories stretching out to the Pacific rim. As mentioned earlier, Arabs early on in the century had travelled to all parts of the American Union. The beginnings of settlement however, originate in New York, where a ‘mother colony’ was established, from which Arabs migrated out into the various United States.

3.4.1 New York and Eastern United States

Statistical and descriptive accounts of Arab settlement in the United States are not unproblematic. When it comes to unearthing numbers and patterns of settlement, history of this community is still marred with ambiguities. Two major issues can be held accountable for the problem of counting the early immigrants: the first obtains from the label given to the early émigrés and the second is a direct consequence of United States official statistics. Both issues are inter-related. According to Nigem and Nagi (1991: 53), United States immigration authorities until 1899, and the national census until 1920, classified Arabs, Armenians, Turks and other Ottoman citizens as “Turkey in Asia” with the implication that these groups are Turkic in origin. They add: “After 1920, the
category ‘Syrian’ was added to accommodate the increase in the Syrian emigrants, but it referred to geography more than ethnicity. However, non-Syrians were classified as ‘Other Asians’ and North African Arabs as ‘Other Africans’” (ibid.). Thus the Arabs were not perceived as a cultural group and were not given that label, and only later that a regional label—Syrian—emerged to designate an ethnicity. These issues will be visited in more detail later in Chapter Three.

Naff notes that the early Arab immigrants identified themselves with “religiously self-segregated neighborhoods and quarters in villages, towns and cities of the old country” (1985: 63). Bogle suggests that the Ottoman Arabs “identified primarily with their religion, their family, and their immediate locality”, attributing this to the “amorphous nature of the Ottoman Empire” (1996: 1). Zenner asserts “Syrian and Lebanese immigrants are generally divided according to religion or region. Thus we speak of Lebanese or Syrian Maronites or Orthodox and Sunnis, Shiites, Druzes and Jews. Yet these immigrants share a common background” (1982: 462). This “village-mindedness” contributed to factionalism within the ranks of the early immigrant community, preventing the rise of a solid ethnic identity from the start, and hampering the development of the community into a single ethnic group (Tayash and Ayouby in Rouchdy, 1992). Although there was a keen sense that everyone was “ibn Arab” (son [or daughter] of an Arab), identification with region and religion prevailed over any sense of nationalism, especially given that the Syrians under Ottoman control did not produce a sense of broad nationalism at this stage in their development. In America, the Syrian label emerged as a designation to denote the geographic origin of those Arab immigrants and to separate from the Ottoman/Turkish and Muslim label. Writing early in the 1900s, a
proponent of Syrian immigration to the United States, Lucius Hopkins Miller authored a survey discussing the desirability of Syrians in the American mix in which he addressed the issue of labelling:

“...the Syrian as such is not recognized by the United States Government except at the moment of entry into the country. Then he is recognized by the immigration authorities as a Syrian; but once on American soil he becomes a “Turk” on the census books. Hereafter the harmony between the Census Bureau and the Immigration Department, now both sections of the Department of Commerce and Labor, will remedy this discrepancy. Casual conversations revealed the further fact that the Syrian is popularly considered as a “Turk” or Mohammedan, though as a matter of fact he is neither, and finally it was discovered that the black haired, black eyed, dark skinned immigrant was considered an undesirable addition to the community...” (1969: 1).

Miller attributes Syrian immigration to America as the direct consequence of “...compulsion, adverse religious, political, and economic conditions”, blaming it on the “stupendous stupidity and moral obliquity of the Turk, together with the blight of Islam, [that] have combined to produce a condition well nigh intolerable” (ibid: 3). Furthermore, he suggests that the Syrians arrived into the United States after the Philadelphia Exposition of 1876, making New York the “centre of Syrian life in this country, though there are fairly large colonies in Fall River, Worcester, Lawrence, Cleveland, Chicago and other cities” (ibid: 5-6). In his work, Miller addresses the Syrian presence in the greater New York area early in the twentieth century, noting, however, that Syrians are universally ubiquitous in America: “From July, 1901 to June, 1902, 4,333 entered the port of New York alone, and 4,566 from July, 1902, to June, 1903” claiming destinations to almost every state and territory of the United States (ibid: 4).

In his undated work written circa 1900, Miller reports claims that the Syrian population in the greater New York area was estimated to be between 5,000 and 10,000 Syrians (ibid: 1). The Syrian community was spread out across several New York City...
communities, namely, Manhattan, South Ferry in Brooklyn, and South Brooklyn, claiming a much lower number closer to 2,500 individuals (ibid: 6). Miller asserts that the majority of the Syrians were Greek Catholics, followed by Maronites (eastern rites Catholics), Greek Orthodox Christians, a number of Protestants and some individuals who are Druze and Muslims, whose numbers were too minute to warrant other than mention. However, he also notes that he found one “Syrian Hebrew” who lived among the Syrian colonists, adding that there may have been about one hundred “Syrian Hebrews” in New York, but they are “merely Hebrews from Syria and do not consider themselves Syrians, nor are they considered as such by the Syrians” (ibid: 11). This observation, as other remarks and observations Miller makes in his work, is reflective of his subjective and value-laden judgments which he makes willy-nilly regarding that group, and leaves his scholarly approach very hollow as he attempts to understand that group of immigrants in that era.

Zenner reports that most of New York’s Syrian Jews arrived into America between 1900 and 1924, mainly from Aleppo in northern Syria, becoming peddlers who “…were consigned goods by Syrian Christian merchants of needlework in Lower Manhattan” (1982: 463). Zenner confirms that the Syrian Jews settled on the Lower East Side of Manhattan, gradually moving to Brooklyn’s Bensonhurst area, eventually residing in Flatbush and in Deal, New Jersey—where all along they had maintained an in-group solidarity, identifying as Syrian Jews, but not as part of the Arab Syrian community (ibid: 465). Although this relationship does not suggest an estrangement of Jews from the remainder of the Syrian community, rather it confirms the prevalent ethnocentric model of the Syrian sub-communities earlier in the century; however, the
rise of the Arab-Israeli conflict must have contributed to the further identification of Syrian Jews with American Jewry versus their attachment to their Arab compatriots.

Zenner (1982) gives an account that explains the dynamic of Syrian Jewish identification:

“One Syrian Jew who did become a conspicuous political figure was William Haddad, who had married a non-Jewish woman and only revealed his Jewishness when he was perceived as an Arab running for office in a predominantly Jewish Manhattan district (Zenner 1965: 361-2). Until the late 1960s, even participation in the United Jewish Appeal by Syrians was not very noticeable. Since then, however, Syrian Jews in Brooklyn have become leaders in the Jewish community, on behalf of Syrian Jews and other causes, and participate more in general politics (Sutton 1979: 244-6)” (ibid: 465).

Still according to Zenner, Christian Syrian immigrants preceded Syrian Jews in arrival to the United States but both paralleled each other in their experiences, especially in regard to the peddling trade which attracted a high number of Syrians: “The peddlers were the chief initiators of Syro-Lebanese colonies throughout the United States. The result was relatively small communities, even in large cities. Only two American cities have large enclaves, New York City and Detroit” (ibid: 466). The reason behind the Arab spread across America is attributable to the Syrians’ desire not to compete against each other. The peddling trade allowed for the build-up of capital that eventually promoted the establishment of shops and other small businesses (David, 2000). Syrians settled in Upstate New York, where they established life and roots.

Thomas (1976) reports that Massachusetts drew a contingent of Ottoman denizens to its cotton mills between 1905 and 1921, adding that the immigrants were largely young men in their teens who were related to each other and whose ambition was to make money and return home, but instead remained there a lifetime, establishing a colony (Aramco magazine, 1976: 3-4). Most of these immigrants were in fact Christians from Syria, but especially the Lebanon area, who had landed in Ellis Island (New York’s entry
gate represented by the Statue of Liberty), and eventually made their way to this northeastern state to thrive as a part of the mosaic of ethnicities in the region as Lebanese Americans.

According to Thomas, these emigrants “…had formed a self-sufficient and inward-looking community as they struggled to raise their families and still send money ‘home.’[Sic.]” (ibid.: 8). Reportedly, WWII hastened the pace of change in the community, which hitherto fore had been resistive of assimilation, but the national mobilisation for the war effort drove descendants of the Arab immigrants, as others, towards more involvements, particularly military service, which brought them into the mainstream of American life. Thomas quotes a community member as saying:

“‘We had kept together, and we didn’t assimilate easily. Our parents didn’t speak good English and we were sometimes called names. But when we went into the service a lot of us became officers, commissioned and non-commissioned, and we saw that we were on a par with people from other ethnic backgrounds. We had a close relationship with each other, [within the community] we still have, which is good. But we saw then that we held each other back, and those that went out on their own did very well’” (ibid.: 6).

In fact, Suleiman (1999: 6) maintains that prior to WWII the Arabs had established their “residential colonies” in the eastern parts of the United States, “especially New York and Boston.” While New York was the “mother” colony given that Ellis Island was the gateway to America, Boston, however, constituted a major secondary colony from which tertiary migrations took place in the eastern seaboard and elsewhere.

Eric Hooglund (in Hooglund, 1987) reports Arab settlement in the State of Maine, the most northern of the continental states. His research suggests that Syrian Arabs began arriving in the state as early as 1885 or 1888, although major influx of ethnic Arabs started after 1900, residing in the cities of the state (p.86):
“The Arab immigrants shared several characteristics, all of which helped to nurture a distinct ethnic identity: 1) They all spoke the same language, Arabic. Even more significant, they all spoke the same or closely related dialects of Arabic; 2) they tended to come from the same geographical area, the historic province of Syria... In particular, they came from districts that are now part of the states of Lebanon and Syria; 3) The overwhelming majority of the immigrants were of peasant origins...; 4) The immigrants were relatively young. More than 75 percent were twenty-five or younger when they left their native villages to come to the United States; 5) The majority, when they immigrated, were illiterate in their native language, as well as English, but had a deep respect for learning and placed a high value on education after settling in Maine; 6) At least 80 percent of the adult males became wage laborers in factories or in small work shops, and thus tended to have similar occupations, incomes, interests, and aspirations. Finally, they were virtually all Christian: two-thirds were Maronite (Syriac-rite Catholic); about 20 percent were Greek (Antiochian) Orthodox; some 10 percent were Melchite (Greek-rite Catholics); and the rest included Protestant sects and a few Muslims (Hooglund in Hooglund, 1987: 86-87).

Although they did not perceive of themselves as Arabs (rather identified with religion), and their fellow denizens conceived of them as “Turks”, gradually however, these Arab immigrants—under the immigration service’s pressure to categorise immigrants in accordance with a nationality—they became officially “Syrians” as an ethnic group. Still, according to Hooglund, the term “Syrian” was the most current label up to 1940, but gradually giving way to the additional term “Lebanese”, and later on in the century to the more inclusive term “Arab American”(p.88).

Because of the American immigration laws that heavily restricted Arab emigration to the United States, leaving the Arab communities to flourish or die on their own, the Syrian community of Maine, according to Hooglund, made a choice, favouring cultural preservation:

“The immigrant generation apparently was determined to pass on cherished aspect of their culture to their American-born children. Between 1915 and 1940 the Syrians made conscious efforts to transform their community from an immigrant one to an ethnic one with solid roots in Waterville [the major city of their residence in Maine]” (Hooglund in Hooglund, 1987: 95).
This is a pattern that seems to have repeated itself elsewhere among community members throughout the country.

Elsewhere in New England, Arabs also founded small colonies. Rhode Island was such a place. Doumato (in Hooglund, 1985:101-121) reports that some Syrians had made their homes in various locales in the state: “As early as 1905, a state census listed 379 Syrians living in Rhode Island. At that time 153,156 people, almost one-third of Rhode Island’s total population, were foreign-born; thus, the Arabic-speaking community was a tiny minority in comparison. By 1920, there were 1,285 foreign-born Syrians in the state, and in 1929, including American-born children, the strength of the community was estimated to have grown to 2,500” (p.102). Mostly Christian (Maronite or Melchite Catholics, and Antiochian or Syrian Orthodox), these Syrians established their largest presence in the city of Central Falls, where they specialised in silk-weaving, working in the local textile industry (p.105). Identifying themselves as Lebanese or Syrians (102, 107), this community established roots, preserving its traditions through the agency of the Church: “‘Become Americans,’ was the message [of the churches], ‘but do not lose touch with the faith, the people and traditions from which you came’” (p.108). Because the Rhode Island community was a small group, its religious institutions, Doumato maintains, assisted in preserving Arab ethnicity. In Rhode Island, culture was safeguarded in the churches, where a love of traditions, music, and food are shared with other members of the community, no matter how assimilated are these Arab Americans (p. 114).
3.4.2  Southern Regions

Nigem and Nagi report that a large percentage of immigrants of the early period eventually settled in southern states, whereas approximately 25 percent of the population remained in the eastern states and a similar number moved into Midwestern states (1991: 53-4). The remainder made their way to the west and southwest. Faires Conklin and Faires (in Hooglund, 1987) report that Arabs had settled in the American South as early as 1890. However, they maintain that immigration to Birmingham, Alabama (the centre of Arab migration to the South) occurred between the 1890s and the 1920s, after Arabs had migrated to the American Midwest from the Northeast (p.69). This influx of mainly Lebanese immigrants established a colony of sixty-five families by 1915, a community that flourished in peddling and other commercial enterprises, but that was met with racism of the traditional South (ibid.).

The Lebanese of Alabama, at first a few families, engaged in the peddling trade in the early part of the century, establishing networks of trade in the countryside, trading with blacks and whites, according to Faires Conklin and Faires. By the 1920s, the Lebanese gradually abandoned peddling for stationary businesses, such as groceries, linen and dry good shops. Some two decades later, the Lebanese of Birmingham became entrenched in the middle class as an entrepreneurial social group (p.73). However, despite their successes the Lebanese community had to face bigotry and racism being generally dark skinned individuals and whose eastern Christian religion (Catholic) did not sit well with the dominant culture of Euro-Anglo Protestant whites, leading to the group’s cultural marginality (Faires Conklin and Faires in Hooglund, 1987: 78-9).

Mississippi is another place where Arabs settled in the South. They were drawn to the agricultural landscape away from the industrial North. Many worked as peddlers,
selling to faraway agricultural plantations, especially cotton, and later becoming shopkeepers. According to Schechla (in Hooglund, 1985: 63), several Syro-Lebanese communities took roots in the Mississippi Delta region:

“These were exclusively Christian communities which were largely self-contained. These communities of common Arab heritage knew each other, but did not always develop strong inter-community solidarity” (ibid.).

Deeper still in the South, the border town of El Paso, Texas (and the frontier town of Ciudad Juarez in Chihuahua, Mexico) also attracted Arabic-speaking residents from greater Syria in the early 1900s as part of the development of the rail service in that region, according to Sarah E. John (in Hooglund, 1987: 105).

The Texas community grew out of a chain migration of families, and, as in Alabama, engaged in the peddling trade, with individuals and extended families helping others in the group (p.106):

“It is probable that a few Syrians were in the El Paso area by the mid-1860s, and by 1885 surnames such as Elias, Issacs, and Abraham appear in the city directories of El Paso and Paso del Norte (Ciudad Juarez), suggesting Middle Eastern backgrounds for those persons. By the early twentieth century, Syrians in El Paso had made their way to Texas from the east coast, and others had begun to use the Mexican border as an alternative entry port. The latter persons included itinerant peddlers who drifted in and out of the border region on their way to other destinations in the United States and Mexico. Eventually many of them settled in the El Paso-Ciudad Juarez area…. ” (John in Hooglund, 1987: 106).

Soon after being established in the peddling trade, the Syrians, as elsewhere, turned their attentions to putting down economic roots in the community. By the first decade of the twentieth century, a pattern of family businesses was established in the area, which, during the 1920s, centred on produce and dry goods businesses (Ibid.: 109). In the 1930s, the Syrians branched out from their traditional businesses into other occupations, such as real estate, wholesaling in produce and dry goods, and specialty
food manufacturing (p. 110). According to John, at a time of economic depression, the Syrians helped out each other, thus downplaying the effects of the depression on the community (p. 111). The El Paso community grew from a small group of families, into a viable ethnic group in the years between 1900 and 1935 who maintained business ties with Mexicans on both sides of the border—ties that became exceedingly important to the city’s economic well being in the 1940s and 1950s:

“Having found a home in the El Paso area, Syrians attracted other members of the group—from Mexico, from such other states as Pennsylvania and New Mexico, and from other parts of Texas. Their church attendance helped them become accepted by other El Pasoans, while they kept close relations within their own group. The second generation became Americanized enough to be able to move freely within the different elements in El Paso, while the close relations with other members of the Syrian community reinforced their traditional cultural heritage” (John in Hooglund, 1987: 113).

Unlike their Mississippi cousins, who had assimilated themselves into the American mainstream, El Pasoans, because of their community’s “inter-connectedness,” maintained a sense of ethnic identity born from family ties.

3.4.3 Western Regions

No different than the South or the Eastern seaboard, Arabs also migrated into western states. Although there is Arab presence everywhere in the United States, including the western states, California was the magnet that drew Arab immigrants. California, at the turn of the millennium, is said to have to the largest Arab American population. Those populations can be found in the southern half of the state: the San Francisco Bay area, San Jose, Anaheim and Los Angeles. Although estimates vary widely, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, Arab Americans are judged to number between 280,000 and 350,000 (based on numbers commonly reported by the Washington, D.C. based Arab American Institute). The matter of numbers will be visited
later in chapters three and four. According to LaBumbard (in Ameri and Ramey, 2000),
the community is mainly composed of Egyptians, Palestinians and Assyrians, but the first
Arab settlers were in fact Syrian-Lebanese immigrants, who were later joined by
Palestinian and Yemeni migrants, settling in the Bay area. LaBumbard adds that the
Yemenis, worked with Latinos as farm workers, and the so-called Assyrians were centred
in Los Angeles, San Diego, and San Jose (p. 71).

3.4.4 Midwestern United States

Along with Michigan (which will be treated separately later), Ohio and Illinois
constitute the major areas of Arab settlement in the American Midwest. According to
LaBumbard (in Ameri and Ramey, 2000), Ohio’s major urban centres such as Cleveland,
Toledo, Columbus, Cincinnati, and Akron are the home of 120,000 Arab Americans,
who are more than three quarters Syro-Lebanese in their origins. In Illinois, Chicago is
the seat of Arab Americans in that state. LaBumbard reports that at the turn of the
millennium Illinois has the smallest percentage of Syro-Lebanese but a large contingent
of Palestinian Arab Americans:

“In the five-county area of metropolitan Chicago there are about 150,000 Arab
Americans and 65,000 Assyrians (Aramaic-speaking Christians from present-day
Turkey, Iran, and Iraq). The earliest Arab immigrants to Chicago were Syrian-
Lebanese Christians, followed by Palestinian Muslims and a small number of
Palestinian Christians…”

“Fifty-seven percent of the Chicago Arab American population is Palestinian and
20 percent is Jordanian. The rest of the population includes Egyptians, Iraqis,
Syrians, Lebanese, Yemenis, and Assyrians…” (p.68-9).

According to Hanania (accessed 2000: 10-11), the issue of population numbers imposes a
‘hardship’ on the community because inflation of numbers by some organisational
leaders leads to political controversies. However, he offers blame for this on “…the
failure of the US Census takers to correctly identify Arab Americans by race (sic)…”
(Ibid.).

3.4.5 Settlement in Michigan

Not unlike the pattern of original Euro-Anglo settlement in Michigan, Arabs came into the state from the New England and New York regions. Detroit, the major city in the state, attracted Syro-Lebanese immigrants beginning in 1890 (El-Kholy, 1969: 3).

According to Abraham and Shryock (2000: 19), the earliest report of a Syrian colony in the area is documented in 1900 in the Detroit Free Press newspaper. The community was mainly a group of about one hundred people, mostly Maronite Catholics. Quoting Schwartz (1974: 256), Abraham and Shryock write that by 1916 a total number of 555 Syrian men were registered as workers in Henry Ford’s manufactories. By the 1930s, already a thriving community existed:

“The first official United States Census which documented the number of Arabic-speaking people in Detroit was conducted in 1930. At that time, the Arab community was largely confined to the city of Detroit and totalled nearly 9,000 inhabitants” (Abraham, 1983:91).

However, Detroit was not the only destination of Syro-Lebanese in Michigan. Naff (1985: 158-9) reports that Flint’s incipient auto industry attracted some Druze to work in the Buick plant. Flint, an industrialising city about sixty miles north of Detroit, also attracted workers at the turn of the last century:

“As more Arab families and single men arrived in Flint in the (sic.) during the 1910s, an entire neighborhood was established. A ‘little Syria’ grew up in the North End near the Buick factory where many of the men had jobs. The Arab factory workers were predominantly, but not exclusively, Maronites from villages in southern Lebanon. Druze from the village of Baakhline, Lebanon, also worked in the Buick factory and lived in the North End. …In the North End, enterprising Arabs ran grocery stores, coffee houses, bakeries, pool halls, gas stations, and rooming houses” (Mansour in Hooglund, 1985: 91).
Similarly to Detroit, by the 1930s, Flint had a thriving community composed of several hundred people. And from those beginnings, that community grew in the 1980s to “…an estimated 5,000 to 6,000 Arab-Americans [who] live in Flint and suburban Genese (sic) county” (Mansour in Hooglund, 1985: 87).

Nonetheless, Detroit and its immediate environs remained the main attraction for immigrants. Naff reports that Muslim immigrants tended to gravitate towards settling in industrial urban areas, attributing this to the fact that by the time Muslims began arriving to the United States, peddling (mainly practiced by the early Christian immigrants) was supplanted by shops and factory work (1985: 159). Naff adds that Muslims and Druze post 1908 had gravitated to Toledo, Ohio, Michigan City, Indiana, and Highland Park, Michigan, noting that, “Dearborn, Michigan, currently the largest [Arab] Muslim community in the United States, grew out of the relocation of Ford Motor Company’s Highland Park plant in 1916” (ibid.).

According to El-Kholy, Detroit’s Syro-Arab community was established by Arab Christians in the 1880s, and were followed by Muslims at the start of the 20th century (1966: 27-8). Naff reports, along with manufacturing work, that Syrians in Detroit had been engaged in private businesses prior to WWI, suggesting “…they migrated to it [Detroit] from other parts of the country to share in its booming economy as entrepreneurs” (p. 271).

A United Community Services report published in 1975 suggests that Syro-Lebanese immigrants who had settled first in New York and Boston came to Detroit circa 1900, and that the Palestinians followed between 1908 and 1913 (p. 4). The report suggests that the vast majority of the early immigrants who settled within the municipal
bounds of Detroit were Christians—Maronites, Melchites, Greek Orthodox, and Syrian Nestorians, also among them were some Iraqi Christians (adherents of the Chaldean rite Roman Catholics). Syrian Muslims had mainly settled in Highland Park, a Detroit enclave constituting an independent city (p. 5).

Yemeni Immigrants, according to the report, began settling in Detroit the years between 1912 to 1925, and resided in the south end of Dearborn (p. 6). Another UCS report in 1986, found that community still concentrated in Dearborn’s South end, and “…near Chrysler’s Dodge Main Plant near the Detroit and Hamtramck border” (p. 27). However, the most salient change affecting the Yemeni community in the 1980s and beyond was that no longer was the community composed only of single men, rather families began settling in those areas.

Although immigration had changed to a mere shadow of its original substance due to changes in American laws in the 1920s, the trickle of immigrants from the Arab world tended to be from Palestine due in large measure to the creation of the State of Israel on the territory of their homeland. Palestinians had been a minority among the earlier Syrians, who in the main arrived from Lebanon. Now, the political circumstances in the region motivated those who could leave to come to America in hopes of a new life and protection. More Palestinians began arriving in the Detroit area as a result of their displacement after the creation of Israel in 1948, generally settling in Livonia or Garden City, two western suburbs of Detroit (ibid.). In the mid 1980s, Palestinian Christians continued to reside in western Wayne County communities of Livonia, Garden City, and Westland, and in Oakland County in Farmington and Farmington Hills, whereas the
Muslim segment of the sub-community tended to reside in Dearborn’s south end and in southwestern Detroit (UCS, 1986: 27).

In keeping with a general pattern of urban to suburban flight as a result of increase in economic resources that characterised much of American life during the 20th century, Maronite Lebanese began moving from their Detroit settlement into an easterly direction, moving into cities of Grosse Pointe, St. Clair Shores, Warren, and Roseville—among others—beginning in early to mid 1920s (p. 6). At the turn of the millennium, descendants of this group still reside on the “east side” of the metropolitan region, moving into new outer lying suburbs such as Troy. Lebanese Christians in the 1980s tended to be located “…in substantial numbers in the eastern portion of the city of Detroit, the Grosse Pointes and Harper Woods, and in Macomb County in East Detroit, St. Clair Shores, Mt. Clemens, Roseville and Sterling Heights” (UCS, 1986: 27).

The UCS 1986 Report also added that Muslim Lebanese tended to be concentrated in the city of Dearborn, detecting a migratory pattern towards Dearborn Heights, Allen Park, Lincoln Park, Wyandotte, and Southwest Detroit. The report also noted the existence of two communities in Dearborn: the South end, and the Eastside community (which is to the north of the city).

Iraqi Christians (also known as Chaldeans), who had established a colony by 1920s, began moving into northern Detroit and Highland Park in the 1930s and 1940s, according to the UCS Report:

“By 1964 the area surrounding their church…together with the entire city of Highland Park contained over 40 percent of Chaldean households. By 1974, more than 1,500 Chaldean families had moved to an area north of Highland Park…. According to the 1969 Directory of Iraqi Chaldeans I the Detroit area, there are also 103 families concentrated in a few areas of Southfield in Oakland County. The Mother of God Church has also moved to Southfield” (UCS, 1975: 7).
This northerly migration of Chaldeans continued with the closing of the century, moving into Oak Park and further into Oakland County cities such as Bloomfield Hills and Troy, and Sterling Heights and Warren in Macomb County. However, the Chaldeans also maintained their enclave inside the city of Detroit (Woodward-State Fair area, known also as the seven-mile area) (UCS, 1986: 27).

However, post 1947 immigration, resulting from the eruption of the Palestinian problem and subsequent instabilities in the Arab East due to decolonisation, immigration changed in character. No longer the Arab immigrants were only of peasant or mercantile background, but many the new migrants were educated individuals in search of further higher education, such as in the case of the many university students who arrived in America, seeking higher credentials, or those who fled the region due to political and social turmoil, among whom the Palestinians were most prominent, but were not the only ones. Egyptian Copts can be included in this category of immigrants who arrived in Detroit after Egypt’s land reforms in the late 1950s. According to Jones (in Abraham and Shryock, 2000), Copts living in the Detroit area spread out geographically across the metropolitan area:

“…Copts are professionals: physicians, pharmacists, engineers, middle managers, and small-business owners. North America has benefited greatly from this influx of professionals. Egypt, on the other hand, has lost an equal number of talented, educated specialists…” (p. 224).

While it is true that, generally speaking, the Copts in Detroit are professionals, that phenomenon is not exclusive to them, rather it must include many Lebanese who fled their native country because of the civil war in the 1970s, and many Syrians who either fled or remained in the United States as a result of the political situation in the home country in the 1980s and early 1990s.
Detroit’s newest Arab immigrants are the Iraqi Muslim refugees who began arriving in the Detroit/Dearborn area in 1992, coming from makeshift camps in northern Saudi Arabia (Walbridge in Abraham and Shryock, 2000: 324). These refugees had answered President George Bush’s call on the Iraqi people to revolt against their leadership during the Second Gulf War, and were sacrificed on the altar of international politics, leading to their eventual sojourn to the United States (p. 327). Twice victimised, once at the hands of their own government when they rebelled against it, and another at the hands of the Allies in their coalition against Saddam Hussein—whose United Nations refugee placement policies left many families separated in many countries around the world— still, when they came to America, governmental assistance was minimal, and they were required to be self-supporting after eight months of subsidy (ibid. 332). The Iraqi community has taken up residence in the main in parts of Dearborn’s east and south end, and the areas adjacent to these parts located in Detroit.

3.5 Conclusion

In this chapter we had an opportunity to review the origins of Arabs in America, and the reasons that prompted their sojourn to America. We also visited the periods of their immigration to the United States, and examined their various patterns of settlements across the country. In the following chapter, Arab American life will be the focus of the discussion. Issues of racism and prejudice will be visited as we touch upon the challenges and struggles that have confronted Arab Americans historically and to the turn of the millennium. This will allow for a discussion of Arab American activism, socially, politically, and economically. Also, we will consider the nature of Arab American ethnicity.
Chapter Four
Arab American Life

4.1 Perceptions of Arabs in America

In 1785, three Arab Jews of Moroccan background ostensibly headed to Philadelphia, travelling on English papers, were deported from the Virginia commonwealth to their homeland after an investigation suspected them of being Muslims (Allison, 1995: 5-7; 33). The response to these individuals was largely due to a fear of a potential “Algerian invasion” of the United States. This fear was exacerbated by political anxieties in the young country, and betrayed a sense of enmity to all things Muslim and Arab. While the Arab sultanate of Morocco was the first state entity to recognize U.S. sovereignty in 1777 (one year before France), tensions still existed between the semi-autonomous states of Arab North Africa, namely Algiers, Tunis, and Tripoli (modern day Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya) over shipping and commerce in the Mediterranean. These tensions would result in America’s first wars with Arab and Muslim states. They were referred to the Barbary Wars.⁴

⁴ The so-called “Barbary States” plagued American shipping and commerce in the Mediterranean after United States ships lost British protection, leading the American government to pursue a policy of negotiation and war in order to safeguard its interests. The United States eventually signed a treaty with Morocco in 1786 and another with Algiers in 1795. The United States Senate approved treaties with Tunis and Tripoli in 1800. The following year, Tripoli demanded increased tributary payments, which the United States refused, leading to a state of war. In 1803, the American Navy bombarded Tripoli from the sea. In 1805 another treaty was established with Tripoli. The American War of 1812 against Britain emboldened Algiers to expel the American Consul General because the United States had been in arrears on tributary payments, thus declaring war. In 1815, Commodore Stephen Decatur sailed with an armada of 10 vessels and engaged the Algerians, and later won safe passage guarantees from Tunis and Tripoli, thereby diminishing the Barbary Coast threat to American shipping. (Diplomacy and War against the Barbary States, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/time/jd/16315.htm> Accessed June 5, 2003.)
Beyond shipping and commerce, the conflict was also rooted in religious ideology. Thomas Jefferson, Patrick Henry and John Adams had feared Algerian designs and felt that Christendom, in accepting paying tributes to North African corsairs, had failed to stand up to the Mahometans. In one correspondence to Thomas Jefferson, John Adams decried the “Policy of Christendom [that] has made Cowards of all their Sailors before the Standard of Mahomet.” Between 1776 and 1815, Robert J. Allison reports that America conceived of Islam as a despotic system that thwarted freedom. The belief in the US was that “Islam prevented men and women from developing to their fullest potential. Islam, as the Americans saw it, was against liberty, and being against liberty, it stopped progress” (Allison, 1995: 46). Thus, the Muslims, mistakenly called Mahometans, were seen as the quintessential “Other”, a strange and exotic cult that represented anti-American values, and was the antithesis of all things American.

4.1.1 Negative Assessments

The negative assessments of Arabs and Muslims seen today are thus not a new phenomenon, but rather simply the extension of historical views rooted in the earliest mindsets of the American republic. This has resulted in the formation of what is essentially a problematised relationship, where every encounter on the ‘macro level’ (and very often on the ‘micro level’) is viewed through the prism of problems and conflict. The logic of this outlook is understood through, and is supported by the use of Biblical interpretations concerning Arabs and Muslims, which then generate political and social consequences. Lastly, the end result is a system of labelling that shapes and moulds what the categories of ‘Arab’ and ‘Muslim’ mean in the general consciousness. All throughout, this chapter will attempt, albeit briefly, to connect historical events and ideas
to their meaning within American life, and how they informed the current depiction and understanding of Muslims and Arabs.

4.1.2 Facing Racism and Prejudice

_Early American Perceptions of “Eastern” Peoples_

Every non-Anglo Saxon group in the United States or its predecessor colonies can claim some form of prejudice, stereotyping or discrimination being practiced against them. Howard Zinn suggests that the early United States was formed in order to protect the interests of a landed upper class. In his book, _A People’s History of the United States_, Zinn offers the following explanation of the racial climate in the early 1700s:

“Racism was becoming more and more practical. Edmund Morgan, on the basis of his careful study of slavery in Virginia, sees racism not as ‘natural’ to black-white difference, but something coming out of class scorn, a realistic device for control. ‘If freemen with disappointed hopes should make common cause with slaves of desperate hope, the results might be worse than anything Bacon [Nathaniel Bacon’s Rebellion in 1676] had done. The answer to the problem, obvious if unspoken and only gradually recognized, was racism, to separate dangerous free whites from dangerous black slaves by a screen of racial contempt’” (2003: 56).

Darker in complexion and of a different religion than Christian Europeans who settled in the American colonies, Arabs were also targets of racism. As have been observed earlier, the American encounters with the Arab and Muslim “East” had been characterized by conflict. This state of affairs prompted a particular state of mind and revealed a fundamental approach emerging among early Americans towards the East. After all, this is a special time in American history, a time of true nation building that was established on an ideology of racism. Racism provides an adequate base for “Othering” anyone who is thought of as belonging to the Arab and Muslim East, regardless of the name in use at the time.
Many names were used to describe the Arabs, for example, the etymology of “Moor” reaches into Latin and Spanish, meaning brown. The word “Moor” has always implied colour in Spanish—brownness—a colour only shades away from black. It is not therefore an accident that an Arab is a “Sand Nigger” evoking a connection with blackness as defined early on in American life. What better proof of the lasting effect of this seeming organic connection between black and brown in the psychic American world then the consistent and persistent portrayal of Shakespeare’s “Othello” by white actors donning black faces or more recently by black actors in American theatre. “Algerine” as a subset of Moor because of its Africa connection, evoked not only a connection to colour, to blackness, but also to Islam and by extension to Arabity and Turk-ness. “Algerine” or “Moor” represented the Anti-Self of America—if “black African” was increasingly becoming codified, as the antithesis of “white European”, then, being “Moor” or any of its derivatives or connectives, is the psychic and cultural antithesis of “American-ness” (Ayouby, 2003). Being Arab and Muslim is to be beyond the pale of civilization and progress, a denizen of the land of backwardness and repression, according to Robert J. Allison (1995).

In the 19th century, the phenomenon of homeless children—orphans and waifs in cities in England or American were referred to as “street Arabs”. Later, the phrase took on lexical legitimacy in the dictionaries, coming to mean “homeless vagabond”, “outcast girl or boy” because like Arabs they are nomads and wanderers. At face value, this explication makes some sense—almost a poetic, may be even romantic, description of homelessness among street children in places like New York. However, given a little more thought, we begin to discern the real meaning behind this turn of phrase: these
children were not viewed romantically by the general population, which gave them the name; rather, they were cruelly treated and often dispatched without mercy. In short, they were considered vermin that needs to be obliterated.

An Article in 1868 Harper’s Weekly Magazine gives the following description of these Street Arabs:

“…they [Street Arabs] have many characters which we have not, and we many original to this soil; but all, in England or America, have a nature in common, and all belong to the nomadic race. Every where they are found they can be recognized as true Arabs; and strange to say, despite its privations, its dangers, and its hardships, those who have once adopted the semi-savage and wandering mode of life in early youth seldom abandon it, but continue to the end of their existence Arabs by second nature.

“Among the ‘Street Arabs’ of New York there are many distinct characters of people. Embraced under the head are to be included pickpockets, beggars, and prostitutes that prey upon the populace, as well as the itinerant sellers, buyers, etc., who profess to make some return for what they receive; but it is only from the latter class that our present illustrations are selected. These are to be seen every day in the streets of the city” (Harper’s Weekly, 1868:604).

Here, we begin to see that the label “Arab” is not romantic descriptor or hyperbole –if in fact it is a metaphor, it is very value-laden, borrowing the “otherness” of the Arabs in order to separate decent society from this unhealthy increase in the surface population, to paraphrase Charles Dickens’ Ebenezer Scrooge. The “otherness” of these wretched children is based on the “strange-ness” of the Arabs. As late as the 1960s, the noun “Arab” in Webster’s dictionary explained its meaning, referring to “street urchin” as a synonym of Arab. In a sense, a full circle, whereby Arab-ness defines the state of being a vagabond, which ultimately redefines Arab-ness. Thus, the “otherness” of the Arabs is the result of an exclusive drawing of boundaries of segregation, imposed by a
label of identification, which depersonalises and homogenizes Arabs and Muslims, while simultaneously emphasizing their distinctness from “Americaness”.

We have established America’s early sense of the “Other” by means of being an Algerine or Moor or Turk or Moslem or Mahometan—all archaic buzz words for Ottoman subject, Turk or Arab or Muslim. This aspect of the relationship has to be located from its earliest beginnings in the framework of the great contest between Dar-u-Islam (Islamic dominions) on the one side, and Christendom on the other. Therefore, it is no surprise that the early United States “plugged into” this historic animosity between the Muslim East and the Christian West. America’s share of animosity, while initially can be contextualised in the broader historic conflict between eastern Islam and Western Christianity, must also be viewed in a backdrop of European/Ottoman competition, where America, after independence, can be observed to instruct Europe in how to deal with Islam—militarily, hence, the Barbary Wars. The categorization of Arabs and Muslims as "Other" can be understood by thinking of three intersecting circles. One is the sphere of race and colour, another is the sphere of religion and theology and a third belonging to culture and lifestyle values. Racism, stereotyping and prejudice live in these intersecting circles of human experience. From the American perspective, Arabs live in all three circles, in effect, inhabiting the common area of the intersecting circles.

With African blacks, they share colour racism, as Arabs in America have migrated from shades of "black" and "brown" to "white" and back to "brown", as the colour line shifted again, especially after the events of 9/11. In terms of religion, although Arabs and Muslims share this space with other religious traditions and, to a lesser degree, with Judaism, Islam, as the historic challenger and rival, is the Anti-Christianity, standing
as the ultimate religious rebellion against God and country. In regards to culture and lifestyle values, the "foreignisation" and "othering" of Arabs and other Muslims, as can be illustrated by negative labelling, is the significant result and convergence of colour racism and religious bigotry, coupled with classical Orientalism—which is a western conceptualisation of what it is to be an Arab or Muslim, thus, problematising Arab and Muslim identities. In essence, once problematised, Arabs and Muslims are conceived as "alien" and "foreign", therefore, "Un-Western", "Un-American", and more significantly, the ultimate "Other".

Although these names are generic labels, their meaning in the American historical context has been less than neutral. The key is in connotations and associations in meaning. If one is to be an Arab, he is a Moslem, a Mohammedan, also a Turk and/or an Ottoman, a Moor or Algerine or any of the subset’s labels. Today, although some of the labels have been “modernized” so to speak, they still contain the same connotations they evoked before. William Shakespeare wrote: "A rose by any other name would smell as sweet." To paraphrase Shakespeare, “An Arab or Muslim by any other name would smell, look and feel as foul” (Ayouby at ASA, 2003).

Categorization of Levantine Arabs

Because of Ottoman control over the Levant (Greater Syria), Arabs and other ethnics from the region were dubbed “Turks in Asia” in the late 19th century, which made them into unfavoured Asiatics. Along with their earlier association with Moor, Algerine, Mahometans, and Moslems, now Eastern Arabs from Syria were saddled with a new colour burden.

Asian Controversy
At the beginning of the twentieth century America was not a hospitable place for Arab immigrants. In fact, American nativist antipathy towards immigrants in the late 19th and early 20th centuries not only encompassed southern/eastern Europeans and Chinese but Jews and Syrian Arabs, as well as Armenians (Kayal and Kayal, 1975: 74-5; Hopkins, n.d., reprinted 1969). Immigrants from the Ottoman Empire began arriving in the Americas in significant numbers in the second half of the nineteenth century, eventually giving rise to questions relating to their racial status, leading discrimination, segregation, community activism and resolution through the court system—all by the First World War (Suleiman in Suleiman, 1999: 7; Samhan in Suleiman, 1999: 217-8). In that timeframe, the proverbial swarthy features of Syrians (olive skin, dark eyes, and large moustaches) did not correspond positively with America’s eugenic pre-occupation with racial ideal types, thus making them into a “visible” minority that betrayed signs of “difference” (Joseph in Suleiman, 1999: 257-83).

Although early Arab American social history is replete with accounts of discrimination and racism across the country (Kayal and Kayal, 1975: 78-9), the South betrayed more overt racism than other areas (Naff, 1985: 253). According to Faires Conklin and Faires, Dr. H. A. El-Kouri, a Syrian physician in Birmingham, Alabama, was moved to defend his community in 1907 against the racist comments of Congressman John L. Burnett, who suggested that the Syrians are “the most undesirable of the undesirable peoples of Asia minor” (in Hooglund, 1987: 76). Apparently, one of the main reasons Syrians were also disliked was due to their friendly attitude towards African Americans with whom they transacted business. In St. Louis, Missouri, by
the 1920s, the epithet of “niggers” was a common term used against those Syrians who were reportedly poor, and particularly those who were dark skinned (ibid.).

Anti-Arab prejudice went beyond racial and ethnic lines to include a confessional dimension: Non-Catholic Eastern Orthodox Syrian Christians were not welcome to use local churches in Spring Valley Illinois, necessitating the community to purchase land for a to build a church and cemetery. In Pollack, South Dakota, Arab Catholics were unwelcome in the town. According to historical accounts, the residents of the town, with the exception of the banker and two other families, were “Protestant Yankees and Ku Klux Klan” (Naff, 1985: 251). Muslims, too, were targeted. Unaware of the difference, often, they were mistaken for Turks or Ottomans (ibid. 251-2). By the late twenties, however, the racial slurs were expanded now to include such terms as dago, sheeny, camel jockey, black, or dirty Syrian (Faires Conklin and Faires in Hooglund, 1987).

Official Categorization

Eastern Mediterranean immigrants, among them the early Arab émigrés, had been officially regarded as Caucasian. However, their racial status became an issue in 1906 when west Asians’ white credentials were questioned by new naturalisation laws, affecting their eligibility for gaining American citizenship. The law that excluded Chinese immigrants from citizenship in 1870 was amended to exclude other non-Europeans. While the law stated that free whites and aliens of “African descent or African nativity” could apply for naturalisation, it failed to define “white”, leaving its interpretation to the courts. In 1910, Eastern Mediterranean peoples, including Arabs, Turks, Armenians and others were drawn into racial controversy when the U.S. Census Bureau classified them as “Asiatics”. The issue was further complicated in 1911 when the
Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization ordered clerks of the Court to reject the applications for “first papers” for persons who were neither white nor persons of African birth and descent (Samhan in Suleiman, 1999: 216-18).

The “Asian controversy” loomed large for the Syrians in the race and colour-conscious South. Syrians were being disqualified from American citizenship on the basis of their non-white race and national origins, leading to court cases to cure the disadvantage. The first legal disqualification had occurred in 1909 when Costa George Najour, a Catholic from Mount Lebanon, was excluded on the grounds of that as an “Asian-born subject of the Ottoman sultan, he was not a ‘free white’ person” (Naff, 1985; 255). The Syrian American community rallied across the country and at a re-hearing of the case the following December, Syrians were declared “white” within the meaning of the 1870 immigration law as amended [from the Naturalization Act of 1790], theorising that the place of origin had no bearing on race. Nonetheless, the issue of the Syrians’ racial identity persisted a while longer as a number of naturalisation papers rejections from Southern and Midwestern states ensued. Although the courts had been highly influenced by the nativism of the times (Naber, 2000), nonetheless, between 1909 and 1914, three more cases were repealed and quietly won in Massachusetts, Oregon, and South Carolina, grounding the Syrians in their newly won whiteness, having proved they belong to the Semitic race, being recognised a legitimate branch of the Caucasian (read) white race.
Impact of Arab-Israeli Conflict on Arab Americans

The most important element of impact of the Arab-Israeli Conflict on Arab Americans has to be the way their fellow American compatriots reacted to the conflict, especially concerning the 1967 Six Day War.

“Perhaps no other recent event has shaped the Arab American community or the formation of its identity as this conflict…. In the period leading up to 1967, persons of Arab ancestry had settled into an identity rooted in religion and nation-state. While religion still provided the primary opportunity for community socialization, persons referred to themselves in terms of their national origins (Lebanese American, Syrian American, Palestinian American, etc.)” (David and Ayoubi, 2003).

Yvonne Haddad (1994: 79) suggests, “It was the advent of the Arab-Israeli war in 1967 that new meaning came to be attached to the term Arab-American.” While people in the Arab world were largely traumatized by the rapid victory of Israel, Arab Americans were traumatized by the ways that Arabs were demonised and the Israelis cheered by the US government and society (David and Ayoubi, 2003), something which led to Arab American political activism and organizational action. Although Evelyn Shakir (1997: 84) notes “the 1967 war galvanized the energy of Arab Americans and stirred them to action…” and Yossi Shain (1996) suggests, “[b]efore that war, Arab-American identity was amorphous and dormant”\(^5\), it is more likely that Arab Americans in the later decades of the 20\(^{th}\) century felt that they had no choice but to engage in action in order to dispel myths regarding their cultures and because they may have felt a need to correct injustices being visited among Arabs back home and in the United States. The activism may have given the appearance of the rise of a new Arab American identity (that has jelled as a result of the 1967 War), however, it is more likely that feelings of Arab-

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\(^5\) This is not a view shared by the author of this study: namely that there was not an Arab identity prior to the 1967 war, or that it was almost made extinct by assimilation. See Gary David (2003) for a critique of this view.
ness had always persisted among all segments of the Arab American population and had
found one avenue of expression through organizational and political activity. Certainly,
however, it was not the only kind of activity that had been part of the Arab American
community’s repertoire of social involvement, as has been demonstrated earlier.

Not only were Arab Americans affected by the War, but also the War reinforced
negative images of Arabs. In his work on the ‘Creation of Arab American identity’ and
their being ‘Perpetual Suspects’, Gary David (2003, 2004) believes this led to the
problematisation of Arabs in the American mindscape. Not only Arabs were seen as
“others”, but also when becoming part of the consciousness of Americans, they are observed to be in the context of a problem.

*Arab Nationalism and Arab American identity*

Arab-ness has always marked Arabs in America. Shakir has pointed out that
everyone in the community is recognized as being *ibn* (son of), or *bint* (daughter of) an Arab, implying acceptance of a cultural sense of identity and heritage. Indeed, being the “son/daughter of an Arab” is a cultural stance, whereas the admission “*ana Arabi*” (I am Arab) is a political declaration, asserting a nationality that exists in ideology, if not in state or legal terms. Therefore, in the absence of any collective Arab State that can bring together various cultural Arabs under one law and nationality, the only venue that had been available historically to assert this Arabity is through cultural attestation of belonging to something bigger and larger than parochial subdivisions. Hence, being *ibn/bint* Arab is a form or cultural nationalism that has existed in America long before the political and ideological nationalism of the latter half of the 20th century Arab World. In fact, Gary David (February 17, 2003) asserts that in America Arabs were very much able
to become Arab before other Arabs back home because, being American in nationality in legal terms, were free to assert and maintain their cultural nationalism, albeit in very subtle and special ways, in the face of an over-arching assimilative project that had been the paradigm of American existence in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Islam and Arab Americans

Historically, the Arab American community’s religious affiliations have been mixed. Arab Americans have been and are members of various denominations of Christianity and Muslim sects. Although historically, in the main, Arab Americans have been and are Christians, a large number are Muslim adherents (Haddad, 1994).

Islam is one of America’s fastest growing religions, whose members are estimated to reach millions in the United States, according to scholarly “guestimates” made by observers (Haddad, 1994). According to the American Muslim Council, Arabs constitute 26.2 percent of the American Muslim population, while South Asians and African Americans constituted nearly the fifty percent (Johnson, 2003). According to Smith:

“Arab Muslims, both Sunni and Shi’ite, continue to comprise a significant proportion of the Islamic community in America. Increasingly, they are highly educated, successful professionals who are also leaders in the development of a transnational, transethnic American Islam…” (n.d., online)

Helen Samhan, an Arab Americanist and Executive Director of the Arab American Institute, suggests that Arab American Muslims constitute roughly 23 percent of the national Arab American population, quoting a Zogby International poll conducted February 2000. She adds:

“Due to the steady increase since the 1950s, Arab Muslims represent the fastest growing, albeit still minority, segment of the Arab American community. Muslim Arabs in America have many more religious traditions and practices that are unique to their faith and may compete with prevailing American behavior and culture. The beliefs of Islam place importance on
modesty, spurn inter-faith marriage, and disapprove of American standards of dating or gender integration. Religious practices that direct personal behavior—including the five-times-daily prayers, the month-long fast at Ramadan, beards for men, and the wearing of the hijab (headcover) for women—require special accommodations in such places as work, school, and the military, thereby making Muslims more visible than most religious minorities and thus often vulnerable to bigotry…” (2001, online).

Certainly Samhan is correct in her assessment that Muslims whose practices, behaviour or outwardly appearance suggest their “different-ness” makes them visible and subject to objectification as “other,” thus problematising their presence among their American compatriots. In other words, in order to become visibly Muslim, it renders one outside the in-group, creating a sense of we/they, us/them. However, it is important to note that there are many who are Muslim but whose behaviours, practices and presentation of self do not necessarily betray them as Muslim and are likely to be accepted as part of the in-group (being “like us”), which suggests that problematisation rests entirely in the camp of mainstream America, where preconceived ideas about Muslims and stereotyping abound, rendering Muslims and Islam only visible as a threat or a problem to be solved, “a perpetual other,” as Gary David has noted (2003).

Although Muslims constitute 23 percent of the national Arab American population, in the Metropolitan Detroit area, the numbers are greater; however, there is no concrete information to suggest exact figures or official statistics. Nonetheless, the Muslim Arab American community in the Detroit area is guesstimated to be around half of the entire population. Additionally, while nationally the Muslim community is characterized by adherence to Sunni Islam—the more mainstream variety of the faith—in Detroit, there is high number of Shi’ah Muslims, especially in Dearborn. They hail in the main from Lebanon and Iraq. Again, while actual numbers are lacking, evidence such as
number of mosques and religious institutions belonging to this group (five in Dearborn) suggests Shi’ah Muslims are likely to be the majority among Arab American Muslims in the greater Detroit area. Another component of the Muslim community of Arab Americans is the Druze sect members. While, technically, they are an offshoot of Islam, and generally are considered to be beyond the pale of Orthodox Islam, members are adherents to a monotheistic belief system that combines Islamic beliefs with other esoteric practices. In Detroit, historically, they are regarded, and tend to regard themselves, as part of the Islamic community. Most Druze adherents hail from Lebanon, Syria and Palestine. They constitute the smallest segment of Muslim population. In regards to Sunni Muslims, their origins are a mix from Yemen, Syria, Jordan, Palestine, Lebanon, Iraq, and Egypt among others.

Arab Americans and Religion

Catholic include Roman Catholic, Maronite, and Melkite (Greek Catholic) Orthodox includes Antiochian, Syrian, Greek, and Coptic Muslim includes Sunni, Shi’i’a, and Druze

Christianity and Arab Americans

According to Zogby International’s numbers, the Christian Arab American community constitutes seventy-seven percent of the national population set. The majority are Eastern Rites Catholics with Orthodox adherents coming in at a far second, while Protestants are a distant third (See Graphic above). Samhan notes the following:

“…The majority of Arab Americans descend from the first wave of mostly Christian immigrants. Sharing the faith tradition of the majority of Americans facilitated their acculturation into American society, as did high intermarriage rates with other Christian ethnic groups. Even though many Arab Christians kept their Orthodox and Eastern Rite church (Greek Catholic, Maronite, Coptic) affiliations, which helped to strengthen ethnic identification and certain rituals, their religious practices have not greatly distinguished them from Euro-centric American culture…” (2001, online).

In the Detroit area, Arab Americans affiliating with Christianity’s various sects constitutes the majority of Arab background population in the Michigan’s southeastern region. Mostly located in the eastern and northern suburbs with a substantial presence in the city of Livonia (on the west-side), Arab American Christians are nearly non-existent in Dearborn, where nearly thirty thousand community members reside. This seeming segregation owes itself less to religious separation as it does to the original patterns of immigration and settlement. Where émigrés had settled depended on the time of their immigration and the available employment. Earlier immigrants tended to be Christian and had settled in eastern parts of the city of Detroit, later moving eastward with their descendants to the suburbs, while later immigrants, who tended to be Muslim, had settled in western areas of Detroit, including the suburbs (e.g. Dearborn), thus, establishing and maintaining a seeming bifurcation.
In addition to Muslims and Christians, one has to mention Arab background Jews and the potential of their inclusion in the Arab American community—at least on its margins. Philip M. Kayal reports:

“There are also thousands of Syrian Jews in this country [U.S.] who migrated here with the Christians at the turn of the [20th] century. Staunchly Arab in tradition and culture, they nevertheless are more likely now to identify with American Jews and the state of Israel than with the Arab-American population. Their nationality is Syrian, their social life is conducted in Arabic, yet Arab-American organizations would hesitate to include them in any count of community size” (1987: 99).

Clearly, from a cultural standpoint, the descendants of Syrian and other Arab Jews have to be included in the ranks of the Arab American community, and Judaism must be counted as one of the community’s religious traditions—not only historically and via Christianity or Islam but directly through Judaism’s adherents and practitioners, both as a cultural identity and religious practice.

4.1.3 Arab American Organisational Activity

Arab American organisational activity is as old as immigration to the United States. From the beginning, according to Naff (1985), immigrant Syrian Arabs established churches, mosques, charitable groups and newspapers that brought the community together in collective action. Historically, this collective action, as David (personal communication, 2003) points out, has not always revolved around politics, although political issues had a role to play (e.g. Ottoman control of the Levant, and, later, Lebanese identity politics), but, in the main, centred around issues pertinent to the community’s daily life such as responding the American assimilationist project, language, religious and cultural maintenance, and employment and immigration opportunities.
Syrian and Lebanese Organizations

Samhan (in Ameri and Ramey, 2000: 200) holds the early Arab American organizations, since the late 1800s and up to the 1920s, were largely faith-based institutions, devoted to cultural and religious maintenance. Because they were in the main of Eastern churches backgrounds (i.e., Orthodox, Maronite and Melchite), these Arab American Christians developed church-based clubs in order to socialize and enact their social and cultural practices. Regarding political involvement and organizing, Samhan suggests:

“The early Syrians did not organize around politics for several reasons…. So in the political arena, the early Arab immigrants kept a low profile and did not form, like other European immigrants, organized ethnic voting bloc that would draw attention to themselves” (p. 200).

However, by the mid 1930s, these faith-based clubs that had emerged as local reactions to immigrant needs for cultural maintenance spurred a movement to bring together many small clubs into a federated system. Thus, the Christian, Eastern Rite churches linked together forming the Federation of Syrian and Lebanese Clubs.

The smaller in numbers Muslim community followed suit in 1952 by forming the Federation of Islamic Associations, calling on Muslims across North America to associate locally and minister to the needs of the communities (ibid.).

Naff (1985: 311-319) observed a tendency towards secularisation, Americanisation and pan-Syrianism (the forerunner of pan-Arabism in America) in organization-building to have begun in the late twenties and early thirties; however, it was not to give fruit immediately. According to Naff (1985), the purpose of these organizations (clubs, fraternities, federations) was to promote a sense of belonging to the
world of Syria by perpetuating the values and virtues of Arabness, such as family unity and honour, hospitality, and generosity.

_Emergence of Arab American Organisational Structures_

Arab American organisations in some form have existed since the Arabs have been immigrating to the United States. Like all ethnic groups, Arab Americans have many reasons for organising themselves. Many of these reasons are related to how other Americans perceive them and how they treat them (Samhan in Ameri and Ramey, 2000). Based locally and nationally (Haiek, 1992), these organizations and institutions have worked to combat racism, discrimination, anti-Arab government policy, and widespread stereotyping, promoting understanding of Arab culture and heritage.

Throughout the intervening decades since their founding, Arab American organisations have gained sophistication, specializing in areas of politics, social services, law, medicine, business and mass communications among others that exist locally and nationally. Examples of these organisations include the various and local democratic and republican clubs, the Arab American Bar Association, the Arab American Medical Association, the Arab American Chamber of Commerce, and the Arab American Press Guild and the now defunct Arab American Media Society.

Some of the most influential and recognisable organisations in Arab America include: the Association of Arab American University Graduates (AAUG), the National Association of Arab Americans (NAAA), and the American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC), the Arab American Institute (AAI), the Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services (ACCESS). Along with these groups listed, there are virtually hundreds more ranging from activities in a local, regional, or national scope.
Arab American organisational activities reflected the need of its participants. In
the latter part of the 20th century, there emerged several Arab American organizations
that are of great consequence and importance to the national community. Scholarly
consensus on the issue is lacking, but the majority (e.g., Naff, Suleiman, N. Abraham and
Shryock among others) seem to hold to the view that the Six Day War of 1967, in which
the Arabs lost territory and pride to Israel, was a seminal event that engendered a need for
organizing among Arab Americans in order to combat not only a biased American policy
in the Middle East, but to improve the Arab image in the United States, thus humanising
and protecting Arab Americans from further bias and discrimination.

Moreover, according to them, Arab American identity was forged by the events of
1967. While a very questionable assessment, the notion, however, points to the
importance of the rise of national Arab American organizations and their impact on Arab
American life. The following is an identification of the four major organizations named
above, and a brief description of the reasons that led to their establishment, as well as
their role and function.

1. Arab American University Graduates (AAUG): The AAUG was founded in
direct reaction to the 1967 Arab-Israeli war. Arab Americans found themselves maligned
by their American compatriots while they were devastated by the blitzkrieg speed in
which Israel had humiliated the Arab world. Created as an educational and cultural
organization, bringing together professional and scholarly individuals of Arab and non-
Arab background in order to foster better understanding between the Arab and American
peoples and to promote informed discussion of critical issues concerning the Arab world
and the United States. In addition to its three periodicals, the Arab Studies Quarterly, the
Mideast Monitor, and the Newsletter, the AAUG published books, monographs, information papers and bibliographies, as well as convened conferences and other venues for scholarly presentations and public awareness. For the last decades of the 20th century, the AAUG was the standard bearer of the Arab American community’s political and socio-cultural issues; however, increasingly, it was replaced by other more specialized and more professional organizations, leaving the AAUG to focus on matters of scholarship.

2. National Association of Arab Americans (NAAA): NAAA was founded in 1972 in order to be the Arab lobbying organization in Washington, D.C. It held at its core values of human rights, believing:

“…that every individual is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, without distinction as to race, color, gender, language, religion, political opinion or national or social origin. The unconditional guarantee of fundamental human rights in the Arab countries is of particular importance to Americans of Arab descent. NAAA is committed to seeking redress of violations of human rights conditions and practices throughout the Arab World.” (NAAA website, n.d.: 2)

As a foreign policy lobbying group, NAAA’s objective is to help bring about a more objective, less biased policy in favour of Israel, and non-partisan U.S. foreign policy agenda in the Middle East.

The NAAA leadership believed achieving this self-declared mission depends on work that strengthens ties between the United States and the Arab world, while promoting even-handedness in American foreign policies towards the region. Anti-military involvement, the NAAA focuses its efforts on promoting the idea of negotiations as the only means to establish “a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East,” a statement often heard in Arab political quarters. The NAAA merged with the
ADC in the late 1990s in order to combine efforts to pursue peace in the Middle East and to combat racism and bias in the United States.

3. **American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC):** The ADC describes itself as “a civil rights organization committed to defending the rights of people of Arab descent and promoting their rich cultural heritage” (ADC Website, n.d.). Former United States Senator James Abourezk formed the ADC in 1980 in response to increased acts of discrimination and blatant prejudice, resulting from structural negative portrayal of Arabs and Muslims in the cultural mindscape of Americans. The ADC has more than seventy chapters nationwide, ranging from Washington, D.C., where it is headquartered, to Detroit, Michigan, Chicago, Illinois, Los Angeles, California and Houston, Texas among others. The organization is considered to be the country’s largest Arab American membership civil rights group, numbering more than 25,000 members (Cohen, 1991).

The ADC stages a national convention in Washington, D.C. and is attended by close to 2000 delegates and conventioneers from across the United States and from abroad each year. The annual convention is the time to discuss current issues facing the Arab American community, review governmental policies toward the community and the Arab world, meet with federal government officials, and provide forums for interactions among the members, including workshops, presentations, and symposia.

The ADC has been involved in some very high profile demonstrations, legal cases, and government lobbying, and has also openly supported the Palestinians in the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict. They have sponsored lectures on these subjects and published full-page advertisements depicting the daily strife of Palestinians in the Israeli occupied territories. These ads were an effort to correct the often inaccurate reporting of
the Palestinian uprising (Hanley, 2001). During the Persian Gulf War, the ADC was an important factor in the fight against a wave of anti-Arab sentiment. They demanded meetings with the Federal Aviation Administration and Pan Am airlines after they began banning Iraqis from its planes (Cohen, 1991). The organization was successful in its protests against the FBI interviewing hundreds of Arab Americans to find out if they had any ties to terrorist groups. The ADC argued that the FBI’s actions stereotyped Arabs as having “some innate knowledge of terrorism” (Cohen, 1991: 87).

4. Arab American Institute (AAI): The ADC is not the only Arab American organization worthy of discussion. "Founded in 1985, the Arab American Institute (AAI) is a non-profit organization committed to the civic and political empowerment of Americans of Arab descent." (AAI Website, n.d.:1). The AAI was established in Washington D.C. by Dr. James Zogby, a long time activist in the community. It was formed in reaction to the ongoing political and social maligning of Arab Americans. The earlier years of 1980s witnessed an increase in violence in the Middle East (e.g. the Lebanese civil war, resulting in American involvement in Lebanon in 1982 after Israel’s invasion, leading to the loss of American life in Beirut, and the subsequent spate of airline hijackings). These events led to increased animosities towards Arabs and Arab Americans, necessitating political action that reaches out to the American mainstream, American political institutions and the Arab world. AAI was given birth to help in the struggle of the Arab American minority find a place in the American political landscape.

The objectives of the AAI are to promote full involvement of Arab American citizens in government. They encourage the advancement of Arab American leaders on all levels of U.S. society. They seek to make an impact on domestic and foreign policy
issues that affect Arab Americans (Haiek, 1992). The AAI have conducted surveys and polls of Arab Americans in order to get a more accurate demographic breakdown of the population. The results from these surveys are presented to government officials and the public alike. The AAI leadership hopes to use this information to clear up common misconceptions about Arab Americans and also to illustrate how significantly important this minority group is to America (Chatfield and Gentile, 2001).

A National Agenda: Political Inclusion

Although there is evidence that Arab Americans have been politically involved at an individual level and small group levels, in the post 1967 era, there has been a tendency, especially among the politicised and immigrants along with descendants of the older “Syrian” community to push towards a more collective political involvement under the Arab American rubric. The founding of AAUG, ADC and AAI among others points to the community’s increasing political awareness, sophistication, and commitment to political activism on the local and national levels.

Recognizing the need for access to the halls of power, Arab American organizational leaders began to develop contacts with politicians and political parties who may be sympathetic to them or some of their causes. After all, Arab Americans as individuals have had access to power centres (e.g. local municipalities, state houses and state mansions, the U.S. Congress and, even, the White House) of decision-making. In fact, there have been numbers of Arab background politicians, such as, Congressman Nick Rahal of Virginia, Congresswoman Mary Rose Oakar of Ohio, U.S. Senator James Abourezk and others, however, historically, this was not achieved as a group with its own agenda.
While the American political environment has not been particularly favourable for Arab and Arab American issues, Arab American activists still maintain the need for political engagement with Washington, D.C. However, increasingly the implications of this modality of engagement has come under scrutiny from members of the community who are questioning its efficacy in light of the continued onslaught of anti-Arab and anti-Islam policies that emanate from the American capital. Since the late 1980s, America has but minimally moved on the issue of concern: (e.g. the Palestine question) and has engaged in political and military action in the Middle East, which the majority of Arab Americans did not support, namely, the Second Gulf War (war to liberate Kuwait from Saddam Hussein in 1990-1) and the current Occupation of Iraq in 2003. Of particular concern here is the limited abilities of Arab American organizations (especially ADC and AAI) in protecting individual and community rights in times of crisis, such as the backlash experienced by the Arab American community in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 tragedy.

Clearly, however, this model of political engagement is found lacking. Primarily, it advocates political involvement at all levels, promoting an air of inclusion in the political process, however, at the net effect level the community tends to be more used for political ends that ultimately may not benefit the Arab Americans.

Moreover, the over-emphasis on accessing power through the white-dominated political structures of Washington, D.C., and especially in the absence of any coordinated efforts with other minority groups, such as African Americans, Latino Americans, and others, leaves the community unprotected and susceptible to political abuse, for it is only
linked to the system through the white-dominated political apparatuses, thus, the terms of this connection can be changed or eliminated at will by the incumbent forces.

Nevertheless, as the case has been for nearly three decades, as of this writing the current emphasis in Arab American organizations remains on inclusionary politics, which mean obtaining political power through money and votes. This, of course, is not entirely a bad approach, only that it is limited, and in the absence of a back-up process of alliance-making and coalition-building with other minorities, it renders the community potentially the object of political blackmail. However, because of the international political situation (i.e., the wars on Afghanistan and Iraq, and their subsequent occupation, and the perception in the majority-Muslim countries that America is engaged in a Crusade against Islam), there is potential for Arab American and Muslim American manoeuvring because political forces and mainstream politicians are keen not to present a prejudiced stance vis-à-vis Islam and Arabs, especially in a world unhappy with Bush’s and America’s war in Iraq, and particularly during a political season (in anticipation of the American presidential elections of 2004).

In due course, it is the hope of activists to achieve enough influence on the American political system in order to relieve the suffering of the Palestinians, and now the Iraqis, and any other Arab peoples. Also, the hope of activists is to be able to influence the national culture in such ways so as to present a better image of Arabs and Muslims in country. However, this writer remains sceptical that this can be achieved, given the historic tendencies towards Orientalism and Islamophobia.

4.1.4 Socio-economic (Demographic) Profile of Arab Americans

*Early Sources: Who Were the Syrians?*
Counting and categorizing members of the Arabic-speaking community in the United States has always been problematic. Not only because Arabs have migrated in waves from differing parts of the region, but also because of self-identifications (linguistic, regional, religious, socio-cultural) that may have emphasized aspects of identity other than the greater ethnic one (i.e., Arab). Thus one finds a variety of labels—depending on the time of arrival of these groups, such as: Syrian, Lebanese, Maronite, Chaldean, Orthodox, Muslim, Druze, etc. (Naff, 1985). In addition, one finds that not only self-identifications complicate matters; rather official “book-keeping” in the United States problematises the issue further by disagreement between official agencies of the United States government over the numbers of the original Arabic-speaking immigrants (e.g. Immigration and Naturalization Service and the U.S. Bureau of the Census) whose numbers rarely match (Kayal, 1987). Nigem and Nagi report:

“Until 1979, most data on Arab Americans were collected from indirect migration statistics and unofficial sources (community studies, religious centers, and Arab Associations). The U.S. Census of the Population, as well as the Immigration and Naturalization Statistics, were of limited value and did not clearly or directly identify this group. …In immigration statistics until 1899 and in census records until 1920, all Arabs, Turks, Armenians, and others were classified as ‘Turkey in Asia.’ After 1920, the category ‘Syrian’ was added to accommodate the increase in the Syrian emigrants. However, non-Syrians were classified as ‘Other Asians’ and North African Arabs as ‘other Africans’” (1991: 52).

According to Naff, official numbers of Arab immigrants have always been distorted:

“Records of the Bureau of the Census dealing with Arabic-speaking people and Syrians in particular also lead one down a vague and confused path. Most of the problem stems from the impossibility of comparing categories of data (and their definitions) from census to census. Whereas the Bureau of Immigration began in 1899 to distinguish Syrians and Palestinians by ‘race’ from other Turkish subjects, the census of 1910 continued to include them under the category ‘Turkey in Asia.’ …In short, there exists no source or means that will provide accurate demographic data on Syrians in the United States before World War II” (1985: 109).
Naff notes that the sojourner mentality of the Syrian immigrants has subsided by 1920 that by 1940, 200,000 Syrians had made America their permanent home, adding:

“…The 1930 census shows 57,227 Syrians and 6,136 Palestinians, with women constituting 43 and 40 percent respectively. The Syrian population shown in the 1940 census was 50,859 and that of Palestinians 7,047. More telling are the figures which included not only the foreign-born but the ‘native white stock of foreign parentage.’ In 1930, there were 89,349 Syrians and 4,311 Palestinians born in the United States of mixed parentage. When combined with the foreign born, the total shows 137,576 Syrians and 10,446 Palestinians. By adding these figures to the total Syrian and Palestinian population for 1940, the result is an estimated 206,128 Americans of Syrian and Palestinian origin and descent” (1985: 117).

Nigem and Nagi suggest Arab immigration to the United States occurred in two periods, 1885-1938 and 1947 to the present, and within each period, phases could be discerned based pull and push factors linked to the situation in the homeland and in America:

“…The second period of migration, from 1947 on, is characterized by different events, mostly political in nature. The Palestinian problem, the creation of the state of Israel, the several wars that followed, including several revolutions and the Lebanese crisis, contributed largely to the second period of migration. These migrants were mostly of high socio-economic status, in particular, a higher educational background. The concept ‘brain drain’ was applied to these migrants” (1991: 54).

This latter period of immigration had imbued the general community of Arab Americans with new rank and file members, increasing its numbers. Yet, despite this growth, undercount and underestimation persist as a problem (Ibid.).

Nonetheless, this brief history of counting the early Arab Americans suggests how the numbers issue has always been a guessing game. At best, the early numbers are “guesstimates” whereby figures from various sources are adjoined to give a general description of the community, a practice that continues to this day. In addition, the “official record” of Arab immigration to America does not have any adequate numbers
that deal with emigration from other parts (e.g. Yemen, Iraq, Egypt). Nonetheless, it is
safe to say that from the 1940s to the 1980s the numbers game is blurry enough that no
one can make definite claims about population expansion and community growth because
any extrapolations are dependent in whole or part on accepting the reliability of the pre-
1940 numbers. Certainly, the racist immigration policy imposed by Quota Act of 1924
had severely curtailed Arab/Middle Eastern immigration to the United States, which had
a major impact on the numbers of Arab descendants in America. The act had limited
immigration to 100 individuals per Arab country, remaining in effect until the latter half
of the 20th century. However, no one can be sure conclusively of the law’s effects absent
real numbers prior to the regulation going to into effect.

Undercount: 1980 Census

According to Nigem and Nagi (1991), the “ancestry question” was first
introduced in the 1979 Current Population Survey and the 1980 decennial census. The
ancestry question was open-ended and based on self-identification. This methodology
allowed for a better sampling of the population, however, it is not without its problems:

“Historically, only a portion of this [Arab background] population
identifies with an Arab ancestry, resulting in a numeric undercount by a
factor of about 3. Limitations of the sampling methodology, combined
with non-response by some, under-response (only two ethnic backgrounds
are tabulated and reported), and reporting ancestry as race, results in
relatively higher under reporting among Arab Americans” (Arab
American Demographics Website, n.d.).

The 1980 Census placed the Arab American community’s size at 660,000, using the
ancestry question; however, Nigem and Nagi suggest that numbers arrived at by Arab
organizations (usually between one and three million) are too high, while census numbers
may be too low:
“Although the range between the estimates based on official data and that based on some adjustments, a rough estimate of the size of the Arab American population for 1980 is approximately 756,665. Adding the immigrants from 1981-1987, the size reaches 858,585. A more liberal estimate may put the figure around 1,125,000” (1991: 56).

Although in retrospect, given Zogby’s new numbers, it is likely that Nigem and Nagi were themselves too low in their adjustment of the numbers, however, it points to the mercurial nature of ascribing numbers to the Arab American community. Nonetheless, this general overview of the situation suggests the complexity of the counting Arab Americans as well as the political nature of the numbers.

*The Number Game: 1990 Census*

According to the 1990 United States Census of Population and Housing, the national community grew by some 167,000 people from the 1980 Census numbers. The number for all persons was placed at 716,391, the majority of whom (424,677 or 59.3 percent) were native born Americans, while (291,714 or 40 percent) was foreign born from Arab parts. Interestingly, of the foreign born set, 49 percent were naturalized citizen, while 51 percent were immigrant in legal status—thus, making the majority constitutionally Americans, regardless of how questionable the numbers are.

*Expectations of the 2000 Census*

Although not perfect, but by far better than the census bureau numbers, the AAI has produced a better picture of the national Arab American scene through its reports of estimates established by Zogby International, an American private and well respected research and polling group, whose research projects Arab American population figures to be three times more than the Census Bureau. According to the AAI,

“It is estimated that at least three and a half million Americans trace their heritage to the Arab world. The U.S. Census identifies a portion of this
population through a question on ‘ancestry’ from the census long form” (Arab American Population Highlights, 2003:1).

Thus, the official census effort is said to drastically undercount the Arab American population. The Census Bureau numbers (1.5 million) suggest a total number two-thirds less than the numbers produced through the Zogby methodology. Through Zogby International, the census numbers are adjusted through a national Arabic surname search.

Census Bureau data is obtained through ancestry (ethnic origins, descent and/or roots) self-reports on a long form established by the bureau and is not distributed to every household. Furthermore, persons amalgamated and reported as Arab are based on the individual’s first ancestry reported, thus, if one reports to be American first and Lebanese second, or being of Greek origins first and Egyptian second, this respondent will not be counted as Arab. What is more, persons are counted as Arab only if they report it first and are from the following north African states: Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, Sudan and Tunisia—leaving out, Comoros, Djibouti, Mauritania and Somalia. The latter has a significant population in certain areas of the country, which dilutes the Arab presence when not counted. The Asian Arab states that are counted: Bahrain, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Syria, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen. However, there are issues of self-identification that derive from these states and which impact the number of Arab Americans in the country: e.g. Maronite Catholic Lebanese not reporting as Arabs, or Iraqi “Chaldean” (Eastern Rite Church members) being identified as an ethnic group instead of a religious one.

AAI’s numbers obtained through Zogby International’s research suggests the national Arab American community is larger than reported in official, constitutionally-
mandated decennial census. Zogby’s numbers include in its definition of “Arab” all the member countries of the League of Arab States and all their inhabitants—even if hyphenated Arabs (i.e., Kurdish Iraqis, Berber Arabs, Armenian Lebanese, etc.). In addition, religious/linguistic groups such as Assyrian, Chaldean, and Syriac are included in the collective Arab pool, as well as groups racially categorized as black-not-Arab, e.g. Sudanese and Somali.

Demographic features of Arab Americans

Today’s Arab America is a population that is constituted from several waves of immigrants from the Arabic speaking countries of Southwest Asia and North Africa and their descendants. Counted upward of three million (often estimated at 3.2 to 3.5 million), the national Arab American community, according to AAI and Zogby International, is said to exhibit the following demographic features:

First and foremost, the Arab American community is an urban population, located in America’s major metropolitan centres. Americans of Lebanese background constitute the greater portion of the national Arab American community residing in most states. However, Egyptian Americans are the largest group in New Jersey, while Americans of Syrian heritage are a majority in small Rhode Island State. Iraqi/Assyrian/Chaldean communities are concentrated in Illinois, Michigan and California, while the largest Palestinian American population is found in Illinois. Although Americans of Arab descent are to be found in all fifty states, Arab Americans are mainly concentrated in ten states: California, where one-third resides of the national population resides, followed by Michigan and New York, then Florida and New Jersey, then Illinois, Texas, and Ohio followed by Massachusetts and Pennsylvania. Although there is a substantial population
living in Virginia, according to reports, residing in the northern suburbs bordering

According to the 2000 Census, educationally speaking, of school-aged Arab
Americans, 13 percent are pre-schoolers, while 58 percent are in basic and secondary
students, and 22 percent are enrolled in college programs, with 7 percent of the grand
total involved in graduate studies. In terms of educational attainment, 85 percent of Arab
Americans have a secondary diploma, while 40 percent hold a bachelor degree or higher qualification—as compared to 24 percent of the national average. In fact, nearly twice the
national average, 17 percent hold post-graduate qualifications (ibid.). School involvement
and attainment indicate a steady trend and express the community’s continued focus on
educational achievement.

In terms of employment, about 64 percent of Arab American adults are part of the
labour force, while 5 percent are jobless. Seventy seven percent of working Arab
Americans are involved in managerial, professional, technical, sales or administrative
fields, according to the Census Bureau Census 2000 Summary File 4. In addition, the
survey found that most Americans of Arab backgrounds (88 percent) worked in the
private sector, while 12 percent were various levels of government employees.

In regards to earnings, the same source reports the median income of Arab
American households in 1999 was $ 47,000 compared to $ 42,000 with all American
households. The national mean income measured at $ 56,644, and the Arab American
average was higher by 8 percent. Also, 30 percent of Arab Americans have an annual
household income of $ 75,000 as compared with 22 percent of all Americans.
Employment and income figures point a vibrant community, rooted in its work ethic and that is economically well off as compared with the national average. However, despite higher than average earnings and being gainfully employed, the Arab American community’s newer members—the immigrants and the refugees—still experience high levels of unemployment due to language/culture barriers, lack of appropriately marketable skills and because of discrimination.

Postscript to Census Issues

Today, Arab American numbers seem to matter more for people, organization and governmental agencies, especially in light of the tragic events of September 11, 2001. Now more than ever, federal governmental agencies are interested in acquiring a more concrete profile of Arabs in America. However, by the same token, there may be reticence on the part of many Arab Americans to be forthright in their participation with the upcoming 2010 national decennial census.

In comparing the 1980, 1990, and 2000 censuses, census information specialist and community outreach professional working with the Arab American community in the 1990 and 2000 censuses, sociologist Rifaat Dika, notes,

“…all of them do not reflect the number of the community because of structural problems in the ways the questions are asked in the long [census] forms, where the answers are ‘write-in’ responses. This is different, for example, for racial groups who have specific boxes to choose from in the short form, such as Hispanic, African American, and so on.

“However, comparing the three censuses in terms of the worst or the best, there is no objective database to come to a solid conclusion. But, I would say that census 2000 is the best of them in terms of reaching out to the community nationwide for the first time in the history of the Census Bureau, and the involvement of more Arab organizations in the process in addition to the media local and national.

“In the 1980 census there was no single Arab American working for the census. In the 1990 census it was the first time an attempt was made by the census to
reach out to the community and to get community grassroots organizations as
census partners, but it was a limited project in terms of number of Arab
Americans who were hired including myself and few other people.

“This changed in Census 2000 as mentioned before. As for now, the situation is
uncertain for the 2010 census. The Census Bureau eliminated the long form
altogether. Now they will use an alternative periodical survey called the
‘American Community Survey’, which includes the same ethnicity and country of
origin questions in the old long form. But, the new survey will not be massive as
the long form.

“I would assume, given the budget cut for the Census Bureau, which will limit
hiring Arab Americans and spending money on media outreach advertising, in
addition to the fear from the post [September] 9/11[2001] situation among Arab
Americans, that the census of 2010 may be the worst if those conditions

4.1.5 Arab American Entrepreneurship

According to social historian Alixa Naff, the first Arab Americans

“…brought with them rigorous habits of hard work, thrift and
perseverance—traits that were quite compatible with the most cherished
American values of the time…they began the climb up the economic
ladder to their goals very early in their immigrant experience” (1985:192).

No different today than before, Arab-Americans continue to preserve these values,
maintaining a strong sense of mercantilism.

*Peddlers*

The early Syrians took to pack peddling in the late decades of the 19th century in
order to make better money. According to Naff:

“The basic virtues of peddling were many. Immigrants could earn immediately; it
required no real advanced training, capital or language skills; and it suited their
individualistic nature and sense of impermanence. In short, it allowed them to
operate on their own terms” (1985: 128).
Although it was not a unique profession for the Syrians (since other groups had engaged in it), however, it has become a trade overly identified with the pioneering early Arab community so much so that,

“[t]he [Syrian] peddler was such a part of the American landscape that playwrights Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein made a peddler a main character in their famous musical *Oklahoma!*” (David in Ameri and Ramey, 2000:114).

Walter Zenner suggests,

“[t]he peddlers were the chief initiators of Syro-Lebanese colonies throughout the United States. The result was relatively small communities, even in large cities. Only two American cities have relatively large enclaves, New York City and Detroit” (1982: 466).

Zenner identifies the Syrian community as an example of a “middleman minority” ethnic group because

“…a substantial and disproportionate number of its members are engaged in small commercial enterprises or are employed in such enterprises by other members of their groups” (*Ibid.*: 457).

By World War I, peddling and the establishment of settlements had accomplished their primary task, namely helping early Arab Americans settle into ‘Amrika’, according to Naff (1985), and many Syrian pioneers had been adjusting to the demand of American living. By the mid 1920’s Syrians had settled and were fully immersed in the Americanisation process. Soon members of the early community trained their sights on new horizons. The emerging Syrian middle-class slowly and steadily began to form before World War I. These immigrants were driven upward by the dynamics of new opportunities. Many became small business owners, launching into their businesses with more courage than capital and more determination than experience (Naff, 1985). She further adds that the early Arab immigrants were the most ingenious, enterprising and
crafty businessmen of the immigrant races (*Ibid.*)

In the early 1900s, Syrian-Lebanese businesses were the basis of Arab-American entrepreneurial endeavours. These businesses included small manufacturing, wholesaling, importing, publishing, and working travel agents. Small family retail enterprises ventured into ice cream parlours, poolrooms, nickelodeons, and movie houses. There were also butchers, bakers, barbers, shoemakers, cleaners, cigar shops, jewellers, and tailors. Scattered around the country, there were also some contractors, developers, farmers, dentists, doctors, pharmacists, and attorneys. Yet, the favourites retail enterprises of the group were grocery stores and fruit stands (*Ibid.*)

While the early Arab immigrants of all faiths tended to engage in the peddling and small trading businesses, there were others who held other forms of employment, such as factory jobs (e.g. working in the auto industry in the Detroit metro area).

*Factory Workers*

Naff (1985) reports that at least some did not resort to peddling, opting for other work, adding that of those who entered into manufacturing had their goal of leaving the assembly line for privately-owned stores, thus, only a fraction remained in factory work—mostly Muslim. David (2000) suggests manufacturing was one of the pull factors in Syro-Lebanese and Palestinian immigration to America, adding,

“…this is the reason for large Arab communities in cities such as Detroit, Michigan; Toledo, Ohio; Wheeling, West Virginia; and locations throughout Pennsylvania” (cited in Ameri and Ramey, 2000:114).

Increasingly, however, manufacturing work among Arab Americans is declining, mirroring a general decline in the volume of American manufacturing jobs as American capital migrate them to cheaper-labour countries. Also, as mentioned above, given the
general higher profile of Arab American educational achievements, there is a tendency towards “white-collar” work that requires advanced training and higher education. Thus, there is less reliance today on industrial work than before. In *Mosaic of Middle Eastern Communities in Metropolitan Detroit*, David notes, “community members attribute their success to the work ethic and the entrepreneurial spirit they claim exists in the Middle Eastern culture” (1998:45), a spirit that stresses focus on business and higher end labour.

*Business Owners and Professionals*

Samia El-Badry, interpreting 1990 Census data on work, notes that western-style educated new Arab Americans identified as members of a professional class, who in the main had immigrated after 1964:

“In general, Arab-Americans are better educated than the average American. More of them attend college, and they earn masters or higher degrees at twice the average rate. Because they tend to be well educated and of working age, their work force rates are high…” (El-Badry, 2001, online).

El-Badry adds:

“Sales comprises the largest percentage of both Arab-American and non-Arab-American entrepreneurs, although the rate of Arab-Americans in sales (33.4 percent) is almost double that of non-Arabs (17.9 percent). Moreover, non-Arab-American entrepreneurs are much more evenly distributed across other occupations such as farming, fishing or forestry” (Ibid.)

Regarding more contemporary profile of Arab Americans at work, David notes that,

“..patterns of yesterday continue today, with second- and third-generation Arab Americans entering professional occupations while immigrants fill their vacancies in manual labor production, store ownership, and agricultural work. As long as immigrants from the Arab world continue to arrive, this pattern will most likely continue” (in Ameri and Ramey, 2000:117).

*Famous Arab Americans at Work*

Within Arab American circles many today embrace the idea of entrepreneurship.
But not many are necessarily fortunate in the business arena. However, there are good examples of contemporary success stories, which include Darrell Issa, the son of Lebanese immigrants, founder of Directed Electronics Inc., and now member of U.S. Congress, and Julian Movsesian, an Egyptian, Cairo-born immigrant, and the founder of Capital Management Strategies Inc. in discussing his business approach, Issa proclaims “The biggest thing about being a businessman in the United States is forget that you’re Arab-American, anything-American. Because the marketplace is too limited,” suggesting Americans of any background ought to be able to work with anyone else (Ibrahim, 2000, online).

4.1.6 Religion, Ethnicity, State-Nationalism, and Modalities of Identity

Being Lebanese: State Nationalism Identity

Lebanese identity is a product of colonial involvement in the Levant that mixes elements of religion, culture and history to form a myth about self and society. In the main Maronite Catholic Christians, but with a considerable number of other Christian minorities, developed a notion of a Christian homeland (a separatist attitude) in the Lebanese hinterlands as a reaction to the overwhelming Muslim context of the region, and were supported by foreign European interests, especially French during the waning years of the Ottoman State. Naff writes,

“Staunch Christian nationalists of Mount Lebanon initiated, between World War I and World War II, a movement that continues into the present Republic of Lebanon which denies their Arabness and claims racial and cultural links to the Phoenicians—links that stretch taut the logic of identity…” (1983: 16).

With the creation of the Lebanese state in the 1920s under a French mandate, this attitude in good time spilled-over into America, causing a schism in the early Syrian
community—between what became Syrian and Lebanese sub-groups in the early Arab community. Although Arabism as a political or overt cultural force was not a strong phenomenon among them, the Syrian-Lebanese controversy served to divert the attentions of community members.

According to Naff:

“…A number of American Syrians, out of conviction and fear, found it more expedient to adopt a Lebanese identity which simultaneously cloaked them in the robe of Christianity and separated them from the rising anti-West, anti-imperialist, and Arab nationalist stridency in the Middle East” (Ibid.)

Again, Naff suggests that,

“…[a]lthough Arabs, including Syrians, share a common language, tradition, cultural traits, and values, their national identity is refracted primarily through the prism of religion. This is just as true when they share a common national origin. The result is widespread factionalism and fragmentation” (1983:16-17).

This assessment is applicable to Arabs from Syria as well as those from other Arab countries. Region (localism) and religion (parochial particularism) combining with vastness of geography and historical forces militate against social, political, and cultural uniformity. Within the Arab American community, there remains a strong component of Lebanese nationalists who reject the Arab or Arab American label in order to escape any association their compatriots and with Islam. Also, this phenomenon is very much at play in the case of being “Chaldean”.

*Being Chaldean: Religion as Ethnic Nationalism*

A small linguistic community of Christians in Iraq, speaking a Neo-Aramaic dialect (also called “Chaldean”) have come to refer to themselves in America as Chaldeans. In point of fact, the label originates in the name of the “Chaldean Catholic
Church” (the Chaldean Patriarchate, established in 1553), which is an eastern Catholic church under the jurisdiction of the Roman Pope. The origins of this church lie in its Assyrian heritage. The Chaldean Church is an offshoot of the Assyrian Church of the East, which had split from the Syrian Orthodox Church in the mid 5th Century (Council of Chalcedon 451 C.E.) over the nature of Christ.

Today, in America, adherents to the Assyrian Church call themselves Assyrians (mainly in southern California) and Chaldean Rite Catholic congregations (mostly in southeast Michigan) refer to themselves as ethnic Chaldeans. This has come to mean a distinct ethnic identity—separate from Iraqi Arab, which, as an ethnic category, did not exist in Iraq prior to immigration. This new nationalism, very much akin to the “Lebanonism” of the separatist Lebanese in thinking and myth making—in this case claiming origins from ancient and biblical Chaldea, the Iraqi “Chaldeans” have developed this identity in America. In a real sense, being Chaldean is an American ethnic self not an Arab origin (Iraqi) identity.

In the main, Iraqi Chaldeans are a significant population group in the Detroit metropolitan area. Their numbers, said to range from 70,000 to 100,000, contribute to their socio-political significance within the mosaic of Arab/Middle Eastern community. Although in Iraq the group would be considered no different from any of the mainstream Arab population, and recognized as religious community not an ethnic one, in Detroit, Chaldeans have evolved a sense of separateness, and have claimed exclusive rights to ancient ethnic origins that almost any Iraqi group can claim, as well. Also, by doing so, they have catered to America’s fears of Arabs and Muslims, thus, distancing themselves from these groups and signalling themselves to be “Middle Eastern”, and potentially, a
persecuted minority by an overwhelming Muslim/Arab majority. Although this claim meets American misconceptions, it does not square with the facts of history.

**Being Coptic: Community Nationalism**

Among the Arabs of Detroit, the Egyptian Coptic community is likely the most isolationist. Sharing with the Chaldeans and Lebanese Christians, a sense of grievance against Muslims and Arabs, and nursing a nationalism that draws on ancient Egyptian lore, the Copts are committed to ethnicity and church—in a way emulating a Jewish sense of self and history.

The Copts, or members of the native Egyptian Church, established by St. Mark, is relatively a new component of the Arab American community (since migration began in the 1960s, according to Jones in Abraham and Shryock, 2000: 224). Again, however, due to factors relating to American distrust of Islam and issues of communal competition in Egypt between Muslims and Christians, which are layered on top of the chronic political problems of the Middle East, (namely, the Arab Israeli conflict, economic dislocation, etc.)—all have worked to mitigate an overt sense of commonality with other ethnic Arabs in the Metropolitan Detroit area.

Although the Egyptian Copts are spread out across North America, with strong component of the community located in New Jersey (AAI population profile, 2003), in Detroit they are spread out across the metropolitan area, according to Jones, who characterizes the Church and its membership in the following way:

“Clearly, the North American Coptic Church is something other than the Egyptian church, but in certain respects it is even more Coptic. Abouna Roufail Michail [our Father Raphael Michael] can be a priest in Greater Detroit in ways he cannot be a Coptic priest in Egypt. In Troy [a Detroit northern suburb where Copts are found], he has the freedom to openly display and talk about his ethnicity proudly. In fact, there is an almost
exaggerated sense of being Coptic in the St. Mark Coptic Orthodox Church compared to most Coptic churches I have visited in Egypt.” (2000:229-30).

Elsewhere in his article, Jones notes Coptic nationalism among immigrants in on the rise, adding:

“While I was in Egypt, I observed that Copts and Muslims alike, when asked, uniformly insisted that they were Arabs. It is interesting that in the West at least some members of the Coptic immigrant community are beginning to think of themselves as ‘non-Arab,’ yet continue to believe they are Egyptian” (Ibid.:231).

Thus, again, we can observe that the American context, due in large measure to its Orientalism, is a springboard for new ethnicities that emerge from Arab background, imbued with anti-Arab, anti-Muslim meanings, in order to cater to and complement American conceptions of Arabs and Muslims.

**Being Muslim: A Holistic Identity**

Renowned American Islamicist John L. Esposito states, “Islam is the second largest religion in the world, after Christianity, and will soon be the second largest in America.” (2003: 22). The fractured Muslim community in America is composed of many differing ethnic and racial groups, among them Arab-origins Muslims, thus, making for a multiplicity of cultural attitudes and religious ideologies. Elsewhere in the account Esposito adds:

“Although estimates vary considerably, it is safe to say that there are at least six million Muslims in America today, making Islam the third-largest religion in the country, after Christianity and Judaism. Muslims have been present in America since the time of Columbus” (Ibid.: 23).

Islam is not a stranger to America; however, its presence has been historically hidden, sublimated and/or suppressed due to America’s Orientalism and Islamophobia (Allison, 1995). In a two-year study of Muslim immigrants, Haddad and Lummis (1987) have
noted Muslim immigrants in the American context have experienced increasing discrimination even among the highly educated and upwardly mobile. Not only historically laden cultural animosity is to be blamed for this prejudicial treatment of Muslims, but also ubiquitous negative depiction and stereotypification of Arabs and Muslims, especially by the media, have added to these feelings.

Islamic revivalism that has swept through the world of Islam in the early 1970s, and is often erroneously associated with religious fundamentalism, has equally impacted Muslims in America, among them Arab Americans. Not only it added to the levels of already existing Islamophobia, it also gave the pretext for further antagonisms directed against Muslims in America and abroad. No doubt the tragic events of September 11, 2001 have greatly assisted in taking levels of Anti-Muslim animosity to greater heights; however, the cultural diatribes and constant attacks against Islam has helped in solidifying an identity within the Muslim Arab and non-Arab Muslim community in the United States.

Even prior to the events of September 11, 2001, the terrorist attack by Timothy McVeigh on the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City on April 19, 1995, at first had been purported to have been the work of “Middle Eastern terrorists”, creating an anti-Arab and anti-Muslim frenzy in the country until blame was found to lay elsewhere. However, such incidents have served to galvanize Muslims and imbue them with a stronger sense of personal identity that has, for some, become a replacement or substitute for other dimensions of self or self-presentations. Certainly, the events of 9/11 have added to this attitude—as studies and personal observation have yielded: Displaying one's “Islamic-ness” more visibly and more forcefully than before the tragic attacks has
become a way of fighting back against social stigma, through appropriating fully, proudly and with commitment to the symbol of societal hate and/or fear of Islam in order to assert a separate identity. (In this, one can recall the same attitude of African Americans in appropriating "blackness" to assert an independent identity). It is very important, nonetheless, not to construe this symbolic behaviour as anti-American; rather it is asserting a Muslim American identity. For example, many Arab American Muslim women, especially young, college-bound students and professionals, can be observed to have donned the *hijab* (or head-cover) to assert their different-ness/separateness and to confront their socio-cultural detractors.

*Being Arab American: A New Paradigm*

Arab nationalism has existed in America in the form of a politically-imported ideology from the Arab world and is overly-associated with back-home politics (Wigle and Abraham in Hartman, 1974). However, an Arab American identity is a phenomenon that may have several meanings. Haddad (in McCarus, 1994: 79-80) suggests three possible orientations: First, as a way for early immigrants and their descendants to connect. To them, Arab meant a cultural (ethnic and national) identification. For others (especially post 1948 immigrants), Arab was not just cultural affiliation but a political vision. A third definition bridges the first two, forming the basis of an Arab American identity that provides common cultural and ethnic ground for people of Arab ancestry in America whose loyalty is to the United States but appropriates political Arabism in the service of community causes—in the United States and in ancestral lands.

Currently, being Arab American has become somewhat of a recognized label. Although often misunderstood in terms of its make-up, e.g. mistaking South Asians and
Iranians for Arabs, as well as confusing Islam, for Arab ethnicity, its recognition has been problematic because of its focus on only a segment of the population—an easily identifiable part, namely, recent immigrants with accents, and Muslims whose dress codes (e.g. hijab, sirwal, beards) may differ from the mainstream, serving to further exoticise and problematise the group.

Nonetheless, America’s over-identification of Islam with Arab ethnicity has had the effect of reinforcing both ethnic Arab feelings (among Arabs), as well as religious identification. Ultimately, however, being Arab American is as much as an individual choice as it is an “objective” characterization of a person or group. As has been shown so far, there is a myriad of other competing labels and dimensions of identity that can be substituted for “Arab American”—although none more substantial or encompassing. However, such identities can serve the purpose of those who profess them, whether Lebanese or Somali or whether Druze or Muslim—but they are also often used to fuel divisiveness and cultural fragmentation. Yet, as we shall see below, in terms of the youth, the future does not look bleak. In fact, by observing Arab American youth, that is, their identity formation, we may be surprised to learn of the potential for truly natural and native variety of Arabism taking root in America.

*Being “Arabic” or “Arabian”: New Nativism*

The new nativism is one connected to the youth in the community. This account is based on personal observation, believing the contours presented herein are the shape of the future to come. The issue is whether Arab American youth, many of whom are born in the United States and all of whom are raised there, can in fact be “Arab”, which brings into question of what are the elements that define Arab ethnicity. Dearborn’s youth, as an
example of an Arab American enclave, are the creation of a hybrid that is neither fully “American” nor completely “Arab.” As a group, the youth are a cross between the two that is unique to the situational elements present in Dearborn. This creates a distinctive ethnic group in itself that fully belongs to itself and only partially belongs to the others.

“Arabics” of Dearborn: The youth of Arab ancestry in Dearborn refer to themselves as being “Arabics”. This designation can be traced to how the school system identifies the group in its census-taking procedures to ascertain languages spoken at home if other than English. This term, which began as a tool to identify educational needs of students, has evolved into an ethnic identity of youth and young adults. When an Arab American student is asked, “What are you?”, he or she will readily respond, “I am Arabic.” While the designation of being “Arabic” may only appear to be a semantic juxtaposition to being “Arab,” it underscores the separation between what it means to be Arab in the Arab world as well as in Dearborn.

The youth inherit a cultural and ethnic legacy from their parents, whose dual aim is not only raising their children to be good Arabs and Muslims, but also to be able to get by in American society. Thus, it is important that the children are strongly grounded in their ethnic identity, and at the same time are fully adapted to navigating life outside the community. Thus, parents emphasize in this process readily observable cultural practices, such as those associated with religion, cuisine, social mannerisms, and other indicators of being “culturally-faithful.” Therefore, those who produce the expected cultural practices are seen as being “authentic” members of the culture, while those who cannot are observed as lost their identity.
It is important to realize that the Arab culture and values being transmitted to the youth in Dearborn are shaped by the hopes and fears of parents and the collective community—which spring from their new, and often hostile, environment. Thus, the “Arabic” culture being transmitted within the community is a new one, specific to its locus and tangentially developing from the ancestral culture as practiced in the homeland. The new variety is born from two main elements: 1) the influence of the immigrant experience; and 2) the nature of the community’s evolution. The youth are therefore not Arab, or Lebanese, or Yemeni, Palestinian or Iraqi, but rather “Arabic”—or Dearborn Arabs.

However, even though this new culture is a localized hybrid, parents imagined it not only to be authentic but also a direct representation of the original ancestral culture. The parents’ belief or expectation that their children are raised in Arab culture and will grow up to be just the same as their cousins abroad can be problematic. The Dearborn Arab youth are separated from their Arab cousins not only geographically and historically, but also in their identity-formation and in the culture they manifest on a daily basis. Thus, what the youth internalise as being authentic to the Arab world is in fact only authentic to the Dearborn community.

Despite valiant parental efforts at Arabisation, Dearborn Arabics still exhibit signs of difference, problematising the cohort in the parents’ eyes, who observe them to be culturally less authentic than themselves. Their distinctiveness has not escaped the youth as they echo it in their public discourse about themselves. The parents see this cultural schism between them and the youth the product of negative effects of American culture. The Arabics, no matter how hard they try to measure up to their parents’ cultural
expectations, they will always come up short of the mark because, lacking the same cultural and social experiences as their parents in the Arab world, they are unable to reproduce them, and, therefore, cannot be culturally the same.

While parents, to varying degrees, express at least vocal interest in someday “going back home,” the youth do not share in any such aspirations. They are happy and content to be whom and where they are. “Dearborn Arabics” are fully at home in their environment and are a group that is well established in their ways and very confident in whom they are. They see themselves not as immigrants, but as natives to their environment. While a cultural minority in the city of Dearborn, they are not alien to it. The youth are not afraid of their American surroundings, and recognize that they have an additional dimension to themselves, which is their Arabic-ness. Although others do not overtly recognize their American-ness outside the community because of issues relating to racism and Orientalism, nevertheless, it is there and accepted by the Arabics themselves as part of who they are.

The cultural property that has been created in Dearborn is distinct and unique to the specific conditions in the Detroit area. In Dearborn, the youth are not Arab in the way their parents would like or theoretically think of them but they are not American in the way that society may like. Their assumed lack of “fit” in both cultures makes it difficult for them to fit in and adjust to either. For that matter, the “Arab-ness” and “Muslim-ness” of their parents is being impacted as well. However, the Arabics are thriving because ultimately they do not see themselves deficient (based on a deficit model whereby emphasis is placed on what is lacking according to subjective judgments of what
is whole), rather they count themselves as whole individuals, intuitively accepting their hybrid natures.

This phenomenon is operating elsewhere in Arab America. Comparing notes with other interested scenes, observers suggest similarities with the youth in other Arab American population pockets. While in Dearborn, being Arab American has an “Arabic” flavour, apparently, in Chicago, where a smaller community (of approximately 80,000 people reside), the youth have taken the term “Arabian” to designate their native (Chicago) brand of Arab American. Interestingly, in New York, (where another sizable Arab American community can be found in the Brooklyn area), Arab American youth are reported to be developing a similar identities—localized and native to their environment. All this suggests that the deficit model is the wrong approach to comprehending the Arab American youth experience.

However, the concept of hybridisation does offer a more positive model to assist in comprehending the Arab American youth experience. What is more, this framework allows the astute observer to extrapolate potential general contours of the future shape of the Arab American community as the youth become parents and the leaders of the community of tomorrow.

4.1.7 Arab Settlement in Michigan

Metropolitan Detroit is home to a large and diverse Arab background community. Arabic speaking immigrants have been arriving in southeast Michigan for over a century, and continue to do so at present. Arab background people can be found across the whole state. Some of the reasons that have prompted their immigration to this area range from the expansion of the automobile and steel industries to a need for family unification, and,
for many more of the second wave immigrants, they came to escape from conditions of uncertainty, including political crises, violence, and economic dislocation that plagued their homelands. Arabic-speaking immigrants settled in the region and gradually transformed it into their home, founding mosques, churches, business establishments, and more, giving south-eastern Michigan a reputation for being identified as the home of the largest concentration of Arab background people in North America.

**Immigration to Detroit**

Estimates suggest the size of the community has reached well over 300,000 Arab Americans in southeast Michigan, or the greater Detroit area. They hail from many sub-ethnic backgrounds: they are Lebanese, Syrians, Jordanians, Palestinians, Iraqis, Yemenis and Egyptians. The most recent wave of immigrants is a large influx of Iraqis (from southern Iraq) who came to America as refugees due to the Second Gulf War. Also, more Palestinians have arrived in Detroit due to the steady erosion of their lands and continued Israeli occupation. Other Arabs have done so as well. Immigration to Michigan and the metro Detroit area has followed the same general patterns described earlier. In this vein, David writes:

“The community itself has evolved and changed since the arrival of the first settlers. Today, a landscape emerges—a landscape of various sub-communities that, when taken together, form a confederation known as the Middle Eastern community of metropolitan Detroit…” (1999:7).

David notes that members of the early cohorts of immigrants (in the main from the Greater Syria region and mostly belonging to various eastern Christian denominations) arrived in Detroit earlier in the 20th century, establishing ethnic enclaves in East Detroit (Lafayette-Congress and Mt. Elliot-Charlevoix areas); adding, Lebanese Muslims began arriving in Detroit to join the booming economy in the area, ultimately moving
from Highland Park to Dearborn, where they established the nucleus of the Arab American community. Although Iraqi Christian Chaldeans began trickling into the Detroit area around as early as 1910, their major influx occurred later during the 1960s and 1970s. Palestinians and Yemenis also were members of the earlier cohorts of immigrants however with smaller numbers (Ibid.).

In the latter half of the 20th century, immigrants began arriving in the area from 1960s and upward. Lebanese immigrants came to Detroit to escape raging civil war, invasions, and political and economic dislocation (1975-1989). Mainly Muslim, they joined the community in Dearborn, whereas smaller bands of Christian Lebanese in the eastern metropolitan area were members of the older community with established roots (David, 1999:10).

Another subcomponent of the community is the Yemeni group, which grew in numbers in the latter part of the 20th century, establishing roots in two cities: in Dearborn, joining their Lebanese and Palestinian co-religionists, and in Hamtramck, a city within Detroit. Both towns attracted Arab immigrants because of the automotive industries. Palestinian Muslims tended to join the community in Dearborn, while Jordanian Christians and Egyptian Copts joined in the 1960s and had made their homes among other Christian groups throughout the metro area (David, 1999). Iraqi Shi‘ah community members arrived into the metro area in the mid-1990s, having become refugees due to the Second Gulf War. Although at first they settled elsewhere in the U.S., eventually they migrated within the country to join fellow Arabs and Muslims in Dearborn and its environs (e.g., Warrendale community, an adjacent Detroit community).
**Arab Settlement in Dearborn**

The beginning of Arab presence in Dearborn dates back to Henry Ford’s move of his industrial installations from the city of Highland Park, an independent municipality within Detroit, to the city of Dearborn in 1916. Arabs were drawn to Dearborn by the prospects of highly paid industrial work in Ford’s River Rouge complex (Naff, 1985). Most of these immigrants initially came from southern Lebanon, a phenomenon that was to continue throughout the century. As U.S. immigration laws changes had eased restrictions on immigration, making for a “pull” factor, and rising or continued turmoil in the Middle East, creating “push” factors for immigrants, more Arab émigrés began arriving in the Detroit and Dearborn area beginning with the 1970s and throughout the 1980s and 1990s. At first, the majority came from Lebanon, then, Palestine and Jordan, and, later, from Iraq—however, all throughout there had been interspersed among them members of other Arab groups, such as Yemenis. During the 1970s and 1980s the community grew, reaching numbers in the thousands:

“There are approximately 75,000 Arabs living in Michigan [in the 1970s]… The Muslim population numbers between 10,000 and 12,000 individuals. The largest concentration of Muslim immigrants in Michigan, and throughout the U.S., can be found in the Southend of Dearborn” (Wigle and Abraham in Hartman, 1974: 280).

Abraham and Wigle describe a community that is engaged in factory work as labourers in the majority with a smaller number working in other professions (small businesses, teachers and religious workers), making of the Arab community a “cultural niche” in the Southend. This niche has continued to flourish and in the 1980s and 1990s, it grew to thousands of Arab background people. The US census of 1990 gave a low estimate of 14,000 Arabs in Dearborn. According to Sally Howell,
"Dearborn, Michigan, is home to roughly twenty-five thousand Lebanese Americans. This population forms the nucleus of what is perhaps North America’s largest, most highly concentrated Arab-Muslim community. As of 1998, there were at least eight mosques in the Dearborn area. These mosques were attended by Shia as well as Sunni Muslims, by third-generation Arab Americans as well as recently arrived immigrants" (Abraham and Shryock, 2000:241).

Writing in the Detroit News, a major Detroit area newspaper, Gordon Trowbridge suggests that:

"...Dearborn is clearly the center of the community in terms of numbers, culture and religion. Tens of thousands of Arabs and Muslims live there. For more than two decades, the community's merchants have made a two-mile stretch of Warren Avenue a thriving hub of Arab commerce, with nearly 200 businesses, many in storefronts and buildings that had been in disrepair” (Trowbridge, 2003, online)

Increasingly, however, it is becoming clear that Arab American in Dearborn are choosing to maintain links to the city on a permanent basis. According to Rignall (1997), Dearborn is no longer a staging ground of immigrants, who once they “made it”, will move out of the “Arab ghetto” to better suburban areas, rather they are choosing to make Dearborn their city (Abraham and Shryock, 2000: 54).

Impact of Turmoil in the Middle East

The turmoil in the Middle East has been a significant emigration push factor:

1. Lebanese Civil War: in 1975, internal strife marred Lebanon, causing many Lebanese, Christians and Muslims, to flee the country. Some of the refugees came the United States, finding their way to Michigan and Dearborn. Moreover, the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon created havoc in throughout the country, but especially in southern Lebanon, causing more forced migration, many of whom found their way to Dearborn through chain migration.
2. **Palestinian Intifada:** Palestinians have been forced to greater immigration since Israel was created in 1948 on the historical land of Palestine. Because of inter-linkages between Jordan and Palestine, due to the displacement of nearly 800,000 Palestinians in 1948, it is hard to discern Jordanian immigration from Palestinian, since many Palestinian were given Jordanian papers for travel purposes. However, according to Cainkar (2000) about 80 percent of the Jordanian immigrants are in fact of Palestinian backgrounds. Cainkar reports that after 1988 (the date of first Palestinian *intifada* [uprising]), Palestinian immigration numbers began to rise steadily due to increased Israeli violence and other oppressive measures.

3. **Yemeni Settlement:** Yemeni immigration has been spurred on by economic need and by continued unrest in their homeland, beginning with a civil war in the middle of the 20th century. However, the 1990-1 Second Gulf War had caused major hardships and loss of jobs for Yemenis who had been working in Gulf Arab monarchies, and were penalized for their country’s opposition to the coalition war on Iraq to liberate Kuwait. As a result, many immigrated to the United States through chain migration mechanism, joining relative and friends in the Dearborn area.

4. **Second Gulf War and Iraqi Refugees:** The Iraqi refugees at first were forced out of their homes in southern Iraq, having rebelled against the Regime of Saddam Hussein in the wake of the Second Gulf War and as a result of President George W. Bush’s call on them to revolt against the central Baghdad government. Abandoned by the outside world, especially America whom they thought would support this uprising, they were severely persecuted, and thousands of them were driven out into the northern desert of Saudi Arabia, becoming refugees there. Of this group of refugees, the United States
admitted a few thousands, most of whom found their way through secondary migration to Dearborn in order to join other Arabs in the area.

Today, Dearborn and the Greater Detroit area are forever influenced and changed by the presence of the Arab-American community. The local culture has been affected by a heritage that has become a part of the mosaic of Michigan of life. Like all other immigrants, once they settled in an area, a chain migration phenomenon had appeared allowing for continued supply of members of the same cultures coming to the area. In time, the immigrants and their descendants, no longer new and alien to their new settings, had become ethnics, natives to America with cultural ties to their ancestral homelands. This is the case of Arab Americans in southeast Michigan.

4.2 Arab American Activism in the 1970s

Although the claim that the events of 1967 gave birth to the Arab American identity is highly debatable, it nevertheless points to a seminal event that has re-motivated or re-invigorated Arab American energies in the United States. No doubt, Arab American activism in the post-1967 era has revolved around political issues—although not exclusively. Gary David suggests:

“The development of community organizations and associations has mirrored the community’s development and reveals the most important aspects of the community life. For instance, there are a total of 24 religious organizations, 14 village groups, and 14 organizations dealing with political, educational, and cultural issues. The professional organizations show the community’s occupational evolution. Those who have not shared it the fortune found by others or who need assistance in finding their place in their new home can go to the various human service organizations providing much needed support to the community. In general, all the groups share a concern with issues of charitable assistance, cultural maintenance, and the preservation of community ties” (1998:3).
In the main, Arab American activism in the 1970s was the result of historic anti-Arab, anti-Muslim tendencies that are endemic to American life and cultural mindscape. The most seminal event that shaped activism in that era and gave it its momentum is the Arab-Israeli June war of 1967, which had devastating effects on the Arab world, and had directly impacted Arab Americans and Arabs in America due to the hostile environment the war had created. According to Suleiman, this war

“…marked a watershed and had a major impact on the Arab-American community. By then, the third generation of the early Arab immigrants had started to awaken to their own identity-and to see that identity not as ‘Syrian’ in the old sense of the term but rather as Arabs. Thus, elements of this third generation combined with the new and politically sophisticated immigrants to work for their ethnic community and the causes of their people in the old homelands…” (1994: 46-47).

4.2.1 Southend of Dearborn

Abraham, Abraham and Aswad agree, reporting,

“Since the early 1950s, the southend has been the site of repeated political demonstrations, meetings, and organizing activities centering almost exclusively on issues stemming from the Middle East. In the aftermath of the Palestine War (1948), which led to the creation of the State of Israel and the forced exodus of nearly a million Palestinians from their homeland, the Arab world has been locked in a bitter and often bloody struggle with Israel into the present. During the interim period, the Arab world itself has witnessed successive periods of political turmoil and instability, as contending political personalities, ideologies, and movements have vied with one another for power and influence. The events of the past three decades have reverberated through out the Arab world and beyond, influencing events in the Southend community as well” (1983: 177).

Halting Industrial Park Project

The 1970s ushered in a new wave of organisation-building, commitment to fighting social stereotyping and discrimination, as well as educating the American public regarding issues in the Middle East. In Michigan, particularly in west Detroit and the Dearborn area, the community was equally under the same pressures as other parts have
been throughout the nation. The Southend neighbourhood of Dearborn, which at the time
was characterized as a “low to middle income working class community of about 5,000
people, over half of which are of Arab cultural descent” (Aswad, 1974:53), an area which
had accounted for 13 percent of Dearborn’s unemployed (and 16 percent of government
welfare recipients), even though it accounted for 5 percent of the population (Ibid.). The
Southend area had been, and remains to be, a continuous host of immigrants from the
Middle East in the Detroit area, primarily of unskilled labourers. From the 1920s to the
1940s, the Southend’s population included a large numbers of Italian, Polish and other
south and eastern heritage Europeans, but by the late 1960s and early 1970s, the area
became a major settlement for Arab-background immigrants.

The Dearborn City Planning Commission decided in 1953 to re-zone the
Southend from a residential area into an “industrial park” ostensibly in order to attract
business and manufacturing into the city, however, according to reports, the primary
motivation behind this move is the to get rid of the undesirable population in the city,
particularly, the Arab element. Plans to convert the area into a manufacturing park were
supported by racist Dearborn Mayor Orville Hubbard (who served from 1942-1977), who
supported segregation and implemented a policy of prohibiting African Americans from
living in the city (Georgakas, 1975:15). To drive out the immigrants (read Arabs) and
other residents and convert the Southend into an industrial park, Hubbard would

“…prevent the rental or sale of non-city residences through arbitrary
enforcement of the building and housing codes and then offer to buy such
properties [at depressed prices. Moreover, his administration] refused to
grant repair permits, and prevented the Federal Housing Administration
from insuring mortgages in the Southend neighborhood” (MERIP Reports,
1973: 17).
This would have driven down the rates of home-ownership in the area. What is more, the city tore down all buildings it had acquired (Georgakas, 1975: 15), and had denied basic services such as garbage collection or failing to enforce industrial noise and pollution laws against the Ford Complex (Ahmed, 1975: 17). According to Aswad (1974: 54), this pressure to force the community out of the area continued in 1970 with the Dearborn Board of Education’s decision to close down the Salina School, an institution that had been and continues to be important to the local community, including the immigrant community, which looks upon the neighbourhood school as a portal of access into the American mainstream. The Southend community rallied to prevent the closedown of their neighbourhood school, proving grassroots activism can achieve its goals. The Southeast Dearborn Community Council (SEDCC), headed by Arab-American Alan Amen, organized demonstrations, clean-up campaigns, and other “visible” activities, while pursuing their case to protect their homes in the federal courts (MERIP, 1975:17).

The federal court, on August 14, 1973, agreed to twenty-eight of thirty-three grievances presented by the SEDCC on behalf of Southend residents, thus finally winning a battle that lasted a few years, prompting group lawyer Abdeen Jabara to note the community’s victory was won not on grounds of community rights but on the principle of constitutional due process of law to protect private property (Georgakas, 1975: 15). Although a victory of local activism had taught Dearborn Arab Americans the value of political involvement, and has lead them to ever increasing levels of political activism in later decades, unfortunately, before the ethnic cleansing project was stopped, “over 250 homes were destroyed, along with stores, clubs, and churches [not to mention social networks], before activists in the community were able to organize a defense of the community’s boundaries” (Rignall, 1997: 3).
Founding of ACCESS

In 1972 the Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services (ACCESS) was formed in Dearborn, Michigan. This important organization is a grassroots response to the industrial park issue, and in recognition of the growing social services needs of Southend Arab Americans. It offers many services to immigrants of Arab countries in order to help them adjust to their new lives. They provide legal services, job placement, family counselling, language training, youth clinics, and cultural programs. In addition to providing these services, ACCESS has opened the Arab heritage folk museum, displaying a wide-ranging scope of the richness of Arab culture (Haiek, 1992).

Although it had humble beginnings, “[t]oday, ACCESS provides more than 57,290 social and legal services, more than 12,600 counselling and psychiatric services, more than 60,300 health and health education services, and more than 55,600 employment and vocational services” (ACCESS website, 2001.). Having grown into a big social services agency in the Detroit area and a power-broker grassroots organization, Rignall (1997) reports that ACCESS leaders have been heavily involved in lobbying at the national level for immigrant rights and the maintenance of federally funded social programs.

4.3 Political Activism in the 1980s

Nationally, the 1980s, the decade of “Reaganomics” constituted a “rough time” for many people, including Arab Americans who not only suffered during economic recession, but also had to endure increased racism. Yet, it was also a time of trial and triumph. During the 1980s, “Arab American” became a more identifiable label and
identity thanks in large measure to the creation of ADC and AAI and their work in fighting stereotyping and discrimination and in leading and mobilizing political activism.

In the Detroit metropolitan area, particularly, Dearborn, Arab Americans were affected by world events around them. The Lebanese civil war had initiated a new wave of immigration to the US, and continued war in Lebanon added to the migration factor, creating stresses with the white, non-Arab population, who saw Arab growth in the city as a takeover of their town. Also, the increase in numbers made the community more visible, thus, an easier target for acts of racism and discrimination. In addition, the new immigrants, because of their problems due to dislocation caused by war, had particular issues to deal with, such as “battle fatigue syndrome” and other war-related psychological problems, illiteracy or under-literacy, limited English skills and lack of marketable skills, all of which placed a lot of stresses on meagre community assets and organizations.

4.3.1 Community Organisations

According to Gary David’s *Middle Eastern Community of Metropolitan Detroit 1998 Directory of Organizations*, “the development of community organizations and associations has mirrored the community’s development and reveals the most important aspects of community life” (1998: 3). David adds that these organisations centre on concerns of “…charitable assistance, cultural maintenance, and the preservation of community ties” (*ibid.*).

In Dearborn, one finds many such organisations. They range in kind and function from the religious to social and from the political to the cultural, and any other shade in between. The most important secular organization in Dearborn is ACCESS; although
concerned with charitable and social welfare, its work has had much political ramification for the whole community.

In terms of religious establishments, the oldest is the Islamic Center of America – located just outside Dearborn in adjacent Detroit, but its congregation and leadership is mostly of Dearborn, had been the religious locus of the Lebanese Muslim Shi’ite Community since its establishment in 1962. There is also the American Moslem Society in the Southend of Dearborn, a centre of Sunni and Yemeni Muslims, which was founded as the Hashemite Hall in the late 1950s but was later taken over by more strictly orthodox Muslims. The American Moslem Bekaa Center, a Lebanese Sunni centre, had been existence since the mid 20th century. In the 1980s, however, with the growth of the community, new mosques and religious centres were added: Institute of Islamic Knowledge, Islamic Mosque of America, and Islamic House of Wisdom. The purpose of these organizations, of course, is religious edification and cultural and language instruction, therefore, focusing on cultural and heritage maintenance. However, added components in their work include charitable fund-raising, inter-religious dialogue and as outlets of Islamic learning to the outside community.

In regards to other groups, the Lebanese American Heritage Club, established in 1982, was created to bring together Lebanese of various backgrounds to celebrate their cultural heritage in America through haflis (community banquet activities), educational scholarships and athletic events (soccer). Similar in scope, the Karoun Village Society and the Kfarhouna Lebanese Club of America, established along the lines of local-affiliation, were used by immigrants and descendants as a way to link with others, enact their cultural practices at special gatherings, maintain group solidarity and provide
assistance for ancestral villages. The Yemeni American Benevolent Association and the Yemeni American Cultural Center, provide services in the same paradigmatic way described above: the organizations offer tutoring to students (a way to influence youth to remain within the body of the community) and social services, in addition to being localised community centres for social interactions.

4.3.2 Emergence of Arab American Media

Prior to satellite broadcasting, the growth and proliferation of cable-casting industry in America enabled local broadcasting in major suburban areas, which prompted Arabic broadcasting in Dearborn via the local cable company (Tayash and Ayoubi in Rouchdy 1992: 168-173). TV Media presence in Dearborn allowed for inter-Arab group solidarity through a heightened sense of communication and a shared entertainment system that pre-existed the current system of Arabic language satellite programming, originating from outside the United States. Among these original broadcasters in Dearborn were Arabic Time Television, United TV Network, TV Orient, and, later, the Arab Network of America.

Arab American journalism, press and media celebrated their centennial in 1998. The first Arabic language newspaper in the United States was founded in 1898. It was called *Kawkab Amirka*, or Star of America.

*The Early Arabic Press*

The need for an Arab American press originated in the trauma of immigration and the need of early Arab Americans to deal with the problems of adjusting to the culture of the United States. Arab American pioneers in journalism founded their newspapers for two major reasons. First, to assist other Arab immigrants in the process of integration into
the social, economic and political life of their new country, and, second, to maintain a
sense of who they are by focusing on issues that are important to Arabs in America
(Tayash and Ayoubi in Rouchdy, 1992).

 Origins of the Contemporary Press

In the years following the Second World War (1939-1945), the new immigrants felt that the mainstream American press did not represent their concerns and looked toward the Arabic press as a source of unbiased news about the Arab world (particularly the Arab-Israeli conflict) and their situation in this country. Also, descendants of the older community who felt connected to their ancestral homelands needed a press that could communicate to them in English. As a result, the new press tended to be bilingual and to focus on national Arab and Arab American issues. This phenomenon reached its zenith in the early 1980s, coinciding with the rise of a national Arab American identity whose mark is cultural awareness and pride in ethnicity. The new demands on the press revived Arab newsprint and paved the way for other forms of media later in the century.

In Detroit, Michigan, where the largest Arab American population is said to live, many newspapers and magazines can be found. One of the oldest newspapers there, Sada al-Watan (Homeland’s Echo), founded in 1984, is a national tabloid that focuses on political news. Detroit Chaldean Times, founded by Amir Denha in the early nineties, is a local outlet, serving the Chaldean sub-community in metropolitan Detroit. The newest addition to the world of newspapers in Detroit is the Arab American Journal (founded in 1997 by Nuhad El-Hajj and Mohamad Ozeir) to deal with issues of national concern from the perspective of Arab Americans in Detroit and Southern California.
Electronic Media

The history of Arab American electronic media is linked to technological developments in that area. As in the mainstream media, Arab American radio broadcasting preceded all other forms. As early as the 1960s and across the nation where Arab Americans lived, there was Arabic language radio programs on ethnic radio stations devoted to informing and entertaining members of the community. Some programs were bilingual and fewer still were in English only. Perhaps, Detroit was and remains to be the largest Arab American market for radio broadcasting. Since the sixties, Detroit has had strong and continuous Arabic language radio programming. *The Arab Voice in Detroit*, the best known and longest running show of its genre, began its broadcasting in the mid-sixties and ceased production in the early nineties, when its producer and media pioneer Faisal Arabo retired. Arabo also explored the medium of television late in the seventies. He developed a show of the same name and was aired on WGPR in Detroit, an independent TV station. The program was a weekly show of a few hours on Saturday and represented the most successful attempt of its kind at the time. Another show, *Middle East Television*, was produced by Gregory Mitri in the eighties and early nineties and was aired on the same channel. Both shows went off the air when the TV station was bought out by CBS in the Detroit market.

Although regular “air-broadcasting” was seemingly on the way out, the new cable technology allowed for locally originated programming to flourish. Again in the Detroit area, the suburb of Dearborn, where twenty percent of that city’s population is of Arab background, the local cable carrier leases an ethnic programming channel that has a full
line-up of Arabic language, including locally-produced shows. This phenomenon is present elsewhere in the country, but to a lesser extent than what is available in Michigan.

**Arab Network in America and Other Networks**

The creation of the Arab Network of America (ANA) in the late eighties revolutionized the Arab American world of media and mass communication. ANA is a national-level broadcaster and cable-caster, which covers not only the United States but also Canada and parts of central and South America. Its creation marked a giant leap for Arab Americans in media, from little steps taken at the local ethnic origination (local programming) cable casting to a transcontinental and fully professional network. ANA began its operation as a radio broadcaster, centred in the vicinity of Washington, D.C., in 1988. However, by mid 1990s, for a variety of reasons, the network folded, and was taken over by its parent company, the Middle East Broadcasting Centre (MBC), ceasing to narrowcast programming to Arab Americans. MBC continues to broadcast international programming, which Arab Americans find of interest to them, including entertainment and news.

In addition to MBC and local Arab American cable-casters in Dearborn and environs, there are other Satellite-broadcasting companies that serve the interests of Arab Americans. Namely, the ART network (Arab Radio and Television), which broadcasts a couple of channels, as well as programming carried by a pay-service (both cable-based and satellite-based) companies that carry these channels in addition to Lebanese and Egyptian channels, as well as Al-Jazeera News Channel, which has become a mainstay of information for Arab immigrants.
4.3.3 Arab American Council

The Arab American Council was founded in 1988 to provide a forum for Arab American leaders and their organizations to discuss issues relevant to their concerns. The AAC was open to all leaders from across the metropolitan Detroit Arab American communities, however, in the main, they were organizations and leaders of the city of Dearborn. The impetus behind the council was the need to respond to the growing challenges in the region facing community members who were becoming more visible due to increase in numbers, but, particularly, in Dearborn, where the community had to deal with a local culture and administration that was antagonistic to their presence.

The idea also gained favour because the AAC was a good response, as a community parliament of sorts, where all leaders and organizations came together on an equal footing, sharing a forum for the exchange of ideas regarding pressing matters in the community. The number growth in the community was accompanied by a growth in many types of organizations, including religious centres and mosques, social clubs and other associations based on village and family affiliations, as well as politically oriented socio-cultural groupings—all of which were trying to assert some leadership in the community but were not able to seize primacy or primary roles. Thus, the AAC became a good venue to bring everyone together for the common good in order to (democratically and inclusively) develop a local and regional agenda.

Although it still exists, the AAC, for all practical purposes, has eventually yielded its role to the Arab American Political Action Committee (AAPAC), which became organized with the State of Michigan as an independent political committee in January 1998. AAPAC’s purpose is to encourage Arab American involvement in the political process and to cultivate and support qualified Arab American candidates to run for
political office, locally, at the state level and federally. AAPAC also plays a role in supporting non-Arab American candidates through a process of endorsements for candidates who are thought to benefit the community. Besides direct political contributions to candidates, AAPAC lobbies on behalf causes of interest to the Arab American community, and is open to all American political persuasions. AAPAC impact in the community will be discussed below.

4.3.4 Emergence of ACCESS as a Power Centre

ACCESS’s work has garnered it great respect among members of the community who regard the organization as a bulwark against ignoring the community and as a representative of Arab Americans on a socio-political and cultural levels throughout the Southeast Michigan region. Particular mentions needs to be made of ACCESS’s cooperative work with the AAI, which has become a model of cooperation for serving Arab Americans locally and assisting in empowering local citizens in the political process. The ACCESS model is becoming one of great importance in the national Arab American community because of its success. There has been interest in appropriating the ACCESS model to develop clones of the organizations elsewhere through local initiative. (For example, in Cleveland, Ohio, there is a movement to establish such an organisation).

4.4 Dearborn Politics

The Dearborn Arab American community is by and large an emergent urban middle class in a non-Arab, non-Islamic context. Arab American parents are transplanted into an urban setting from mostly rural or semi-urban backgrounds. Their immigration is in a real sense a double one: Not only are they easterners living in a western society where their social practices and religious teachings are perceived to be alien to the host
culture, they are also, to varying degrees, depending on their places of origin, less urbanised than what their new setting demands.

In this milieu of a very diverse, vibrant and growing ethnic community that is increasingly middle class in orientation, finds itself clashing with an established white racist culture that is threatened by the foreign-ness of the new immigrants and their children, their growing numbers and their hard-won economic success. The following account addresses the nature of the setting:

“It is an odd fate for a place that used to pride itself on its racial purity: a white bastion in which ‘driving while black’ was only half-jokingly said to be the crime that most preoccupied local cops. ‘While they were busy stopping blacks getting through the front door,’ explains Osama Siblani, publisher of the Arab American News, ‘the Arabs snuck in the back’” (Engel, 2001, online).

This is the background that produced the candidacy of Michael Guido for the mayor-ship of Dearborn in 1985.

4.4.1 “The Arab Problem” and Mayor Guido

Hoping to capitalise on Dearborn’s historically evident animosity towards African Americans and other non-whites, Michael Guido, an American of Italian heritage, offered himself as a “white knight” candidate, (with all the implications the term “white” carries in an election season in a white supremacist context), promising to protect the city and its (white) inhabitants from the onslaught of the “Barbarians” by dealing directly with the “Arab Problem” in Dearborn, as one of his election campaign pamphlets suggested.

Although Mayor Michael Guido, who has won several elections so far, has toned down his anti-Arab rhetoric, having recognized the electoral implications of the community’s growth in numbers; but,
“...during his first run for office in 1985, he mailed a pamphlet to every home addressing ‘the Arab problem’ of the immigrants moving to the city threatening ‘our neighborhoods, the value of our property and our darned good way of life” (Pickler, 2003, online)

Additionally, describing the situation, a news article in New Yorker Magazine indicates the following:

“...During his first campaign, in 1985, he circulated a blunt-talking pamphlet that referred to Dearborn's ‘Arab Problem,’ in which he disparaged bilingual classes for Arab children in the public schools, ‘new neighbors [who] neglect their property,’ and the ‘‘gimme, gimme, gimme' attitude’ of ‘the so-called leadership’ of the Arab community... Guido has sufficient finesse to have befriended many members of the older Lebanese business establishment. But no one would accuse him of being overly solicitous toward the larger Arab population, and they are grossly underrepresented in the municipal workforce—about two and a half per cent” (Sanger, 2001).

However, according to scene watchers and community members, Guido justified his approach by noting that at the time no knew much about the Middle East and Arabs and that he did not mean to offend anyone.

Guido’s conciliatory approach is less a show of tolerance than it is an expression of political expediency, which characterized the relationship of Arab Americans to City Hall in the nineties. If anything, this relationship has been understood as a *quid pro quo* by which community members accepted the political realities of Dearborn, opting for maximization of their position through compromise and political engagement with the mayor and his majority-based constituencies. From the perspective of the mayor, recognizing the growing numbers and influence of the Arab Americans in his town, he decide on a policy of accommodation when impossible to refuse, co-optation when community members differed on issues, and out-right ignoring the community when he could get away with it politically. This approach to politics stretched out from the mid
1980s through a political détente throughout the 1990s through the early beginnings of the new century.

### 4.4.2 Political Détente in the 1990s

More and more, through their economic presence in the city – touted as the second largest tax based after the Ford Motor Company – Arab Americans had gained some influence on Guido administration, which did not want to alienate them entirely, given their growing numbers as potential voters. The community by the early to mid nineties was estimated at 20,000, making it some 20 percent of the city’s total population.

The nineties were a time of building up community resources in order to withstand outside antagonisms and to establish a solid power base—especially at the economic and self-help level (e.g. ACCESS), so that community institutions can better mediate between mainstream society (especially economic and political structures) and members of the community. An example of this orientation is the founding of the American Arab Chamber of Commerce in Dearborn, whose origins lay in the late 1980s when a group of core Arab American business entrepreneurs envisioned an organization that assists businesses in improving their operations and promoting their products and services domestically and internationally. The Chamber focused on organizing seminars and conferences related to trade opportunities with the Middle East for American companies, and providing assistance with advertising, translation and trade missions, as well as intercultural consulting.
4.4.3 Politics of Education in Dearborn

In the American system, education, for the most part, is left for the local authorities and the states to determine curricula, needs and funding. Thus, education is quintessentially a local political process, theoretically, impacted by voters within the local school authority district through the voting.

In Dearborn, education has become an issue of concern for the majority public as a result of the institution of bilingual education programs, and, later, the institution of the Arabic language curriculum, as well as other student support services (e.g., free or reduced lunches). The politics of education in Dearborn is not only about “ethnic politics” but the politics of racism, too.

Bilingual/Bicultural Education

In response to a growing immigrants presence in the schools, and in the wake of new federal and state regulations concerning the education of minority student, Dearborn Public Schools initiated basic supportive programs for limited English speakers in 1976. The idea behind the program is for students to receive support language interventions (i.e., the use of one’s native language as an educative tool) to assist in achieving success with the regular school curriculum.

One of the largest urban school districts in Michigan, Dearborn Schools has, because of industry, attracted immigrant populations. Dearborn has the largest concentration of Arabic-speaking residents in the United States. Dearborn’s Limited English Proficient (LEP) students comprise no less than 32 percent of the total student population in the district and it represents the largest percentage of LEP students in Michigan (Ayoub, 2000).
Dearborn Schools experienced significant growth in student enrolment throughout the 1980s and 1990s, mainly due to a large Arab immigrant and refugee influx during last two decades–although immigrants have been arriving since the 1970s–but particularly after the Second Gulf War. This dramatic increase of language minority students affects almost every elementary, middle, and high school, however, the majority are mainly localised in East Dearborn, while Westside schools remain largely Euro-American in makeup, creating a natural divide between the needs of each community sector.

Although the majority immigrant group in Dearborn is of Arab background, constituting a minimum of fifty percent of the total student population, the total immigrant group comes from thirty-two diverse language backgrounds. Also, more than half of the language minority students are LEP. Arabic-speaking LEP students comprise 95 percent of Dearborn’s total LEP student population. These linguistic backgrounds not only make for special barriers (as well as future opportunities) for students, but also they create political issues in the city revolving around issues of language primacy and planning and issues pertaining to assimilation.

**Student Busing**

Busing from East and South Dearborn to schools on Westside was due in large measure to the over-abundance in students in the eastside of the city, while Westside areas were experiencing declining numbers. In order to accommodate students in schools, the boundaries of school areas were re-drawn by the school district to include East and South Dearborn students in West Dearborn schools, much to the chagrin of parents and community on either side of town. Parents on the eastside see in this action a systematic devaluation of their children, being looked upon as less important than whites. The
average retort to busing is, “why do they bus our children and not theirs to our schools?”
On the other side of town, community-members, while assimilationist in orientation, they become segregationist, observing the act of bussing as forced integration. Because of over-crowding being experienced in schools, since 2000, and due to new schools being built, the school district is planning to re-draw school boundaries again, hoping to minimise busing. However, the new boundaries will have to include busing from the east side of the city, no matter what, where most students come from, thereby, re-vitalizing the old debate, and injecting new venom in old hatreds.

Introducing Arabic in Dearborn Schools

Teaching and learning Arabic in Dearborn Schools presents a whole set of issues unique to that setting. A foreign language, Arabic is a heritage language in the district. Another major issue is teacher competence, training and certification. Add to this already politically charged situation the complex matter of expectations on the parts of students and parents, on the one hand, and teachers and administration, on the other. The political significance of Arabic to the involved communities in Dearborn is both emotionally charged and highly controversial. In the end, the question of Arabic in the schools reaches into the areas of language policy and language primacy.

Arab Americans want Arabic taught in the schools because they see it as maintaining their heritage and as validation of their presence in the Dearborn community. To them, Arabic is not only a source of national and ethnic pride, and a means to maintain cultural and religious links, but also a vehicle for the preservation of a sense of a particularistic identity, especially among the young--who would be its learners. On the other hand, those in the greater community who do not want Arabic taught see it as an
encroachment against English and as a form of ingratiating to immigrant interests at the expense of the native language and lore. Arabic is seen as an immigrant language by both segments of the society, and, therefore, is either devalued vis-à-vis English, or championed as a source of ethnic pride and a badge of political empowerment.

From the perspective of Dearborn Public Schools’ District Administration, administrators are caught between two opposing viewpoints: nativism and cultural maintenance. Both sides accuse the District of political catering to the other side. Although Administration is actor, agent and receiver of action, as a whole, it sets the tone of instruction—whether through good intention or bias. Nonetheless, it is responsible for setting the language policy of the school system, which views English as a “language of power”, meaning that students facile with English are able to achieve well and more than others who are not. That of course makes sense. However, the application of this doctrine in the school setting can have some basic drawbacks in terms of a student population whose native language, for all intents and purposes, is “outlawed.” This policy has implications for teaching Arabic in the district, relegating Arabic to a second-status language, harming its appeal to non-Arabs, and creating an environment of siege for Arabic as a foreign/heritage language. Moreover, the procedural application of that policy in the form of administrative discipline and sanctions against students who use Arabic in the school setting adds to the lingua non-grata status of Arabic.

Election 2001: Arab American Anger

Détente gives way to a hot war every once in a while. In a taped Dearborn City Council meeting in 1999, Mayor Michael Guido suggested to a Southend of Dearborn citizen that his organization should work on teaching immigrants American standards of
hygiene and cleanliness, causing a new uproar in the city. This is not a new theme:
historically, there has been an attitude among Dearborn’s Euro-Americans that Arabs
who are in their midst are not clean people, a view likely originating from some
prejudiced sense of “dirty Arabs.” However, for a mayor to invoke this stereotype in
public, on tape and with a feeling of invulnerability suggests the degree to which Arabs
are held in disdain in the city, and his reliance on west-end voters for his political base.

“School Matters”

As previously mentioned in another chapter, school politics is local politics. One
of the issues that faced Dearborn voters in the 2000 political season was the “Bond
Proposal”, a levy of $53 million to support the local school system. The school board had
finalized a plan for a school bond issue in order to remedy overcrowding and other needs
at local schools, including the addition of technology and other improvements that were
badly needed. The Arab American Political Action Committee, AAPAC, responded
negatively to the idea because the proposal doesn't address the problem of overcrowding
in the city's elementary and middle schools and because of their concern over increased
Arab American student bussing from the east and south ends of Dearborn to the west side
schools. The school leadership and board did not seem responsive, however, rather
assuming the Arab American community will support the proposal because nearly 50
percent of the student body is Arab American, and because historically the community
highly valued education and was supportive of Dearborn Schools.

Nonetheless, for the first time in the community’s history, Arab Americans in
Dearborn voted against a school-financing request from the school district. AAPAC’s
work on defeating the proposal was considered to be the primary reason for its defeat.
AAPAC wanted the building of a new middle school in the Southend to support Salina
ger school students who, once graduated from elementary level, were bussed to the Westside
Stout Middle School. Also, they supported the idea of building a new middle school in
the heart of northeast Dearborn in order to relieve over-crowding at Lowery Middle
School. The bond proposal did not live up to the expectations of the community.

AAPAC’s new battle cry was, “Support A Better Proposal For Our Kids, Our Schools,
Our Community And Our Future,” as their election literature had asked. In a second
round of elections on June 13, 2002, the community voted no and the proposal was again
defeated.

As a result of the second failed vote, the-then-Superintendent (Dr. Jeremy
Hughes), after consultations with board members and other stakeholders, appointed a task
force, drawn from various sections of the community in order to devise plans for a new
bond issue that meets with the requirements of those concerned, brought together a
taskforce to help engineer a new bond proposal that will meet with the approval of the
majority of the community.

Meanwhile, however, Arab American Abed Hammoud, a professional with
degrees in engineering, law and business, who had been so ably leading AAPAC, wanted
to affect things on a larger scale in the city. Mr. Hammoud decided to run for the Mayor-
ship of the city in 2001. Mr. Hammoud stepped down as president of the organization to
run for office, a race viewed by many, among them members within the Arab American
community as a “David vs. Goliath” political campaign that favours the incumbent
mayor. No doubt, Hammoud had the intellect, skills and experience to lead the city as its
mayor; however, the question was, would Dearborn, a city with a history of racial and
ethnic prejudice, elect an immigrant Arab for its executive leader? The question was further complicated by the events of September 11, 2001. In fact, the day the attacks occurred was the day of the primary elections (to narrow the field of candidates to the top two vote getters), leading to a November 4, 2001 General (run-off) Election to determine the winner.

Hammoud made a good showing in the general election, but he lost. Mayor Guido, however, was pressed for the first time in his career, having, also for the first time, to campaign within the Arab American enclaves of East Dearborn, seeking their political support. Hammoud’s candidacy was a breakthrough in many ways. His successes as a leader in AAPAC showed his potential as politician. The events of September 11, 2001 no doubt impacted his political bid for leadership in very negative ways, affecting not only his political campaign, but also the political future of Arab Americans at the local level.

Nonetheless, the bond proposal was revised and in March 26, 2002 the new proposal (nearly $150 Million worth) was passed with support of the Arab American community—having revamped the approach and substance of the levy. Mr. Hammoud, as well as the community, felt pride in their ability to effect the local political process to their advantage, believing the community has come of age, politically-speaking, in terms of its ability to affect change. From the perspective of community members, the consecutive bond issue elections have proved once and for all that, while the community is supportive of education in Dearborn, most importantly, however, decisions of a grand nature need to be reached via consensus with adequate input from the community. Although, City Hall seemed to be out of their sphere of influence, (with only two council
members and 2.5 percent of city employees being Arab American), especially in light of the Mr. Hammoud’s defeat—the events of September 11, 2001 notwithstanding, Arab Americans nevertheless had felt vindicated in being able to affect politically the school system in the city. Traditionally, the schools, as the first station on the road of political process, have opened the gangway for future significant involvement.

Nonetheless, the effects of September 11, 2001 remain a major obstacle for seizing success in the socio-political struggle of the Arab American community to be accepted in their city. Although they had made significant small steps towards that end, the events of September brought on a crisis that shook the very foundations of community among Arab Americans. The following from researcher Patrick Belton is instructive:

“…White elected officials from West Dearborn tend to boast of their ‘good ties’ to the Arab community, while complaining to me off the record of that community’s growing influence within the city. The Arabs, on the other hand feel marginalized by September 11th, 2001, and while Dearborn whites brag about how well Dearborn weathered the terrorist attacks, the Arabs are quicker to remember the broken storefront windows, the threatening 2:00 a.m. telephone calls, and the highway graffiti insulting to the Prophet” (Belton, 2003).

4.5 September 11, 2001 Crisis

The tragic events of September 11, 2001 left the United States populace in shock. Not since the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour in Hawaii did the American people feel so vulnerable. Indeed, this time, one can argue, Americans have felt more vulnerable than ever. While Pearl Harbour was the periphery, New York constituted a major American city, and whereas accounts of the attack in Hawaii were learned of “second-hand”, the tragedy of the towers was witnessed first hand by the majority of the American public. It was a major cultural quake for the American people, who seem to have thought to be
immune to the troubles that plagued parts of the world outside. The immediate reaction of Americans was outright fear and anger. Ordinary people were afraid for their lives and the lives of their loved ones. Also, they were angry with the perpetrators of these heinous acts and anyone associated with or connected to them.

The linking of the tragedy with Islam, Muslims, Arabs and other associated peoples immediately after the tragedy (whether rightly or wrongly) gave the American people a target and an outlet for their fears, anger and hate. While the President urged Americans to stand united and fight their anti-Muslim and anti-Arab prejudices, his administration pursued a policy of “guilty-if-innocent-until-deemed-a-non-threat” within the Arab and Muslim community in the country, assisting in fanning the flames of hate and fear, albeit indirectly. Thus, American Muslims, and Arab American citizens or lawful residents of Arab backgrounds, in addition to South Asians and even Hispanic Americans who may have been confused for Arabs due to racial stereotyping, became a community at risk in every respect. The risk—whether imagined (an over-sensitivity) or real (as in the case of governmental intrusions, and increased vigilance in the form of security profiling, and targeting of Arabs and Muslims), affected how Muslims and Arabs in America regarded themselves in several ways.

With regard to the Arab American community, nationally and particularly in the Detroit metropolitan area, where the largest community of Middle East background people have made their home, observation has yielded the following perspectives on the reaction of Arab Americans. At first, as Wafa Shuraydi\(^6\) has maintained (2002), while Americans were going through the grieving process, psychologically, Arab Americans

\(^6\) Michigan Association for Bilingual Education annual conference in Dearborn, Michigan (April 25-26, 2002).
seem to have lagged behind in their shock and in their denial of the ethnic background of the perpetrators of the terrorist acts. As a result, Arab Americans’ sense of the world around them was marred with fear. However, as the denial slowly ebbed and the realization that indeed ethnic Arabs have been involved in and responsible for the tragedy—predicated on individuals’ own sense of who they are, lest one over-generalizes and reduces people to pedantic formulas, nevertheless we may discern three categories their reactions: First, the development of hyper sense of “American-ness”; second, the development of a hyper sense of “Arab-ness” (or Islamic-ness”); and, third, a general withdrawal from labels.

The American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee has reported an increase in acts of discrimination and hate-inspired attacks against Arab Americans or those who were perceived to be members of the group in the year following the attack on New York and Washington, D.C.\textsuperscript{ii} This very attitude in its logic carried out fully finds prominence among some members of other Arab American communities who wish to down-play their “Arab-ness” in favour of other sub-identities (such as the Maronite Lebanese and Chaldean Iraqis).

A phenomenon that has been observed among some Arab Americans is the display of their “Arab-ness” more forcefully than before the tragic attacks as a way countering societal hate and in order to assert a separate identity. It is imperative to note that such behaviour is not meant to be anti-American; rather it is quintessentially American. That is to say, the emphasis on Arab-ness and display of Arab artefacts is an

\textsuperscript{ii} “Report on Hate Crimes and Discrimination Against Arab Americans: The Post-September 11 Backlash,” a report dealing with the aftermath of the attacks between September 11, 2001 to October 11, 2002. Compiled and published in May 2003 by the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee: www.adc.org
assertion of “American-hood”—in other words, the Constitutionally-guaranteed American rights are fully engaged and practiced to affirm a super ethnic identity within the framework of American citizenship. For example, it has been readily observed that many Arab American Muslim women, (particularly young, college-bound and professionals) have donned on the hijab (or head-cover) in order to assert their differentness in the face of social stigma thrust upon Islam and its adherents.

As a teacher of Arabic as a foreign and heritage language at the University of Michigan-Dearborn, this writer has observed a marked increase among his heritage students in wearing of the hijab among his female students, who, when asked, have reported regarding their pride in being Muslim and in being committed to Islam, as well as in declaring this publicly through wearing the head-cover. Certainly, women are not the exception here, as men also have exhibited their own sense of separateness, often, through increased mosque attendance or membership and activism in the Muslim Student Association or other ethnic student bodies, as well as “mainstream” organizations while maintaining an Arab or Muslim label.

4.5.1 National Impact: the USA PATRIOT Act

The aftermath of the tragic events of September 11, 2001 entailed major repercussions for Arab and Muslim Americans. Not only were Arab and Muslim Americans looked upon by their neighbours and fellow citizens as suspicious, and as potential saboteurs, but also the U.S. government had helped fuel this sentiment by reinforcing racist and xenophobic tendencies through promulgating special directives (law enforcement profiling), establishing special regulations (airport security measures) and enacting laws—all of which had far reaching impact, including “chilling” Arab
American activism and subjecting the national community to extreme scrutiny. The most important of these governmental actions is the enacting of the USA PATRIOT Act 2001, which is an acronym for “Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism.” President George Bush II signed the law act into law October 26, 2001, inaugurating a new era of fear in American life. The law, whose name is designed to play on the nationalist emotions of a people who have been unjustly-attacked, the Patriot Act (for short), gave the executive branch of government new and draconian powers (EFF, 2001). Organized into 342-page document, the act begins with Congress condemning discrimination against Arab and Muslim Americans. However, as Congress proceeded to honour and protect the rights of Arab and Muslim Americans by special mention and by enumerating their contributions to American life and society, the body of the USA PATRIOT Act began to dismantle those very rights—not only for them, rather, also for all Americans. According to an analysis of the act conducted by American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), an organization devoted to protecting constitutionalism and the historically-famous American “Bill of Rights”, suggests the law increases the government’s surveillance powers in four areas, namely, records searches (Section 215), secret searches (Section 213), intelligence searches (Section 218) and “trap and trace searches” (Section 214) (ACLU website, n.d.).

What is more, according to the same analysis, the new law allows the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to spy on Americans, something that has been prohibited since the 1970s; also, it creates a new crime called “domestic terrorism”, which, potentially, can include any activism if so interpreted by over-zealous prosecutors. Also, most importantly, the law:
“...allows for the indefinite detention of non-citizens. The Patriot Act gives the attorney general unprecedented new power to determine the fate of immigrants. The attorney general can order detention based on a certification that he or she has ‘reasonable grounds to believe’ a non-citizen endangers national security. Worse, if the foreigner does not have a country that will accept them, they can be detained indefinitely without trial” (ibid.).

Under the USA PATRIOT Act and other like-minded Executive Orders, regulations and laws, the national tenor of the United States has markedly changed. In a report discussing the subject, the Center for Constitutional Rights (CCR), an non-profit and educational devoted to the protection and advancement of American constitutionalism, has noted that recent legal developments “…have seriously undermined civil liberties, the checks and balances that are essential to the structure of our democratic government, and indeed, democracy itself” (CCR, 2002: 1).

However, barely two years after Congress passed the USA PATRIOT Act, the government does not seem satisfied with the current powers it has already accrued under this draconian law. In fact, the U.S. Department of Justice is seeking to expand its powers under a draft bill of “Domestic Security Enhancement Act”, which is being called “Patriot Act 2”, which will give the government even greater powers, such spying on religious and political activities, not disclosing the identity of individuals detained in connection with a terror investigation, stripping lawful immigrants of the right to a fair deportation hearing, and other extreme measures (ACLU Press Release, 2003).

4.5.2 Harassment and Hate of Arab Americans

In the wake of the tragedy, members of the Arab American community – along with Muslim and South Asian Americans, even some Latino Americans, who were mistaken for “Arab”, a common occurrence in America, owing to an Orientalist heritage that lumps all “browns” together – were subjected to myriad hate crimes. They
experienced acts of physical violence and direct threats (e.g. bomb threats), according to the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC Fact Sheet, 2002). In addition, immigrants and citizens alike experienced wide-ranging forms of discrimination that included “airline racism” (“flying while Arab”, i.e., Arab passengers expelled from airplanes or refused to be flown, and/or subjected to humiliating searches). Scores of such cases were reported to Arab American organizations. Also, employment discrimination, including hostile work environments and loss of jobs occurred. According to ADC, several hundred cases of discrimination and termination were reported to ADC.

In addition to numerous reports of unnecessary law enforcement-profiling occurring across the nation, there were many cases of tensions in schools and universities, resulting from faculty and/or administrative prejudicial actions and treatment (ibid.). Also, according to ADC, the civil rights organization has documented acts of “discriminatory service or denial of service” in which Arab Americans were adversely affected.

In November of 2002, Human Rights Watch, an independent, non-governmental and international organization, submitted a report on the situation of Arab Americans, noting general alarm. In its report, “We Are Not the Enemy: Hate Crimes against Arabs, Muslims, and Those Perceived to be Arab or Muslim After September 11,” Human Rights Watch suggested that Arabs, Muslims and those thought to belong to Middle Eastern background “…became victims of a severe wave of backlash violence”, adding:

“…The hate crimes included murder, beatings, arson, attack on mosques, shootings, vehicular assaults and verbal threats. This violence was directed at people solely because they shared or were perceived as sharing the national background or religion of the hijackers and al-Qaeda members deemed responsible for attacking the World Trade Center and the Pentagon” (2002: 3).
Additionally, recounting a history of backlash against Arabs and Muslims in the United States, the report notes the lack of preparation on the part of governmental agencies, whether local, state of national, to deal in a preventative way with potential incidents in cases of crises. The report informs that:

“Our research demonstrates that action in advance of potential outbreaks of hate crimes can help mitigate the harm to individuals and property from backlash crimes. The success in combating backlash crimes in Dearborn, Michigan, for example, where only two violent September 11-related assaults occurred in a city with 30,000 Arab Americans, reflected steps taken by local and state officials long before September 11. In particular, Dearborn Police had already identified high-risk communities and were ready to deploy officers where needed within hours after the attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon” (ibid.).

The report also suggests that, were the United States to be spared additional hate crimes and backlash incidents against Arab Americans and Muslims, federal, state and local governmental authorities ought to develop action plans to prevent and mitigate potential violence to people and property. Even though Arab American, American Muslim and human and civil rights leaders have forwarded calls for such plans across the country, the situation and the potential for harm for people and property has not changed, according to scene observers.

4.5.3 Local Impact

Although Michigan and Dearborn seem to have been given good marks for dealing with the immediate effects of the attacks in New York and Washington, D.C. on September 11, 2001, nonetheless some questions have persisted in the minds of some regarding reasons behind police deployment, especially in Dearborn. Although not much discussed publicly, privately, however, Michigan and Dearborn residents have asked whether the deployment was as much a show of force in the event of potential terrorists emanating from within the local community, as it is to protect it from outsiders. Not
easily answered, however, as a hypothesis, it has credibility given the traditional linkages made between the local community and events beyond the border. After all, it has been observed, local and state officials are drawn from the same cultural and population backgrounds that, on the whole, harbour Orientalist tendencies, may see Arabs and Muslims—by definition—as outsiders and potentially dangerous.

At any rate, the community at large in the Detroit Metropolitan area did not escape backlash incidents unscathed. In fact, since September 11, 2001, members of the communities of Arab and Muslim Americans have been acquainted with violence, abuse and effects of prejudice. The following journalistic account makes the point:

“The Detroit region is home to the largest concentration of people of Arab descent in the United States, with Dearborn the center of that community. Restaurants, schools and mosques cater to families such as the Unises, who have four generations of roots in this country.

“But since last September, this place has felt less like a haven for Arab Americans. There has been periodic harassment, the constant fear of bodily harm and the frightening possibility of being incarcerated in connection with the war on terror -- fears that Arabs and Muslims around the country have echoed” (Pierre, 2002:A3).

Nearly two years later after the attacks of September 11, there does not seem to be an end in sight for the targeting of Arab Americans in the Detroit area. A local, detailed news investigation had yielded information suggesting Arab Americans are very fearful of being targets of investigation and accusation:

“Federal prosecutors in Detroit have tripled the number of criminal cases brought against Arabs and Muslims in the past two years while dozens of people have been labeled as terror suspects. But the government has so far proven terror connections against only three of 155 terror suspects considered for prosecution” (Bebow, 2003a)

However, the community is not only under attack from official quarters, rather Arab Americans must deal with social and cultural ramifications of this antagonism and
general anxiety which are whipped up and reinforced by over-zealous governmental action in hunting-down ghosts of terror. As a result, there have been false arrests of individuals thought to have connection to terrorism based on their ethnicity (Bebow, 2003b).

According to a locally-conducted opinion poll, sampling 500 Arab Americans in the Detroit Metropolitan area in May of 2003,

“…discrimination continues to be a problem for Arab Americans. Forty-one percent said they or someone in their family have experienced bias since the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks in 2001. A similar survey conducted shortly after the attacks showed only twenty two percent reported bias.

“The biggest problem reported was nasty comments, followed by strange looks and racial slurs. Some said they’ve experienced job discrimination, threats and physical confrontations. A few said they were shot at” (Warikoo, 2003).

Thus, while the American mainstream feels the country is being subjected to terrorism, and among them Arab and Muslim Americans, nonetheless, this minority group is also being subjected to the hate and terrorism from fellow Americans. Therefore, Arab Americans are doubly terrorized and marginalised.

4.5.4 Conclusion

Arab American history and life, especially after the events of September 11, 2001, suggest a new pattern of life. While they may have been tolerated in some places or rendered invisible in others that mitigated factors for their presence, the new culture of security in the country cannot allow for this invisibility anymore, nor will it accept “othered” people because by definition they represent a threat. While it has never been “easy” for Arabs to assimilate/integrate in American society, due largely to a colour line, that sometimes they were able to cross depending on the hues of their skin, it has become increasingly hard for them to be recognised as a part of American society due to their
associations with terrorism and Islamic radicalism, in addition to their colour and religious baggage, especially when the colour line shifts away from them, depriving members of the community potential security in being (or becoming) “white”.

Review of Arab American history and life suggests to readers the existence of a strong anti-Arab racism that is conflated with anti-Muslim bigotry (which is interwoven with fears of African, black and brown people and which rejects anything that is not white as being opposite of normal or right), something that ultimately and naturally leads to the alienation of Arab Americans from their American compatriots as much as it estranges the rest of America from her native children of Arab (and Muslim) backgrounds.

In the following chapter, the reader will have occasion to review the history and evolution of the educational system in the city of Dearborn. The discussion will focus on the historic context of Dearborn’s education system, as well as its ideology, mission and political milieu.
5.1 Introduction to Education in Dearborn

As elsewhere in America, education in Dearborn is a local enterprise. At the macro and policy level, education system is governed by an elected body of seven trustees, who decide collaboratively on a myriad of issues, ranging from financing to curriculum to school boundaries, as well as a multitude of many other things. Thus, the board members, as educational trustees, are guided by local needs and desires, which significantly bear on the educational process through the political impact of the ballot box. In terms of day-to-day management of the school system, Dearborn Public Schools (DPS) is administered by a Superintendent of Schools who is directly responsible to the elected officials of the Board of Education. The superintendent is assisted by a number of directors, departments’ chiefs, who compose the “decision-making cabinet” that oversees the running of the school buildings, staffs, curricula and everything else. In keeping with the principles of local control and administration, accordingly, DPS is the local educational authority charged with the public education of young residents in the city of Dearborn, Michigan.

As an institution of elementary through secondary education, DPS is a “P-12 school district” or pre-kindergarten through high school, which entails 14 grades, pre-kindergarten and kindergarten, elementary (grades 1 through 5), middle school (grades 6
through 8), and secondary, (grades 9 through 12). In addition, as part of the school district, although it is run autonomously, DPS Board of Education controls the Henry Ford Community College, a first and second year university college institution that focuses on vocational and general studies.

As of this writing, DPS has three high schools, six middle schools, 21 elementary schools, and four specialty schools, including pre-kindergarten and training centre for challenged students. As of early 2004, the Dearborn educational system (P-12) enrolled not less than 17,500 students. Nearly eight thousand are distributed at the K-6 level, while the middle school level educates nearly 4,000 students. The secondary level educates more than 5,500 students. Overall, the system employs a little more than 2,000 workers, the majority of whom are teachers (1,340 teachers). Nearly 600 are non-instructional staff members, including custodial engineers and teachers’ assistants, among others. There are nearly 100 administrators, including superintendent, directors, principals, assistant principals, supervisors and coordinators.

5.1.1 History of Education in Dearborn

Home of several Native American tribes for generations (Cornell in Hathaway, 1989: 26-31), prior to American statehood, the lower parts of Michigan belonged to the British crown (1760-1796) (Cumming in Hathaway, 1989: 59-75); and before that time, to the French who were the first Europeans to settle the region (1701-60) (Armour in Hathaway, 1989: 43-55). The area of what later became the city of Dearborn was a wilderness that was not inhabited by Native Americans until later in the 18th century. Following the defeat of Native American resister Chief Pontiac, in 1763 in Detroit, French settlers moved inland, along the Rouge River, establishing farms (LWV, 1976: 1-
3). Later on Yankee New Yorkers and New Englanders arrived in the area, leading to the establishment of small settlements and villages, such as Pekin, Greenfield, and Springwells. Pekin Township, named Dearborn, then renamed Bucklin, and again Dearborn, after an American Revolutionary military hero, General Henry Dearborn, who became Secretary of War during President Andrew Jackson’s administration. Springwells Township became a city in 1923, and in 1925 it was renamed Fordson. Dearborn village, incorporated in 1893, became an established city in 1925. In 1928, the consolidated Dearborn (west Dearborn) and Fordson (east Dearborn) were both united into the new city of Dearborn.

The modern city of Dearborn, an historic and a major neighbouring city of Detroit, has an established educational system whose beginnings go back to the earliest history of the State. Education in Michigan was in the main a private and mostly Catholic enterprise, especially during its French period (New Detroit, July 1990:1). During British rule, generally the inhabitants were mainly French and their social order remained the same, including their educational system. But, the nature of education changed with the advent of the American phase of sovereignty over the land. Such changes that presently will be discussed had profound impact on Michigan, including the area that came to be the city of Dearborn.

Today, Dearborn’s educational system services the residents of the city of Dearborn and a portion of another neighbouring suburb, the city of Dearborn Heights. The system is called officially, Dearborn Schools, but is also known as Dearborn Public Schools, a reference to the fact that it is a publicly funded and maintained system of education. Not unlike elsewhere throughout the United States, Dearborn’s schools had
humble beginnings that eventually grew into the large and complex organisations that exist today. This evolution picked up pace after the beginnings of the 20th Century in response to demographic growth, industrialisation, and urbanisation. Certainly, however, Dearborn’s schools and their history are directly linked, indeed, intertwined with the history and politics of the State and the locale. Although that history and range of politics will not be addressed extensively here, we will have opportunity to attend to some major points.

Colonial and Territorial History

The first school in Lower Michigan to open its doors is reportedly a parochial school, established in 1755, during the French regime (New Detroit, 1990:1). It was not until 1796 that the Americans were to raise their banner in Detroit; before the territory of Michigan became an American possession as a result of the victory of the young republic in its war of independence, it was for a while administered by the British Crown as occupied territory. After 1796, the region was governed as an American territory being prepared for statehood by means of a provisional government:

“As a means of providing an orderly administration of the territory, the [American] government passed a series of ordinances—in 1784, 1785 and 1787. The last, known as the Northwest Ordinance, provided a plan of government or constitution for the Northwest Territory. It guaranteed the inhabitants freedom of religion, the right of habeas corpus, trial by jury, free passage on all navigable waters, and a number of other basic rights. It also stated that ‘…schools and the means of education shall forever be encouraged’” (Cumming in Hathaway, 1989: 65).

Indeed, after the victory of the United States in its war of independence, many colonists left the original thirteen colonies in hopes of riches and new land to settle in the newly acquired territories. The new comers arrived from the east, mainly from western New York and New England region (Hathaway in Hathaway, 1989: 322). At first it was a
trickle only to be interrupted by the War of 1812, in which the nascent republic engaged against its former oppressor, Britain. But by the beginning of the 19th century, the region was well on its way to becoming a bastion of Anglo Yankee culture. It was during this period that the first “public school” was established. Styled the Catholepistimiad in 1817 in the city of Detroit, it

“…consisted of a primary school and an academy, represented a movement toward free public education: the tuition of the poor was paid by the territory [government]. The curriculum proved complex, however, and the school closed after only ten years. In 1837, the Catholepistimiad was reorganized and moved to Ann Arbor; it was subsequently named the University of Michigania and finally the University of Michigan” (New Detroit, 1990:1).

Another milestone in Michigan educational history came when in 1829 legislation was promulgated, directing parents and guardians whose children attended public schools “to pay tuition and furnish fuel for the school, but pauper children were allowed to attend free” (ibid.).

But by 1830s, immigration from the east resumed, adding to the numbers of Michigan residents such that, by 1837 Michigan was admitted into the Union (Cumming in Hathaway, 1989:73; Rosentreter in Hathaway, 1989:92). This era marked the beginnings of the “national period” in education in Michigan, as well as other places in the country. Now and furthermore in history of the region, as well as the nation, public education would grow in significance. In 1835, Michiganders drafted their first constitution in preparation for joining the American federation on equal footing with original and other newly admitted states. The founding Michigan fathers not only saw fit to emulate the American constitution in its forms and ideology, as well as the spirit of earlier federal statutes (ordinances of 1784, 1785 and 1787), but they also added a new
dimension that was to affect the course of education in Michigan and elsewhere in the United States:

“…The constitution was similar to existing state constitutions: it included a bill of rights, established a bicameral state legislature, and enfranchised all twenty-one-year-old white males. The document’s farsighted provision concerned education. A state superintendent of public instruction was created, making Michigan the first state to constitutionally establish this position. The constitution also placed the proceeds from the sale of the public lands set aside in each township for education (Section 16) in a central school fund. Since the value of these lands differed, this unique proviso allowed for a more equitable distribution of state funds for education and was Michigan’s first step toward the equalization of educational opportunity” (Rosentreter in Hathaway: 1989:83-4).

Gradually, however, educational concerns in the state took on greater importance. The growth in numbers and a pro-education mind set did much to improve education in the state. Michigan’s second constitution (1850) provided for free primary education, but the Michigan legislature failed to uphold this requirement for nearly two decades, according to Rubenstein and Ziewacz:

“…In 1869 rate bills (tuition charges) for common schools were finally abolished, thereby fulfilling the constitutional directive. Two years later, over Democratic objections, Michigan became one of the first states to pass a compulsory education law requiring children between the ages of eight and fourteen to attend school for a minimum of twelve weeks a year. …High school education received a boost in 1874 when the Michigan Supreme Court ruled unanimously that a city had the legal right to levy taxes to finance postprimary education…” (Rubenstein and Ziewacz in Hathaway, 1989:145).

When we aim to trace the development of the Dearborn school system, we must attribute its beginnings to the revolutionary idea of secular, free and compulsory schooling for children as espoused by American nationalist ideology (Spring, 1986: 14-19; 50-52; 70-109). With respect to Michigan, the United States Congress passed successive legislations but primarily the Northwest Ordinance in 1787, which had
governed the status of the northeast territories of the diminutive United States and established education as a public good. In no unequivocal terms, the law, known as the Ordinance of 1787, established the government of the Northwest Territory, laying the foundation of public education in Michigan (Cumming in Hathaway, 1989: 65). It provided that, “…every sixteenth section of land in crude townships in the Western Territory was reserved for the maintenance of public schools within such townships” (Kurmas and Kurmas, 1975: 3). Another law, the Act of 1804, called for land to be reserved for the purpose of public education in townships in the area which later became the sovereign State of Michigan. Furthermore, in 1827, yet another law provided that every township that had at least fifty residents must as such establish a schooling system. The law stated that residents, “… should provide themselves with a school-master of good morals, to give instruction in reading, writing… as well decent behavior, for such terms as should be equivalent to six months in the year” (ibid). According to Kurmas and Kurmas, the schools were supposed to be supported by means of a local poll tax, assessed and collected with the county taxes. Hence, the law not only confirmed the idea of local schooling but also reinforced its local and public funding, thus opening the door for politics to enter education, making schooling a viable political issue.

Kurmas and Kurmas report that in 1833, still another law provided for the election of three commissioners and ten inspectors in each township whose charge was to inspect and manage the school(s) in their jurisdiction. These public officials had the power to compel orphan children and the children of poor parents to attend school at public expense of the district, a power that paved the way for increased free education for all students.
Michigan became a full-fledged state of the American Union in 1835. As part of its admission into the American family of states, Michigan acquired from the general government funds accrued to the state from the selling or worth of “section numbered sixteen in every township” to be used for schooling purposes. Indeed, the funds from this allocation established the State’s basic school fund from which school districts still draw today. Michigan’s newly promulgated constitution on the eve of statehood gave the Legislature the power to provide for a system of education in the State. This historical outline had a profound effect on the development of education in Michigan, including Dearborn.

Origins of Dearborn Schools

The earliest evidence of organised schooling in the geographic area that later became the city of Dearborn can be gleaned from public county records and other historical records such as the Michigan Historical Records Survey Project (April 1941). The “Minutes of the Meetings of the Townships of Bucklin, Pekin and Dearborn” (May 28, 1827 to April 13, 1857) record notes that a log schoolhouse was established in 1824, but it had been used for town meetings as early as May 28, 1827—(all according to Kurmas and Kurmas). But they report that the first well-documented reference to a public school in Dearbornville (a section of west Dearborn today) was of a log school mentioned in the Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction School Inspectors’ Report (a Michigan Senate document of 1837). Ostensibly, the school was completed in 1835 and was attended by twenty-five children, and by 1838, numbers reached ninety students.

According to Kurmas and Kurmas, the Scotch Settlement – an area located north and central of today’s Dearborn city – evidences the presence of a school building built in
1861 which currently stand in the city’s Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village complex. They also indicate that according to a school district undated handbook, there is information suggesting that in 1856 the local school board purchased an addition to the originally owned lot and built a two-storey schoolhouse in 1857. In 1890, the United States Congress enacted a law under which the Custodian of the Detroit Arsenal Grounds was directed to deliver possession of the land to Dearborn for educational purposes. In 1891, the Dearborn school district retained its first superintendent of schools. And in 1892-93, the military installation of the surgeon’s quarters and barracks were demolished in order to build the new Dearborn School, later to become the high school of the city and “flagship” of the schools. The new school building became operational in 1894.

According to Kurmas and Kurmas, the school was quite larger than current needs at the time, as one room was used for high school students, and only two other rooms were utilised for lower level students. They also report that the first student to graduate from high school was in 1897. Only one student graduated because up to that point the Dearborn schools did not have more than grade 10, that is, ten years of consecutive educational training.

*Dearborn Schools in Earlier Times*

Life in Dearborn schools in earlier times has been described as “austere”, reflecting the totality of life in the Dearborn area overall. Dearborn, not unlike the rest of Michigan, was initially settled by “Yankees”, that is, north-eastern new Englanders, whose puritan origins favoured simple living (Hathaway in Hathaway, 1989:322). Kurmas and Kurmas describe life in the schools as having been “…meagre, rigid and
strong on discipline and respect for those in authority” (ibid.). The following is a
description offered of a typical schoolhouse:

“The schoolhouse of the pioneer was built of log and was generally located
at the intersection of crossroad. For seats, slabs with legs to them were
universally used, which answered the double purpose of seats and sleds to
ride down hill on. The desks were constructed by placing boards upon pins
driven into the walls of the house. No stoves were used in those days, but
instead, an ample fire-place was constructed by sawing out a few logs at the
one end of the house, and filling up the hole thus made the stone and mud,
which formed the back of the fireplace. Wood being plenty, there was
usually a rousing fire roaring in these primitive fireplaces” (Kurmas and
Kurmas, 1975:9).

Course of Study and Conduct

In contrast, the new school building of 1893 was considered to have all the
amenities available those days, which included heating by means of furnaces, electric
bells, ample rooms, enough lighting, and were well ventilated (ibid.). For these
conveniences, students were required to adhere fully to all school rules, regulations and
administrative directives. These rules, considered few in number and reasonable in nature
during those times, included the following:

“Pupils shall walk quietly and in single file through the halls and up and
down stairs and shall not remain in the halls or on the stairways. They shall
neither scuffle, run, jump, nor make any loud noise in any part of the
building” (DPS, 1895-96).

The focus was not only on strict discipline in matter of behaviour and conduct, but it also
extended to the curriculum. Kurmas and Kurmas note that the schools’ instructional
programs revolved around “morals”. They report that, according to school pamphlets,
moral instruction was fundamental to all the grades, stressing self-reliance, mastery of
self, good hygiene, and the use of good language (ibid.).
5.1.2 Description of Education System in Dearborn

*Modern Times*

By the end of the 19th century, the Dearborn area was on the cusp of major changes, as described in the previous chapters. Subsequently, the educational system in the area was to follow suit in response to the challenges of the times ahead. As the first decade of the 20th century came and gone, Dearborn area, up to that point a collection of rural villages, was gearing up towards urbanised consolidation and industrialisation. Henry Ford’s industrial revolution in south-eastern Michigan impacted the Dearborn region most heavily, causing its rapid and complete makeover. Dearborn Schools’ current guise and structure owes itself largely to the way the system was organised and operated in the earlier third of the 20th century, during the time Dearborn gathered its parts and became a viable city. Today, Dearborn Schools boast of having 29 schools and providing education to more than 17,000 children.

The Michigan State Constitution requires the State Legislature to maintain and support a system of public education state-wide through the organising of a “State Board of Education”, whose members are elected by popular vote. The Board members work with the Superintendent of Public Instruction, setting the academic standards for all state-wide districts (LWV, 1987:160). Per customary American lore, education is a local matter. Therefore, local districts are organised as political subdivisions of the State that are independent from municipal entities in which they exist. Thus, unless otherwise specified by a special measure of law, the executive branch or chief of a city, county, or municipality does not intervene in the affairs of the local school district.
The day-to-day administration and leadership of a school system is left to the superintendent and his/her team of administrators under the policy-making guidance of a locally elected board of education. The board remains the focal point of educational politics in the locale, and, theoretically, responsive to the will (and whims) of the majority of the citizenry of the area. In Dearborn, the board is described as follows:

“The Board of Education is responsible (1) for setting the school policies for the district; (2) for hiring administrative, instructional and non-instructional staffs for implementing these policies; (3) for determining the millage requests; and (4) for setting the actual tax levy. The board directly hires only two people, the Superintendent of the P-12 program and the President of Henry Ford Community College. All other positions are approved by the board according to recommendations made by those two chief executives” (LVW, 1976:161)
The modern school district is composed of all sections of the city of Dearborn and a part of the adjacent city of Dearborn Heights, the Fairlane District, which was incorporated into the system in March of 1972 (LVW, 1987: 160). However, unlike most school districts throughout Michigan and even the United States, which are Kindergarten through grade 12, Dearborn Schools today is a P-12 (Pre-Kindergarten to twelfth grade) district. Further, peculiar to this school system, its board of education is also the board of trustees of Henry Ford Community College (HFCC), named after the famed Dearborn citizen. Thus, in practical terms, Dearborn Schools is in fact a P-14 school district; that is to say, the district offers fifteen years of public education. However, three academic years of which (pre-kindergarten and the associate level at the college) are heavily subsidised, though not free, whereas the rest are free of fees to resident students of school district. Of course, the College is run independently as tertiary education institution.

The Dearborn Schools teaching staff members are numbered at approximately 1200 teachers, the majority of whom are the elementary levels, with decreasing rank order through middles schools and high school. Also, there are about 200 bilingual teachers that are part of the bilingual/bicultural and compensatory education program. The majority of Dearborn teachers hold bachelor degrees with smaller numbers holding masteral and doctoral qualifications depending on qualifications, experience and length of service, a teacher’s salary can range from the upper twenties to the mid seventies. Most teachers in the district are in the middle of the range. In 2001-2002, the schools’ budget for teachers amounted to more than half of the budget, testifying to the great cost of attracting and retaining teaching personnel (DPS, 2001).
Dearborn Schools’ teachers are members of a labour union. Teachers are represented by the Dearborn Federation of Teachers (DFT), an affiliate of the American Federation of Teachers, one of the United States’ two main educational labour unions, the other being, the National Education Association. Membership in the DFT is guaranteed by state law:

“…[Michigan] Public Act 379 which was passed by the legislature in 1965 allows teachers to organize for collective bargaining. However, because the school district deals with one collective bargaining agent, teacher members vote to choose the organization that will represent them in contract negotiations. Currently, the Dearborn Federation of Teachers represents all the Dearborn teachers, (LVW, 1976: 163).

Currently, (2001-2002 Academic year), the school system does not have more than 200 minority teachers (Saad, 04-26-2002). This is a ‘guesstimate’ because the system’s human resources department has not taken measures to count the backgrounds of its employees, however, those in the know are generally aware of trends and ethnic and racial contours of the school district’s instructional staff are agreed on this rough number.

The number of teachers in the school system is calculated at 1,177 instructors (DPS Apple Book, 2002: 111). The number of Arab American teachers does not reach more than fifteen percent of the total number of teachers in the school system (Saad, 2002-04-26). Thus, the total number of Arab American and other minority professionals does not exceed the twenty percent mark of Dearborn School’s overall number of teachers (Student Services, 2001). The total number of Bilingual and Compensatory Education teachers is suggested to be 126 instructors of whom about 90 percent are Arab Americans. The overall number of instructional assistants working in the district is said to be 143 paraprofessional tutors—however, Arab Americans make up the great majority of this corps of tutors, suggested to be ninety five percent by Saad. Certainly, it is less
expensive to hire paraprofessionals than it is to employ fully credentialed teachers. This is why one notices such a high number of Arab Americans being overly represented in this pool of employees.

There are twenty-nine schools in the constellation of Dearborn Schools and a principal heads each school. Additionally, there are eighteen assistant principals distributed across all levels in highly populated schools. The purpose of the administrators is to give assistance, guidance, and curricular leadership to the teachers, students, and other staff members, in addition to safeguarding the smooth operation of the school setting. Structurally, the superintendent of schools is the titular head and the chief executive officer of the school district. An Aide de Camp, styled the Assistant to the Superintendent, assists him. Also, there are several Directors, who lead and manage the various departments of the school districts, such as Student Services, Secondary Curriculum, Business Services, and the like. Directors are officially managers of building school principals. There is one Director of Arab American background, who was promoted into the position in 2000, having served in the district for more than 25 years. Dr. Wageh Saad became Director of the Special Programs and Student Services Department after serving as administrator for the bilingual education. In the academic school year 2001-2002, for the first time ever, there will be seven Arab American administrators. The district also has three Student Services Liaisons, though not administrators, nor teachers; they are “shadow” assistant principals, and intercultural facilitators and cultural brokers with students, families, and community. One of the liaisons is also designated as a hearing officer for student discipline in central administration.
While the need for new teachers fluctuate depending on the numbers of the student population, the retirement of staff members, and the requirements of the school curriculum, generally, the district hires some new teachers every year. In the late 1990s and early decade of the 21st century, a trend has been observed in increased hiring of new teachers. Mostly, these new teachers are white, Euro-Americans, and a limited number of minorities, and Arab American teachers (Ayouby, 2001). The district has had difficulty recruiting qualified teachers, especially secondary level teachers, according to the Human Resources Department (Stuef, 2001). The department attributes this shortage to a growing lack of teachers in the region, a trend experienced across the United States at the time of writing. Human Resources attempt to recruit new personnel through alerting local area universities regarding the available opportunities, or via attending “employment festivals” across the state in order to attract new teachers. Nonetheless, there is no active effort to recruit Arab American teachers locally save for the Bilingual/Bicultural Education program.

Dearborn Schools offers many educational programs for its student body. Law requires some of these programs; others are mandated by the local board of education, while others are recommended by the school system. Among the programs required by law is Special Education which provides for the education of disabled students who are “…residents between the age of 0 and 26 years or until graduated from high school” (LWV, 1976: 165). The services provided for disabled or handicapped students include programs for mentally, emotionally, and physically or health impaired students. Also, the District offers services for the speech and language impaired, as well as, services for the learning disabled students. Additionally, the district offers pre-kindergarten academic...
services to students at its Cotter Early Childhood Center, whose primary focus is the
development of social and academic skills in order to promote better learning in later
grades.

Given that Dearborn has had a history of immigrant students since the
industrialisation of the city, the school system has provided for some form of teaching of
English for students who need assistance in second language acquisition. Such a program
was envisaged in the mid 1970s in the following manner:

“Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) – The purpose
of this program is to help foreign-language speaking students to function in
English with little or no inclusion of their mother tongue. The program
exists wherever it is needed; it functions at all grade levels and is locally
funded” (LWV, 1987: 170)

Other educational programs are also made available to students. Among them the
IGNITE (Inspire the Gifted and Nurture Individuals Through Enrichment) program
which began as a part of a locally funded package in 1975:

“…Every Dearborn school provides for these students with emphasis on
enrichment at the elementary level and advanced placement at the secondary
level. As is the case with special students, gifted students must be so
identified by an Educational Placement and Planning Committee. Testing is
initiated through either teacher or parent requests” (ibid.).

The district also provides vocational training in its high schools, and through its
School to Work Academy, an alternative education high school program. The focus in
that setting is on practical skills, as well as individualized study. Moreover, the district
has adopted the “theme school” approach in which a school promotes learning in a
defined discipline, such as science, or arts, or technology (DPS Theme Schools, 2001).
The newest addition to the family of Dearborn Schools is the International Academy, an
elementary school that focuses on multiculturalism and the learning of a second language
The district also offers summer school programs that include driver education, special and compensatory (bilingual/bicultural) education activities, and voluntary secondary education summer school for students who are making up failed credit coursework (DPS Student Services, 2001). Also, the district offers evening classes in its adult and community education program for community members and for secondary students who need to make up failed classes. The adult program offers classes that are mainly non-academic, enrichment mini-courses, ranging in length from one session to several (DPS Dearborn Adult and Community Education catalogue, Fall 2001: 2; 6-7; 10).

Henry Ford Community College (HFCC) was established in 1938, shortly after the Michigan Legislature passed a law allowing school districts to ventures into the area of tertiary education. Created as Fordson Junior College and offering classes at Fordson High School, it was renamed Dearborn Junior College in 1946. With passing of new legislation in 1952 enabling the establishment of a community college, “…Henry Ford Trade School closed and its monies and programs were given to the Board of Education to expand technical and scientific programs at the Junior College. At the same time the school became known as Henry Ford Community College” (LVW, 1976:179). Today, the college remains a major public tertiary education institution along with the University of Michigan’s Dearborn campus, and the newly renamed Davenport University (formerly Detroit College of Business). The presence of these tertiary institutions in a small city of a little more than ninety thousand residents shows the importance of the town’s place among the other suburbs as a magnet for technical and scientific learning, along with other educational pursuits.
Currently, the State of Michigan through its Department of Education allocates funding to local school districts based on one formula, thus treating all students in the State similarly; however, not long ago, it was the locale—a district, town or city, which funded educational programs on its own. The new system, promulgated in the mid 1990s, was intended to eradicate disparities in funding throughout the State in order to offer sound educational programs for the State’s children wherever they resided. Originally, districts whose finances were better than other areas opposed it. These citizens and school officials felt that the new system would deprive them of funds they would otherwise have had, and thus funneling funding into other school districts, accruing no benefit to them. Not a small part of this thinking was linked to racism and classicism because the new system of funding was and intended to enliven the finances the Detroit School District (Michigan’s largest metropolis) and other poor districts whose sagging economies and tax bases forewarned of major educational catastrophes if not attended to in some fashion. It is worthy to note that the population of the city of Detroit is more than 90 percent African American, whereas other poor districts have high rates of poor whites, blacks and other ethnic minorities (Michigan Department of Education Form IM-4203).

Dearborn Schools are one of the largest urban school districts in Michigan (after the Detroit school district) and are distinguished among the urban school districts as having the largest concentration of Arabic-speaking residents in the United States. Dearborn’s Limited English Proficient (LEP) students comprise no less than 32 percent of the total student population in the district and it represents the largest percentage of LEP students in Michigan (Ayouby, 2000). Further, at least 37 percent of students in the
district are eligible for free or reduced cost lunch, placing that student population below or at the poverty line (DPS Student Services: 2000).

Dearborn Schools experienced significant growth in student enrolment throughout the 1990s, mainly due to a large Arab immigrant and refugee influx during last two decades—although immigrants have been arriving since the 1970s—but particularly after the Second Gulf War. This dramatic increase of language minority students affects almost every elementary, middle, and high school, however, the majority are mainly localised in East Dearborn, while Westside schools remain largely Anglo-American in makeup. According to district figures, almost every classroom contains culturally and linguistically diverse students. And in nine schools, more than fifty percent of the student population is Limited English Proficient students, whereas eleven of the district’s thirty schools have a poverty rate of over forty percent. This dramatic poverty rate, highly correlates with lack of English proficiency, is largely due to the immigrant populations (DPS Student Services, 2000).

Although the majority immigrant group in Dearborn is of Arab background, constituting a minimum of fifty percent of the total student population, the total immigrant group comes from thirty-two diverse language backgrounds. Also, more than half of the language minority students are LEP. The majority of the language minority groups in rank order is: Arabic, Spanish, Romanian, Urdu, and Albanian (DPS Bilingual Handbook, 2000). Arabic-speaking LEP students comprise 95 percent of Dearborn’s total LEP student population, numbering nearly 5000 students in 2000 (Ayouby, 2000). These linguistic backgrounds make for special barriers and opportunities that the schools must address.
5.1.3 Mission and Ideology

American educational establishments whether primary, secondary or even tertiary, have roots in America’s colonial experience—particularly, they emerge from a decidedly religious background. The colonial educational philosophy from which stems the beginnings of American education lies in the religious experience and training of the colonists. The most revealing history to inform this discourse is the colonial experience of New England, whose population established primary (reading and writing schools) for the lower classes, and Latin grammar schools for the colony’s elites beginning in the 1630s (Rippa, 1988: 31-2). Indeed, Massachusetts, the leading colony in New England, enacted in 1642 a law that required “… selectmen of each town to inquire into the literacy of the children and to fine those parents and apprentices’ masters who refused to account for their children’s ability ‘to read and understand the principles of religion and the capital laws of the country’” (ibid. p.38). In 1647, the Massachusetts colony enacted another ordinance that came to be known as “Old Deluder, Satan” Act, requiring the establishment and support of schools, setting precedence for public support of education and intimately connecting religious values to school learning (Spring, 1986: 1-8). No wonder then that all of America’s original colleges (such as Harvard, Yale, and Princeton) all emerged from religious backgrounds and were created for religious as well as civic purposes.

Although the colonies gradually became more secular due in large measure to the rationalist influences of the Enlightenment and because of the needs of an incipient American nationalism (accommodating a geographically and demographically growing United States), which attempted to promote national cohesion through education, American schooling gave rise to the Common School Movement in the early 1800s. The
The purpose of this movement was to give the country schools that produce in one form or another American citizens, whether they were American born, or, increasingly, the children of European immigrants that began to arrive in America as early as the 1840s. It was for these schools to make of these children Americans who would eventually become the work force of the industrial north, the settlers of the west and the fighters for the country’s political survival (referencing the American Civil War, which was fought to establish federal control and ascertain a perpetual union). It is in this context that we can locate the origins of modern education in Michigan and the locality of Dearborn. While the old *raisons d’être* for education may not readily become apparent, nevertheless the spirit of a utilitarian approach to education can be discerned in the original emphasis placed on values in learning, and, pragmatic bend that ultimately produced John Dewey as a major figure in pragmatic philosophy and American education.

The Dearborn Schools website in 2001 posted the following as its current mission statement:

“It is the mission of the Dearborn Public Schools to teach all students the skills they need to succeed. In pursuit of this mission, the Dearborn Public Schools will…

- provide a safe, stimulating learning environment
- establish high expectations for students
- actively engage parents and community members in the learning process
- employ a high quality, enthusiastic staff
- deliver a comprehensive curriculum
- nurture personal responsibility and respect for others.”
In 1998, Dearborn Schools Mission statement proposed the following:

“The Mission of the Dearborn Public Schools, in cooperation with home and community, is to prepare all students to become contributing citizens in a changing society by providing them with knowledge, skills, and a sense of personal and social responsibility through a challenging curriculum and high expectations” (DPS BBE/ESL Handbook, January 1998).

Interestingly, both statements are very much similar in thought and ideology. In the older mission statement, there is an emphasis on developing citizens out of students who will become contributing citizens through the agency of high expectations as designed by not only the school system but the “home” and the “community”. It is a partnership between schools and the community, of which the home is a smaller unit, as we are given to understand.

The District’s responsibility is to “provide a safe environment” with “high expectations” of students who are taught by “high quality” teachers, delivering a “comprehensive curriculum”. The rest seems to be up to others in this learning process because it is a partnership with others in the community and the parents. However, despite the seeming positive aspects of these mission statements, upon taking a closer look, one might observe some deeply disturbing attitudes, which in fact, we may find to permeate the culture and the pedagogic practice among many teachers, administrators, and other staff members.

The most striking element is the notion of taking students and developing them into citizens. While at face value, it is understood that the purpose of public education is to promote social cohesion within society, it is imperative to realize that at least half of the student population is composed of non-citizens—that is, immigrants whose legal status is either as resident aliens (in the majority who do not enjoy the rights of citizens),
or refugees (who are, too, not able to enjoy the same privileges of citizens). But, this emphasis on citizenship strikes a cord because, given the traditional American emphasis on the melting pot approach, it suggests that the school system’s function is to melt this group of students into “American-ness.”

Again, at face value, this may not seem sinister but the invocation of community (which is not defined) is oft interpreted as the leadership of the community—that is, those who are able to articulate an agenda. Generally, they are the natives of the community and not the immigrants or their representatives. Thus, this supposed partnership with the community becomes tainted, in practice, with an agenda that may not represent the best interest of the immigrant community or its body of students. Certainly, invoking cooperation with the “home” sounds democratic and egalitarian, but, in the best of circumstances, the power differential between the school system and the home is so great in comparison, that it renders the original equation void of any essence—let alone when the “home” in many instances is an immigrant household that recognises its “powerlessness” vis-à-vis the system or its officials. One must observe that many of these immigrants have come from countries where the political environment was not conducive to democratic and egalitarian political cultures, hence, these people develop a healthy skepticism regarding authority, which in democratic setting may become disadvantageous. However, the dye is cast by then. Yet, in the truest sense, this dynamic works to the advantage of the power elite, leading to the augmentation of the status quo, and to the possible reinforcement of the existing power structures within society.

The purpose of school, according to the mission statements, is to gain “knowledge” and “skills” in order to function in a “changing” society. At this point, one
may not know what kind of knowledge and skills constitute a comprehensive curriculum—as had been touted in the statements—however, one realizes that such knowledge and skills are designed for those native students who are becoming contributing “citizens”. Most certainly, those who are immigrants/non-citizens know that they live in a different society, and not a changing society. Though it may be changing, they are oblivious to this change. They never knew the process of change because in many ways they are part of the process of change—and that change does not directly impacts them (in the sense offered in this analysis), rather it impacts the natives/citizens around them. Thus, the knowledge and skills being taught is a curriculum designed to help the natives/citizens become able to control their environment—presumably, among its elements also the non-citizens. This understanding throws under the light the nature of this “comprehensive curriculum” and invites questions regarding its applicability to the needs of the immigrant/non-citizen student body.

But this knowledge and skills are supposed to come with “a sense of social responsibility through a challenging curriculum and high expectations.” If in the first instance the curriculum is geared towards the needs of the citizens and natives of the student body with a decided favouring of a “melting pot” hypothesis, then it gives an edge to the natives/citizens over the immigrants/non-citizens. The question that raises itself here is what does “social responsibility” mean to the natives/citizens? Also, what does “social responsibility” mean to the immigrants/non-citizens? In the case of the first group, it is likely to be something on the order of “a white man’s burden” (to varying degrees, depending on the temperaments of those involved), which translates into a “responsibility” to acculturate the immigrant, to assimilate the other into the mainstream
of society—on the terms of society’s elites. A very interesting proposition, indeed, especially when the “immigrant other” may not wish to assimilate and participate in society based on the terms of host society’s orientation. Similarly, the question posed regarding what is being taught to the immigrants must be investigated in this hegemonic light. Does “social responsibility” for the immigrant mean to “toe” the cultural line and not make waves? If so, what are those high expectations? Clearly, of the immigrant, the high expectations noted must engender the total loss of identity into the cultural landscape as constructed by the native/citizen group. The immigrant must become “one” with society—but, it does not seem it is a joining based on free will as much as it is one based on compulsion. Conversely, the “high expectations” for the native group translates into empowerment to achieve and to carry out the will of native society.

What is puzzling is the claim of “actively engage[ing] parents and community members in the learning process.” No doubt, there is no Freireian pedagogical practice ongoing in this context. Yet, the phrasing intimates the kind of liberatory educational practice that might be observed in a setting applying this approach. Although it sounds encompassing and welcoming, it is deceiving in practice. Were it so, then, the business of the school district would be not only be educating the young, but also their parents in programs that are viable, intercultural, practicable, and skills-enhancing of the immigrants. Additionally, this would mean the opportunity for native parents to engage in learning as well in similarly viable, practicable, and worthwhile activities. Certainly, what passes for adult and community education in the school system does not by any means live up to the intimations of this maxim.
5.2 Bilingual/Bicultural Education in Dearborn

Theoretically, bilingual education involves the learning of an additional language along one’s own native tongue. This model of education includes heritage and foreign language learning. Bilingual bicultural education in America is a language education approach that values at its core the native language assets of the students who are engaged in learning English. According to Krashen, bilingual education has two goals; “The first is the development of academic English and school success, and the second is the development of the heritage language” (1999). Although bilingual education was intended to focus on English as a second language, teachers were supposed to do so instruct using simplified English or the student’s native language to prevent falling behind: “Bilingual education is a means to make it possible for linguistically diverse children to achieve the same challenging academic standards required of all children enrolled in America’s schools (OBEMLA, 1995). The original objective behind BBE programming is to provide language education support to students in other subject matter content areas while they are engaged in learning English in order to prevent their academic regression, according to McCabe (2004).

As a language teaching methodology, bilingual/bicultural education (BBE) is a constellation of teaching techniques that cater to limited English proficient (LEP) students. McCabe identifies four different methodologies: 1. English immersion, (where the instruction is entirely in English); 2. English as a Second Language, (an approach that may use simplified English, and/or native language support); 3. Transitional Bilingual Education, which offers instruction at least in part in the student’s native language,
promoting English acquisition; and 4. Two-way Bilingual Education is a methodology where instruction is given in two languages in order to acquire both equally (ibid.).

5.2.1 Origins and History

As a movement in American education, Bilingual/Bicultural Education (BBE) sprang largely from the activism of the 1960s. Although America has always been a polyglot nation, multi-lingualism gave way to the ideology of “melting pot” America—a country whose values and cultures were largely Anglo and European. But, the civil rights and ethnic activism of the sixties produced a call for the recognition of the needs and particularities of American groups, among them Hispanic and Native Americans, thus leading to calls from some quarters for bilingual education as a means to achieving parity with English-speakers. This movement gradually took hold to varying degrees—educationally, politically, and legally, such that by the mid to late 1970s, the United States federal government had appropriated and funded programs for disadvantaged LEP students (Rippa, 1988: 355-71).

In reviewing the history of bilingual education in Dearborn, it is evident that several events contributed to the shaping of instructional services offered to students. In 1968, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) —intended to close the gap between privileged and underprivileged children (Holland, 1999), was amended by an ordinance (Title VII), and mandated to focus on economically-disadvantaged minority students, with English as a priority:

“The United States Congress passed the Bilingual Education Act in 1968 in recognition of the growing number of linguistically and culturally diverse children enrolled in schools who, because of their limited English proficiency, were not receiving an education equal to their English-proficient peers. Now a part of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), Title VII encourages the development of programs in bilingual
education, Emergency Immigrant Education, and foreign language assistance” (California Department of Education).

In 1970, Michigan’s Office of Civil Rights (OCR) advised all school districts of its concerns relating to the enforcement of the Civil Rights Act (DPS Landmarks, n.d.). The OCR Memorandum stated that:

“Where inability to speak and understand the English language excludes national origin, minority group children from effective participation in the educational program offered by a school district, the district must take affirmative steps to rectify the language deficiency in order to open its instructional program to these students” (ibid.).

The 1968 amendment and this memorandum pressed Dearborn Schools and other districts to take note of their responsibility under the law to offer services to minority language groups.

Not long afterwards, the United States Supreme Court unanimously rendered a decision in the case of a Chinese American student, Kinney Kinmon Lau, in his favour against the City of San Francisco. The student, like 1800 other Chinese American students, lacked additional support for learning adequate skills in the English language (Trundle, 2001). The Court stated: “There is no equality of treatment merely by providing students with the same facilities, textbooks, teachers and curriculum, for students who do not understand English are effectively foreclosed from meaningful education” (Lau vs. Nichols [U.S. 1974]).

Thus in 1974, the State of Michigan enacted Public Act 294 which mandated bilingual education in school districts that had twenty or more students same minority language students. The law paved the way for increased services to children in Dearborn Schools to rely on their TESOL program as described earlier to offer instructional services to teach English. And with evidence mounting in favour of bilingual/bicultural
educational programming as being a sound teaching practice for immigrant students – coupled with federal requirements and state protections, Dearborn Schools embarked on its bilingual education project (Saad, July 19, 2001). In 1976-77, the Dearborn Schools established officially its Bilingual/Bicultural Education program, servicing 238 Arabic-speaking limited-English proficient students (DPS Landmarks, n.d.). Although students were being offered instructional services far better than before based on changes in the law, in the spring of 1978-79, State of Michigan and monitors from OCR cited Dearborn Schools for non-compliance and demanded specific actions (ibid.).

According to Dearborn Public Schools records, in 1979-80, services had to be extended and expanded in answer to the growth among Arabic-speaking immigrants, and the emergence of new immigrant population, namely, Italian, Albanian, Greek and Romanian. By the early 1980s, the district had about three thousand Arab American students, and of them, nearly fifty percent were eligible for bilingual education support services. The program grew with increases in the immigrant population, especially because of Arab immigration to Dearborn as a result of political tumult in the Arab lands (David, 1998). To date, the program continues to grow, and this phenomenon will be described in more detail later in this chapter.

Unfortunately however, from the beginning, there was a misunderstanding of the purpose and structure of bilingual education in the Dearborn community, which eventually lead to disapproval of the program on the part of a segment of Dearborn society. A respected local community organisation, the League of Women Voters of Dearborn-Dearborn heights, in its handbook designed for informing the public about
affairs in the community, described the Dearborn Schools’ nascent Bilingual/Bicultural Education program in the following way:

“Bilingual Program – This program is mandated by Public Act 294 [of 1974] which states that when 20 or more students speak the same foreign language, basic concepts, such as reading, math, social studies, must be taught in their own language.

English-speaking students who are interested in learning Arabic, which is the foreign language that applies here, may participate in the program. While this program is locally funded, Dearborn is applying for federal monies to help augment the program” (LWV, 1987: 170).

Although the handbook’s author(s) recognise(s) that Dearborn has a bilingual education program, its purpose is completely misconstrued. The law mandated that students receive instruction in their own language as a means towards acquisition of English. Describing the law and bilingual education in Michigan up to 1995, one news reporter stated that:

“Under current law any public school district with at least 20 foreign-speaking students must provide each of them with bilingual education for as long as three years. That forces districts to hire teachers who speak the students' native language so they can help the youngsters with math, science and social studies while the immigrants learn English” (Hornbeck in Detroit News, 1995).

Here too, the news report misinterprets the purpose of Dearborn’s bilingual education program by stating that the local school districts are forced to hire teachers, yet it glosses over the fact that schools are only required to give native language support in the process of learning English. That is, in practical terms, up until 1995 (when the law was changed, leaving it to the local districts to decide needs), a school district had to introduce a bilingual education program if it has twenty or more students speaking the same language, but this did not mandate the teaching of the native language. In fact, the spirit of the law—as the term of three years of instructional service implies—is a transitional bilingual program philosophy.
5.2.2 Ideology

In three years, it is not possible to acquire full academic competence in two languages among the majority of children. Hence, the intent behind the law can be inferred clearly: to use the native language skills as scaffolds to build competence in English. Once the rudiments of competence are accomplished, the scaffolds are discarded, and full use of the new structures is made in acquiring new learning. Dearborn Schools adopted this philosophy, which is labelled, transitional bilingual education. Its basic premise is to use the native language (in this case Arabic) as a tool of instruction for learning English instead of being an end in and of itself. In Dearborn, the program was not geared towards teaching Arabic, rather towards learning English. If Arabic was used, it was to supplement the learning process whose goal was to acquire English language skills, as well as other skills such as math and social studies (Saad, 2001).

In theoretical terms, bilingual/bicultural education is a method of teaching that encourages learning in more than one language (Krashen, 1996: 3-16). There are many forms of bilingual education, meaning, there is not one model of bilingual education—rather, there is a wide spectrum, ranging from a proposition of equating instruction in two languages to utilising one language to support learning in another (Nieto, 1992:153-80). Historically, in Dearborn Schools, the system practised the latter approach (Saad, 2001). Yet, ironically, the community, that is, the non-Arab, non-immigrant community, has taken bilingual/bi-cultural education to mean a foreign language approach, that is, instruction is in the Arabic language, and has found this to be offensive to their sensibilities, particularly their assimilationist and “melting pot” values.

Opponents of bilingual education in Dearborn and elsewhere in the United States, stress that because of its emphasis on a foreign language, Bilingual education fails to
deliver success for students. Secondly, that learning a foreign language on a par with
English ultimately will lead to English becoming a minority language in its home
country, losing its *lingua franca* status. The opponents of Bilingual education also
contend that Limited English Proficiency (LEP) students could still be learning in English
and, thus, no need for native language instruction, which ought to be learned at home and
not in school. And lastly, opponents tend to view Bilingual education as anti-American
because “English unites the United States”, and because “all must be American”(Ayouby,
1999).

Proponents of Bilingual education argue that learning in a mother tongue will help
continue the process of learning, whereas, stopping to learn a foreign language, and
waiting to acquire competence in it, will stunt learning in other academic areas.
Moreover, BBE proponents assert that maintaining or developing language skills in one
language are fundamentally transferable to another, while retaining a native language will
help the individual become more marketable in a globalised world. Additionally, learning
and maintaining a native language serves to create a pro-foreign language culture in a
school, thus promoting interculturalism, while negating the effects of self-alienation. But,
more than anything, the promotion of bilingual education in this philosophical approach,
leads to respect for multiculturalism, and reflects as well as institutionalises the American
mosaic (Ayouby, 1999). Between those two opposing positions, we can find the bilingual
education program situated in the educational, municipal and community politics.

The school district describes its Bilingual/ESL program as a “support that enables
our linguistically diverse children to achieve the same challenging academic standards
The program description, positive and accommodating to the needs of immigrant and
LEP children, further states:

“These standards include achievement and proficiency in both English and
other content area studies. Integral to the program is the use of the student’s
first language, as needed, to access prior knowledge, increase
comprehension and use higher order skills in English while maintaining a
school climate conducive to positive self-esteem” (ibid.).

Thus, the focus of the program is on developing increased skills in English and other
areas, such as math and social studies, using the native language as a means to extend the
child’s learning. However, although accommodating development of skills while
acquiring English, the program does not in anyway foster development of the native
language of the child. In fact, betraying to the world their ideology of the program, the
district acknowledges their goal to be five-folds: 1. To assist students to acquire English;
2. To use the “home language” to further growth in “concept understanding”; 3. To help
students understand their own backgrounds and promote positive self-esteem during a
time of adjustment; 4. To appreciate other cultures in the community; and, 5. “To assist
bilingual/ESL students and their families in the process of acculturation to the American
school system and American society and culture” (ibid.). Thus, in its essence, the aim of
the project is to help students and parents adjust to the new surroundings and assimilate
into the mainstream of the American system.

5.2.3 Growth

The Dearborn Public Schools system is a large metropolitan Detroit school
district whose student population in the 2000-2001 academic year totalled 17,222
students in its kindergarten to twelfth grade (K-12) program (Ayouby, 2000). Though it is
considered a metropolitan, suburban community, Dearborn is more of an urban setting
than a traditional part of suburbia, although now it is adjacent to the city of Detroit, which
grew to meet Dearborn’s boundaries. The city is distinguished in the United States as
having the largest Arabic-speaking community in North America if not outside the Arab
East (DPS Student Services, 2000). In the 2000-2001 school year, the school system’s
English-language Limited Proficient students are estimated at 32 percent of the total
student body (DPS Compensatory and Bilingual Education, 2000). The school system’s
numbers show that the total Dearborn school population represents under one percent of
the state of Michigan’s total K-12 student enrolment. However, according to the State of
Michigan school district data, the Dearborn district ranks seventh in the state in terms of
student population but has the highest level of LEP students in the state (Project
Accelerate, 1999).

According to the school district’s English language proficiency testing results, the
numbers show that one third of the 5,000 LEP students in the system are classified as
“Non-English Speaking”, while the rest are divided into groups of low, middle and high
LEP students, as well as transitional into mainstream programmes. Dearborn has
experienced (and continues to experience) a trend of significant growth in its enrolment,
resulting in increased needs in infrastructure, as well as funding and staff. In the early
1990s, the district commissioned the building of three new elementary schools, with an
average capacity of 525 students each. The district also built additions to several
elementary schools in order to upgrade the facilities and alleviate over-crowding. Later in
the 1990s, the district proposed additions to its three high schools, however, the voters in
the city voted down the measure for increased funding in two separate elections in 1999
and 2000. This matter will be visited later, but the significance of the need to build is
supported by a dramatic and sustained increase in student numbers, necessitating long
term planning to ease crowding.

The 1990s proved a decade of a large immigrant influx into the city of Dearborn,
thereby increasing the number of the district’s LEP population. The following table and
graph show the trend:

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<tbody>
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<td>6000</td>
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<td>5000</td>
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<td>3000</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td></td>
<td>2051</td>
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<tr>
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<td>0</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Immigrant Growth in Dearborn Public Schools

Graph 1. Immigrant Growth in Dearborn Schools

Table: Number of LEP Students in Dearborn Public Schools more than doubled between the 1988 and 1998.
The increase in language minority students in the school system impacts all levels of education in the city: elementary, middle, and secondary. According to school assessments, virtually all classrooms contain culturally and linguistically diverse students, and in nine schools more than 50 percent of the student population is characterized as Limited English-language Proficient. In addition, eleven of the district’s twenty-nine schools have a poverty rate of more than 40 percent. School sources list half of the elementary schools (K-5 schools) as “School-wide Comprehension Title I schools” which means they receive additional funding support from the United States Department of Education through anti-poverty, anti-illiteracy programmes. Further, Student Services and Compensatory Education departments reported in 1998 that the middle school level (grades 6-8) LEP students constituted 24 percent of that segment of the student population, and that the secondary level (9-12) comprised 14 percent of the student enrolment.

There is a direct correlation between LEP students and poverty levels. This stems from the fact that recent immigrants into Dearborn tend to be less proficient in English language skills and have limited financial means. The following table presents the number and percentages of Dearborn’s LEP students (and poor families) for the 1998-99 academic year. The chart indicates in descending order (from high need to low need) a direct correlation between the high LEP populated schools and those that have a high poverty rate. Please note that these schools are located in the eastern and southern part of the city, where the Arab American community is mostly settled.

The city’s Arabic-speaking minority historically has been Lebanese, Palestinian, Jordanian, and Yemeni who settled in Dearborn in order to work in the city’s industrial
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Student Population</th>
<th>LEP Population</th>
<th>LEP %</th>
<th>Poverty Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Salina (K-5)</td>
<td>663</td>
<td>548</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Becker</td>
<td>281</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McDonald (K-5)</td>
<td>478</td>
<td>367</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miller (K-5)</td>
<td>448</td>
<td>321</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maples (K-5)</td>
<td>645</td>
<td>423</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oakman (K-5)</td>
<td>399</td>
<td>239</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William Ford (K-5)</td>
<td>635</td>
<td>373</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lowery (K-8)</td>
<td>1276</td>
<td>741</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henry Ford (K-5)</td>
<td>704</td>
<td>370</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stout (6-8)</td>
<td>703</td>
<td>256</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woodworth (6-8)</td>
<td>708</td>
<td>226</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fordson (9-12)</td>
<td>1796</td>
<td>370</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edsel Ford (9-12)</td>
<td>1428</td>
<td>222</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>River Oaks (K-5)</td>
<td>371</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smith (6-8)</td>
<td>649</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Howard (K-5)</td>
<td>335</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duval (K-5)</td>
<td>244</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whitmore-Bolles (K-5)</td>
<td>308</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dearborn High (9-12)</td>
<td>1354</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lindbergh (K-5)</td>
<td>298</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long (K-5)</td>
<td>260</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bryant (6-8)</td>
<td>862</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haigh (K-5)</td>
<td>405</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nowlin (K-5)</td>
<td>289</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snow (K-5)</td>
<td>350</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: DPS Bilingual & Compensatory Education Department, 1998-99*
complex associated with Ford Motor Company, and as a result of chain migration that enabled many to come to the United States.

Immigration into Dearborn in the mid to late 1990s has been due to violence and political turmoil in Yemen (as a result of the reunification of that republic), and because of the Gulf War and its dramatic effects on Iraq. The Iraqi refugees in particular caused a strong rise in the non-English speaking (NES) population in Dearborn Schools in the past five years. The increase in the number of NES students has challenged the available resources that serve students in the district, especially in light of the fact that these students have had special circumstances associated with their deficits, i.e., issues of cultural adjustments as well as war-related psychological adjustment. These issues created a need to address their impact and ways of dealing with them by the instructional and administrative staff.

5.2.4 Education Versus Politics

An old American adage suggests, “All politics is local”. When it comes to the topic of schools that saying cannot be more accurate, especially in light of the fact that education is a local matter governed by local political processes. And this is very much applicable to the Dearborn setting, a small city with many parochial attitudes and village-minded orientations. Add to this isolationist temperament, the presence of a large immigrant community whose ethnic background is not wholly welcome in the first instance.

Hence, Arab American presence in the city of Dearborn has not been without controversy. When the community became more visible in the early 1980s as result of its natural growth, and because of continued immigration, many Euro-Anglo Americans in

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the city felt threatened by what was perceived as an alarming Arab presence in the city that promised to change the culture of the town. At the time, the Arab American community did not number more than ten thousand residents among a population that nearly numbered a hundred thousand. It was during this time that the mayor of Dearborn then candidate Michael Guido fought a campaign that made the Arab presence in Dearborn a political issue. Guido, realizing the potential of appealing to the anti-Arab sentiment in the city—an act reminiscent of anti-black activism—published a campaign brochure that resembled a periodical newspaper with a headline that stated, “Let’s talk about the Arab Problem in Dearborn.” Referencing the Arab community in the context of a problem, the brochure asserted the “white” credentials of the candidate, and Guido presented his candidacy (and voting for him) as an act of saving the city from an alien horde. The mayor was elected based upon that platform, and has remained mayor of the city through several elections. Quite adept at using the tactics of Orville Hubbard, mayor Guido had laid the ground for the political environment in the city, tainted with racism as it is, and set the stage for further alienation of the Arab American community.

From the beginning, it is apparent that hostility to the Arab American community in the city translated itself as hostility to the bilingual/bicultural education program. The focus on “English-only” became emblematic of suppressing the expression of a variant ethnic identity in the city. This is best expressed in a quote from an Euro-Anglo American given to a major newspaper reporter, investigating Dearborn’s language policy:

“Ann Nastase, 74, believes in the traditional way of learning English: sink or swim. She was 8 when her family immigrated from Italy in 1929. Her motto then and now: ‘You learn this language. You’re here now, not in the old country.’
‘They put me in first grade,’ Nastase remembered. ‘I watched the other kids and copied what they did. Eventually, I learned’” (Arellano in Free Press, 1995).

This attitude, very prevalent in the city, ignores that European languages have similarity with English—being another European tongue. Also, such an attitude does not want to acknowledge that there were many students from older generations who “lost-out” on significant educational gains because the “sink or swim” approach did not work for them, and, as a result, dropped out of school. Many in the city do not want to admit to the possibility that those who did well under the old “melting pot” assimilation model of education as represented by “sink or swim”, could have achieved far more gains than they have accomplished had they received the support opportunities of bilingual educational.

**Dual Language Program (YALLA)**

Dearborn’s YALLA dual language education program (Yalla being also Colloquial Arabic meaning, “lets go [learn]!”), was Dr. Shireen Arraf’s brainchild. She headed the bilingual/bicultural education program at the school district from 1992 to 1998. During that period, she focussed on professionalising the program, and introducing innovative approaches to enhance the bilingual/bicultural and TESOL programs by attempting to bring the concept of dual language teaching in bilingual education to Dearborn schools. It was started as a first grade classroom pilot-project in 1994-95 in Becker Elementary School. Many members of the community and Board of Education met her with hostility and resistance when it was learned that she applied for grant funding for dual language learning. The program, based on federal department of education research which suggested that students learning in a dual language approach
were able to achieve more gains, ostensibly, was conceived to pilot a small project in the
district.

The pilot program was to be housed at a newly built, majority Arab American
student population, Becker elementary school. School community parents welcomed the
approach because it meant that their young children would have an opportunity for the
first time in Dearborn public education to learn Arabic on equal footing with English in a
classic bilingual approach. But the notion that Arabic was equalled to English disturbed
many in the greater community including the Board members. Nonetheless, the District,
through Dr. Arraf’s efforts, was able to acquire federal funding for this approach, and
Dearborn Schools was slated to be the recipient of five million dollars over five years,
dedicated for managing and running this pilot program in Dearborn.

“Dearborn [Schools’ Bilingual/Bicultural unit administration] had proposed
expanding its dual-language program in two or three more classrooms and
included it in its application for the federal grant [for annual renewal funds
for the extant transitional bilingual education services]. But after more than
100 Dearborn residents [presumably, Euro-Anglo Americans] began a
campaign of letter writing and calls [to the Superintendent and Board of
Education members], the district decided to withdraw its proposal to add
more dual-language classes next school year” (Arellano in Detroit Free
Press, 1995).

After deliberations among board members, the grant proposal, which had been presented
to the Federal Department of Education, was ordered withdrawn (Board Minutes, June
27, 1995), and not long afterwards, Dr. Arraf was transferred from her position as
Coordinator of Bilingual/Bicultural Education services to conduct research and testing for
the school district. This move suggests that pressure from the Euro-Anglo community,
members of same-minded school administration, and Board members, led to her
dismissal.
According to a newspaper report, an influential Board member known for her English only tendencies, and who was one of the primary antagonists of the expansion of the bilingual program, stated her disapproval of the dual language approach because it did not emphasise the English language, and, consequently, American culture. She was quoted as saying:

“‘I live here [in west Dearborn] and I know they [Arab Americans] get their culture at home, at the store, in gas stations,’ [Jewel] Morrison said. ‘They are already steeped in their own language culture’” (Arellano in Detroit Free Press, 1995).

Although she is only a secondary school graduate and is known in the town as a self-described “active mom”, Mrs. Morrison poses herself by sheer will of the public vote that made her a Board member, as an expert on Arab American life and culture. Mrs. Morrison is convinced that Arab American children need only English education because they are immersed in Arabic language and culture within the confines of their community, which includes homes, stores, and gas stations. The latter is a reference to the inordinate number of petrol fuel businesses, an area of commerce that Arab Americans have found an entrepreneurial niche in Metropolitan Detroit (David, 1998).

According to Mrs. Morrison’s line of thought, given that Arab American students get “enough” of their culture at home and stores, they need to spend more time learning English language and American culture at school. Also, consequently, the children as they are presently, are not “American enough”. As such, this view reduces the totality of the Arab experience to being “gotten” at “stores and gas stations”, suggesting Arab culture per se is too superficial and mundane enough not to warrant experiencing it in any public school setting or through any structured academic venture. This issue will be visited later, but suffice to say at this juncture that this attitude permeated the Board, the
Dearborn Euro-Anglo community, and deeply offended the sensibilities of the Arab American community.

Although the English only proponents from the Euro-Anglo community and their Board partisans were successful in forcing the BBE program to restructure its dual language proposal pilot for grant funding, the parents of Arab American children (the majority ethnic group) at Becker Elementary School, supported by many of the Arab American community’s leadership in Dearborn, and armed with the legislation, rallied to the cause of dual language, perceiving the attack, with good reason, as a xenophobic if not a racist attack on the Arabic language and the community’s ethnicity.

Eventually, under some considerable pressure, the school district could not do away with the program, and it was “re-instituted” on a smaller scale. It was also funded by the school district because there were students already involved in the program, and could not be withdrawn from it without considerable disruption and damage to their learning process, which meant that if students were dropped from the program, the District would have been legally liable in the courts in case of a lawsuit. Eventually, the school district sought federal funds to maintain the program, which garnered a lot of public support among Arab Americans who viewed the program’s survival as a major victory in the area of education in the city. Thus, YALLA Dual Language program was established at Becker in 1994-95, using English and Arabic as media of instruction:

“The YALLA program (Young Americans Learning Language Actively) was funded through a federal grant. Half of the students at the school were in the program. Parents had a choice of whether to have their children participate. The program's goal was for students to develop proficiency in both Arabic and English and an understanding of Arabic and American cultures. This approach made possible the development of Dearborn's curriculum and other materials in both Arabic and English—the first examples in the United States” (Dearborn Schools website).
The YALLA program has been pronounced a success at the School District. Dr. Cheryl Kreger, Director of Special Services Department (which includes special education, remedial education, TESOL and bilingual services), has said in a published news item on the School District’s web that the experimental hypothesis of the program has been confirmed, adding that learning in their native language, children will transfer gains to learning English language skills. Moreover, in the same article, the director noted that “…it takes four to seven years for a child to be academically proficient in a second language” (ibid.) thus, confirming the viability of the dual language approach, while implicitly, criticising Michigan’s law which originally only mandated three years of transitional services, and in the mid 1990s reduced the mandate to a district option.

5.3 Arabic as a Foreign Language (AFL)

Dearborn Schools offer a very special experience in the area of teaching Arabic as a foreign language at the secondary levels. This particular program began as a pilot project at one high school in the early 1980s, making Arabic the district’s fastest growing foreign language taught in the late 1990s and the beginning of the new century. The Dearborn experience is special because of the population this program serves. Although, according to the district it is taught as a foreign language, the great majority of the discipline’s students are of Arab background in a school district whose student population is approximately fifty percent Arab/Arab American. In this section, gleaned from personal experience, and “field notes” from the front, several areas of concern will be addressed. The major three areas: first, the origins of Arabic as a discipline and its relationship to bilingual education in the Dearborn Schools; and, second, an exploration
of its current situation through first hand experience, and on the basis on other sources; and, third, some of the outstanding issues facing the program at this time.

5.3.1 Origins of the Arabic Programme

The phenomenal growth of Arabic as a Foreign Language (AFL) as a discipline in the Schools is directly related to the growth of the Arab American community in Dearborn, and is related to the increases of Arab immigration to the city. It is the site of the Ford Motor Company international headquarters and manufacturing plants, making the town a natural destination for immigrants seeking work in the factories. A city of a little more than ninety thousand inhabitants, the Arab element constitutes a third of the population at the turn of the 21st century\(^7\). Considered to be the area of highest concentration of Arabic-speaking people in the United States, Dearborn has been a magnet of chain migrations since the 1970s. As mentioned earlier, the Dearborn Schools student population reaches a little more than 17,000 students, however, half of the student body is of Arab background. Therefore, Arabic as a Foreign Language is indeed a heritage language in the school district and the community at large.

The political signification of Arabic to the involved communities in Dearborn is thus emotionally charged, highly controversial, and polarised. This issue has been visited in the context of Bilingual/Bicultural Education, and the views of the greater community vis-à-vis the BBE is also applicable to Arabic studies (AFL). This will become clearer as we discuss the context of Arabic in the schools, and deal with issues pertaining to language policy and language primacy.

\(^7\) Note that Dearborn’s population size did not change in the last twenty years, but the size of the Arab American community within this city grew substantially.
Teaching and learning Arabic in Dearborn Schools present a set of issues unique to the setting. Arabic is taught mainly because Arab Americans fought for its offering. From their personal experience, they see its incorporation in the general curriculum as a validation for their presence in the Dearborn community. To them, Arabic is not only a source of national and ethnic pride, and a means to maintain cultural and religious links, but also a vehicle for the preservation of a sense of a particularistic identity in a sea of Euro-Anglo Americans, especially among the young—those who would be its learners. On the other hand, those in the greater community who are threatened with the idea of Arabic in the schools, and may not want it taught there, perceive its inclusion in the public school curriculum as an encroachment against English. And it is seen as a way of “kow-towing” to immigrant interests in the city at the expense of the native culture. Therefore, in this milieu of hostility, a context for Arabic as a foreign language is born. It is sandwiched between the nativism of the Euro-Anglo Americans and the preservationist attitudes of Arab Americans. Arabic is thus not viewed either as a classical language (such as Latin, Greek or Hebrew, which clearly it is) or as a modern language of innate humanistic worth that benefits learners in an increasingly “globalised” world—rather, Arabic is seen, by both segments of society in the city, as an immigrant language. Therefore, it is either perceived as the emblem of minority group, and devalued for its status as an immigrant language, or “overly-valued”, championed as a source of ethnic pride and a badge of political empowerment. Thus, Arabic as an academic discipline is situated between those two poles that form the context of its pedagogy.

Arabic as a Foreign Language began as a small experiment in 1982, encouraged by a liberal thinking Fordson High School’s principal, Mr. Harvey Failor, according to
Dr. Albert Harp, who was the first AFL teacher. The idea grew out of a request in 1979 from the parent advisory committee that included Arab Americans who approached Dr. Harp, asking him to investigate the opportunity of teaching Arabic at school. At the time, Mr. Harp, an educator and Arab American activist, spearheaded the effort to introduce the idea to school officials. Harp worked with school administrators and community members to offer a basic course in Arabic language. After political opposition from the Euro-Anglo community, which centred on the premise that immigrants should learn English and not their native language were surmounted, the next challenge arose from the ranks of administration. Administrative concerns centred on matters relating to obtaining accredited teaching staff member who is recognized by the State and the North Central Accrediting Committee, the private body which accredits academic validity of schools and universities in the region. On contacting these agencies, it was stipulated that the district must retain a knowledgeable candidate in order to approve the teaching of Arabic in the curriculum.

At the time, there was no university program in the state that was recognised by the State Department of Education for certification (professional accreditation) in the teaching of Arabic. (The same holds true at the turn of the century, as well). During the early 1980s, the Department of Education, through the office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, suggested that the district apply for an emergency permit for a candidate teacher who will be teaching the discipline. The letter, from Paul S. Bielawski, dated November 9, 1981 and addressed to Mr. Harp, stated:

“…It is suggested, though not required [italics for writer’s emphasis], that such a person have 20 or more semester hours of Arabic, or have successfully completed an Arabic Language Proficiency Test as part of a
bilingual endorsement program. An emergency permit is applied for by the district.

According to communication with the school district from North Central Association of Schools and College in Michigan, the solution for the district’s rules-bound problem was that,

“…Mr. Harp could go to a senior staff member in an NCA accredited college or university and request a proficiency statement. This should state that Mr. Harp has a proficiency in Arabic that is equal to that of a person who has taken 20 semester hours in Arabic. Note that he would not be asking for credit in Arabic, merely the statement described above. When the statement is sent to me, Mr. Harp will be approved” (Hayden, 1982).

According to Mr. Harp, he enlisted the help of the University of Michigan’s Professor of Arabic studies, Dr. Raji Rammuni to certify his competence in Arabic late in February of 1982. Professor Rammuni had formally administered the Arabic Proficiency Test of the American Association of Teachers of Arabic sometime earlier and on its basis pronounced Mr. Harp’s proficiency for the purpose of teaching high school courses. Based on the professor’s attestation of competence and Mr. Harp’s teacher credentials, the school began piloting the program in the fall of 1982.

5.3.2 Introduction of Arabic

The year 1982 was a fateful year in the Arab American community in Dearborn. It was the year that Israel invaded Lebanon, which ultimately resulted in more immigration of Lebanese to the Detroit-Dearborn area. It was also the year Arabic became a discipline taught at a public secondary school for the first time in the history of American education. According to Dr. Harp, first year Arabic, courses I and II, were offered in one section in addition to one course in advanced Arabic literature. Each section had an average of twenty-eight students. The following year the program grew to
triple the number of students who were taught in the fall of 1982. After 1985, and until 1994, Mr. Harp taught Arabic fulltime—that is, he had a compliment of six classes per semester in Arabic.

5.3.3 Links to Bilingual Education

Arabic, as stated earlier, has been linked in the mindscape of the general Dearborn Community with the Bilingual/Bicultural Education program offered by the school district. And although bilingual education implies that two languages are being learned, the program in Dearborn is actually a transitional bilingual program that fosters learning English via the vehicle of other languages. In short, Arabic is a tool to learn English, and thus was never the focus of teaching. In essence, the Bilingual education program in Dearborn was a TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) program in philosophy and practice.

Yet, in the community, essentially, hostility arose against the program because it either used Arabic as a tool of instruction instead of the “sink or swim” approach, or because it was thought to teach Arabic. The view, anti-Arabic at any rate, considered that there was no reason to learn Arabic. Though it is a phenomenon in the minds of people in the general community, mostly among Euro-Anglo Americans, it eventually affected Arabic when it was introduced as a discipline (via AFL), given the historic hostility in the city.

It did not help matters any, of course, that Arabic was not considered a separate discipline on the official, practical, and psycho-social level. As stated previously, even the State Department of Education and the accreditation agency perceived Arabic as a part of Bilingual/Bicultural Education. But, that approach to understanding Arabic as a
discipline betrays a functionalist, even a derelict attitude on the part of officials whether State-level or local. Ostensibly, knowing Arabic, regardless of the level of fluency, is sufficient enough to be able to teach it. This view is evident by the letters referred to earlier that conditioned accreditation as a teacher of Arabic on equivalence of a minimum of 20 semester hours of instruction in Arabic, or in passing a bilingual proficiency test designed mainly for oral fluency. Certainly, in the best of circumstances, whether through the proficiency test or coursework in learning Arabic, this does not automatically bestow competence or teaching proficiency, especially when bilingual training tends to be TESOL training.

However, despite the ironic misconception involved here, Arabic has been identified with bilingual education. To that degree of identification, it was almost a certainty that teachers of Arabic would be drawn from the pool of Bilingual/Bicultural Education teachers. Indeed, beginning with Mr. Harp and throughout the history of the program to date, the majority of teachers came from within the TESOL/Bilingual Education paradigm, carrying minimal or limited qualifications in teaching Arabic. Only two teachers were drawn from AFL backgrounds, and both had university teaching experience. Their cases will be addressed later in this chapter.

The interesting issue in this regard is the equation of Arabic (as a language and a discipline) with Arabic—the tool of instruction—in Bilingual/ESL teaching. This attitude, functionalist as it is, entails the devaluation of Arabic into a mere tool; a status reserved for a secondary, even insignificant ethnic language. Moreover, the linkage to bilingual education, on a professional level, essentially leaves Arabic pedagogy in the hands of teaching professionals whose training is not Arabic teaching but English
learning. Not only is Arabic as a discipline a “non-concept”, but also bilingual education is itself devalued for its links to immigrants and Arabic in the greater community. Thus, Arabic as a foreign language is twice marginalised—once as language not worthy of pedagogy in its own right, and again as a tool for learning. In either case, Arabic does not appear on the radar screens of educational officials or lay members of the Euro-Anglo community. It is worth noting that, similarly, other languages within the Bilingual Education programs have encountered some levels of difficulties in asserting their value as a discipline, but unlike Arabic, their issues do not sustain a link between a language and the community it represents. Due to the political turmoil in the Middle East, Arab Americans in the United States have been a maligned and marginalized group, and this is clearly reflected in the constant hostility and opposition they have encountered—and continue to experience, in the domain of bilingual education.

Critically important in all of this, the connection in the Dearborn public mindscape to bilingual education, which implies programmed services for immigrants, who, by virtue of their newcomer status and lower socio-economic backgrounds, are not considered high on the social scale. This is especially true in the case of Arab Americans given that their background is perceived as suspect in the first place. Socio-linguistically, that leaves Arabic isolated as a minority language in the greater community, only depending on its own community for growth. This issue will be dealt with later, as well.

5.3.4 Curriculum and Instruction Issues

A major issue for consideration is related to the syllabus. The Arabic syllabus in Dearborn Schools had been formulated on an ad hoc basis, depending on each teacher’s abilities, training, preparedness, and qualifications in addition to theoretical and
methodological positions. However, aside from the issues that concern teachers’ preparedness and methodological biases, one must also consider the objective situation of Arabic, that is to say, one must realize that Arabic diglossia creates its own set of issues that impact the teaching syllabus in addition to any other pertinent issues.

The ubiquitous and all-too-consuming question that teachers of Arabic consistently tackle is what to teach. What the debate revolves around is the point whether the syllabus, which now admits the need to emphasize the five basic skills, would concentrate on standard or dialect-based Arabic, or both, and if so, when will each variety be introduced, if not simultaneously. This is the most pressing critical issue for the teacher of Arabic today, and the answer(s) to this dilemma is directly related to desired learning outcomes. No doubt, however, these outcomes are invariably tied to the philosophical learning of the teacher and the program as a whole to the degree that it molds the purpose of teaching and learning.

*Arabic Diglossia:* Aside from the issue of class time scheduling which will be visited later, the most vexing problem for the AFL teacher and student alike is the complex matter of diglossia, which heavily impacts the teaching process. Chejne (1969) suggests that Arabic speakers are undisturbed by a tradition of linguistic dualism that has existed ever since the language became a codified literary vehicle, while the people rely on their dialects for their everyday life. Ferguson (1959) offers a definition of this linguistic phenomenon, which he terms *diglossia*:

“…[A] relatively stable language situation in which, in addition to the primary dialects of the language (which may include a standard or regional standards), there is a very divergent, highly codified (often grammatically more complex) superimposed variety—the vehicle of large and respected body of written literature either of an earlier period or in another speech community—that is
learned largely by means of formal education but is not used by any sector of the community for ordinary conversation” (p.336).

In essence, Ferguson presents a general framework to understanding the main issue in Arabic pedagogy.

Badawi identifies within the diaglossic world of Arabic five levels of speech: 1. Classical Arabic, 2. Modern Standard Arabic, 3. Educated Spoken Arabic, 4. Semiliterate Spoken Arabic, and 5. Illiterate Spoken Arabic (1973: 89). Badawi’s classification suggests that the dichotomy of Arabic is really a multi-layered phenomenon that entails substantial pedagogical implications. According to Freeman (1994), spoken Arabic while is not standardized, each dialect has its own set of “grammar” which can interfere in the communication process, however, he adds:

“It is incorrect to think of the existence of two separate languages, one Classical and the other Colloquial. Rather it is a continuum. The most “down home” street jargon sits at one end of the continuum. At the other end of the continuum sits the most ornate, elevated, classical language completely inflected for case and mood. Where a given person’s speech sits on this continuum depends on a lot of factors, not the least of which is how well the two speakers know each other. Another very important factor in determining the formality of the language, is the formality of the occasion. The full-blown classical form of the language is typically spoke when giving newscasts, university lectures, television or radio interviews, speeches and sermons.

“Conversely, Colloquial Arabic is written only in cartoons and movie scripts. Writers occasionally write dialogue using Colloquial Arabic in novels and short stories. Writers who do this run the risk of limiting their audience. In English it is permissible for a writer to toss in some colloquial jargon, for flavor and authenticity, but in Arabic it is “incorrect” for a writer to use colloquial grammar and idiom.”

Certainly this situation complicates the teaching process to a great degree, challenging the instructor to define his/her goals in and in understanding the purpose of students behind learning Arabic. Thus, this state of affairs moves al-Batal (1992) to report:
“The educational challenges incurred by diglossia have been especially significant for the teaching of Arabic as a foreign language. Teachers of Arabic as a foreign language are continuously faced with the question of which variety to teach in the classroom, especially when oral skills are involved. Although this question has been posed ever since the teaching of Arabic began in the United States, the Arabic teaching professions (Sic.) is far from having reached a consensus” (p. 285).

Indeed, the community of teachers of Arabic has not reached a consensus on the issue, and many have opted to teach the discipline based on their views and philosophies.

Munther Younes offers this view:

“Arabs from different parts of the Arab world speak different dialects, but MSA is the same everywhere. This is why the majority of Arabic programs prefer to teach MSA. However, students who learn to speak only MSA will not be able to use it in conversation; not only will they sound funny, but they will also find it very difficult, if not impossible, to understand what is being said to them.

“I believe that teaching a spoken dialect for everyday conversation and MSA for reading, writing and formal speaking is the most effective way to prepare students for function in Arabic. I also believe that if a student masters any Arabic dialect well enough, he/she will be able to function in other dialects, just as native speakers from different areas of the Arab world do” (Introduction, 1995).

Younes espouses a two track approach to learning Arabic, both MSA and dialect concurrently. However, Mahdi Alosh differs in his approach, focusing on MSA as bedrock of learning the Arabic language. He states:

“The Arabic you will be learning is the variety used in the Arab world for formal instruction, in the media, and in formal situations. It is, more or less, invariable all over the Arab world, thus giving you the advantage of learning the language that is readily understood everywhere in the Arab Middle East…Learning this form of Arabic lets the learner identify with the educated population and have access to the literature and the written and spoken media. This variety, however, is not used for everyday oral interaction on the street or at home” (Introduction, 1989, p. 6).

Clearly, Alosh favours teaching language, using MSA as the common denominator of all educated Arabs, thus enabling communication based on bias in favours of an educated class, whereas Younes favours learning a dialect in addition to MSA. There are programs
that will favour spoken Arabic only—such as might be needed by anthropologists in the field. But, what remains, is the fact that Arabic diglossia itself is multi-faceted—especially in light of the regional varieties that can be included under Badawi’s classifications.

**MSA and Dialect Arabic:** The challenge is compounded further with a moral issue because the honest instructor’s refusal to teach a preferred personal dialect that may not be the choice of the students, knowing full well that *talking* must nevertheless be taught in the classroom. But to teach MSA and a dialect (if one dialect is unanimously agreed upon, which is seldom true, and a capable instructor is found to teach it), it means that instruction will be carried out through two parallel tracks. Certainly, this makes for a very cumbersome process, notwithstanding the factor of classroom time scheduling.

What is there to do? First, whatever is decided regarding content at the program administration level ought to be communicated to students at the very beginning to minimize friction or conflict over the nature of anticipated learning. Second, it would be profiting to all concerned to reconsider what constitutes the learning content of the first year in a traditional college setting as compared to non-Truly Foreign Languages (TFLs). Walton reports that “…a student with average language learning aptitude the FSI [Foreign Language Institute in the United States] experience indicates that to reach proficiency level of 2 [high novice] requires 480 contact hours for Category 1 language such as French, German or Spanish, but 1,320 contact hours for Category 4 language such as Chinese or Japanese [or Arabic]” (1991: 163). Obviously, Introductory French 101 cannot be the same as Introductory Arabic 101.
5.3.5 Expansion at Fordson High School

Each year, a new continuation level was added until the program mushroomed into a full four-year, eight-semester program. This had occurred in the mid-1990s. Subsequent to Mr. Harp’s effort, eventually eight other teachers were recruited to teach Arabic from 1994 to 2001. After the stability that Mr. Harp offered the nascent program, it experienced great flux due to the varied approaches espoused by each incoming teacher.

Dr. Harp, a published poet and writer by sensibility, had a good command of the Arabic language. His pedagogical training was in teaching English to non-speakers. The teachers that followed him also had training in areas not directly pertinent to Arabic pedagogy, rather their professional education revolved around various content areas (math, social studies, and English) in TESOL framework. Only one teacher had AFL training and teaching experience at the collegiate level, namely, this writer. Another who had AFL teaching experience at the college level, Dr. Dika, a sociologist by training who taught as well at Fordson. Essentially, the professional training and experience of the other teachers centred in the TESOL/Bilingual Education paradigm.

At one point, prior to Mr. Harp’s leaving the program, Mr. Fouad Moawad, a TESOL bilingual teacher, taught Arabic for a semester. But his experience and training did not adequately prepare him for the task. The teacher to replace Mr. Harp, eventually, was Mr. Ahmed Bazzi, a mathematics instructor in a bilingual TESOL framework. He taught from 1994 to 1996. When Mr. Bazzi left this assignment, Dr. Adnan Salhi, an English reading and TESOL teacher, taught the program (1996-97). He, too, had impeccable Arabic language skills like Mr. Bazzi, but no direct training in Arabic pedagogy. All the teachers thus far are, however, legally certified by the state as
professional teachers, although in different content areas from Arabic. The writer, Kenneth K. Ayouby followed Dr. Salhi in teaching (1997-98). He held a Master’s qualification in Arabic language and literature. At this point, too, another teaching position in Arabic was added, which was filled by Ms. Nabila Barada-Hammami, whose teaching credentials and experience were anchored in English second language teaching (1997-Present).

When the writer moved on to a different position, Dr. Rifaat Dika took the position for the duration of a year. Khalil Al Stouhi, a social studies/ESL teacher, who also was a long-term substitute at Fordson, replaced Dr. Dika (1998-99). His area of teaching was anchored in social studies, although he was a speaker of Arabic. Later, Mr. Moawad replaced Mr. Al Stouhi (1999), having transferred into the position from the Bilingual and ESL department at school (2000-01).

It was in the academic year 1997-98 that the program was expanded to nine sections per semester. Two years later, two teachers taught Arabic fulltime at Fordson High School. It is worth noting that Arabic throughout this period had been taught to majority Arab background students. A study conducted in 1989, Kenney found that (although 75 percent were American citizens of Arab ancestry) the majority of AFL students were of Lebanese background, followed by Palestinian and Yemeni (Kenney in Rouchdy, 1992: 127-31). Personal observation attests that this trend increased and was maintained as Fordson gradually acquired a mostly Arab-background student body.

5.3.6 Expansion into Dearborn High School

As members of the Arab American community moved from their original enclaves of east Dearborn to more affluent areas of west Dearborn, the demand for
Arabic at Dearborn High School led to the establishment of an Arabic course there in the fall of 1994—beginning with Arabic 1 and 2. First year Arabic was taught by Ms. Amira Fadlallah, a bilingual/ESL educator until 1998. She was drafted into the position because she was a native speaker of Arabic. She taught first year Arabic classes, Arabic 1 and 2. In 1998-99, Mr. Khalil Al-Stouhi replaced her. Later, Ms. Nauf Abou-Dib, also an ESL and social studies teacher by training, was retained at Dearborn High School in 1999. Currently, she teaches Arabic first and second year, a total of four levels, which was added in winter 2000.

It is worth noting that here, too, that these teachers are not Arabic specialists. In fact, Ms. Fadlallah, who initiated Arabic at Dearborn High School, was by her own accord, very unsuited for teaching Arabic and had not received any training in that discipline. Her background was in ESL, but being an Arab immigrant herself who arrived into the United States in her teens, she had a command of colloquial Levantine Arabic. According to Ms. Fadlallah, although she is a trained and certified ESL teacher, her command of Arabic was only conversational with limited Arabic literacy skills. Yet, she was hired to teach Arabic at Dearborn High School! This is an egregious act of devaluation of the importance of Arabic, as it portrays a non-caring attitude for the students who would be the learners from that teacher. The act of hiring that teacher represents the epitome of marginalisation of Arabic as a discipline, and its total “subjugation” by the bilingual/bicultural and ESL field, as somehow being a sub field of TESOL. This issue will be addressed again later in this chapter.
5.3.7 Introduction into Middle and Elementary Schools

Academic year 1999-2000 was the first time that Arabic was offered at the middle school level, taught at Lowrey Middle School, which has a predominantly Arab American student population. It is one of Fordson’s feeder schools, and thus one of the reasons why Fordson became a majority Arab American high school in its own right. The school offered four sections of Arabic. Also, that same year, another Fordson feeder school with a major Arab American population, Woodworth Middle School, offered one section of Arabic per semester. In total, out of six Middle schools, only two teach Arabic. Their program consists of the same first year Arabic program (semester 1 and 2 of the high school syllabus), which was instituted by the writer in 1997-98. The same teacher taught Arabic at both schools, an ESL/Bilingual teacher as well, who left at the end of 2000. Currently, the program is in hiatus because no one teacher was found to teach it.

Aside from the dual language approach at Becker Elementary School, which has been covered earlier, Arabic had not been taught elsewhere at the elementary level anywhere in the district in spite of the parents' activism in seeking Arabic teaching as early as 1994. Indeed, in a memo to the Superintendent of Dearborn Schools, Dr. Jeremy Hughes, presented a request for inclusion of Arabic as a foreign language in the elementary curriculum as an elective class. The memorandum from “concerned parents” dated November 9, 1994, stated:

“…Accordingly, we are asking for Arabic to be continued [sic] as a foreign language exploratory course offering for sixth graders, to be followed by more formal offerings in the seventh and eighth grades, our request is that Arabic, as a foreign language, be offered on a four-year continuum.”

Another memorandum, dated April 16, 1995, addressed to the superintendent in the name of the Arab American community, asked the school district to include a semester of
introductory Arabic at the seventh grade and continuing semester at the eighth grade. In regards to the high schools, the community asked for a third and fourth year of Modern Standard Arabic instruction, paralleling French and Spanish offerings. This parent campaign eventually succeeded in forcing the district to offer Arabic at the middle and high school levels, and indeed, Arabic was also included into an exploratory foreign language course that originally had French, German and Spanish as curriculum of the course. Arabic was added to that curriculum and it was first offered in 2000. The Arabic segment of the curriculum lasted for two weeks only and was meant to introduce students to some Arabic sounds, words (mainly nouns) and orthography.

5.3.8 Profile of the Current Programme

Arabic has become a significant discipline of study in the foreign language departments of both Fordson and Dearborn high schools. The reason for this is attributable to the numbers of students that are enrolled in these courses. As stated earlier, the District’s student population is deemed fifty percent Arab American in 2000 CE (DPS Student Services, 2001). During the mid 1990s, the percentage of Arab American students was placed at forty percent (Alam, 1994). As can be observed, the continual growth in student numbers of Arab Americans in the city has had a “spill-over” effect in the Arabic language program. The program continues to grow because of the numbers of students involved with it, however, what remains to be seen is to what end the Arabic programme is progressing. This matter will be addressed fully elsewhere in this work, but now focus will be directed towards the profiling the programme in curricular terms.

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8 In 2002, Student Services reported unofficially that the Arab American population has reached over 60 percent, but was not publicised for fear of “white flight” from the city.
Initially, content-wise, the Arabic program depended heavily on the Elementary Modern Standard Arabic (EMSA) curriculum, which had been the backbone of Arabic instruction at the collegiate level in the United States for many decades. The program, gleaned primarily from the work of Peter Abboud and his colleagues at the University of Michigan, was augmented with additional supplementary materials developed by Mr. Harp. He had developed curriculum and taught three basic courses: “Arabic for Beginners”, “Intermediate Arabic”, and “Advanced Arabic Literature” (Harp, n.d.). The literature course was eventually dropped because it was thought that Arabic proficient students (who would be its students), ought to concentrate on English proficiency attainment, and not have their time occupied by something they already knew. Interestingly, however, advanced standing level student whose native language was English were not obliged to drop advanced English language classes in favour of other classes. Also, equally interesting, the same pool of students was not excluded from electing French or Spanish.

5.4 Conclusion

As stated earlier, Mr. Harp’s strengths as a teacher of Arabic lay in the realm of literature, being a novelist and a poet. His emphasis all along was on developing all the skills needed for communication in formal standard Arabic. After Mr. Harp left his teaching assignment for an administrative position, Mr. Bazzi, a bilingual Math instructor, took over the program and began teaching Arabic as a native language. Granted that the overwhelming majority of the students he had were indeed of Arab or Arab American background, but they were not native Arabic speakers, yet they were treated this way. In fact, Mr. Bazzi imported curricula from the Arab world, mainly from
Lebanon, his home country. As a consequence, the preponderance of students was alienated from the materials of the new syllabus because of its native focus. In retrospect, it is not surprising that Mr. Bazzi, a mathematics teacher first and foremost, who is trained to teach his discipline in a bilingual English methodology, lacking the Arabic methodology, resorted to a default position, thus, teaching Arabic as a native language. But, one is left wondering about the leadership of the school in regards to the program, and its purpose in countenancing the teaching of Arabic as a native language, when in fact the students were not natives of the Arab world, rather natives of Dearborn.

Already, however, prior to Mr. Bazzi’s tutorship, there were some problems with the materials of study. As mentioned earlier, Mr. Harp’s basic program depended on the EMSA book, which in fact, is a university program that has been formulated with adults in mind. This book is designed for adults who are taking Arabic for purposes other than scholarly or civilian reasons, rather for Foreign Service, military and intelligence purposes—as can be surmised from the vocabulary of the program.

When Mr. Salhi took over from Mr. Bazzi, Arabic took on again a new face. An English reading teacher, who taught ESL, Mr. Salhi, convinced of the communicative approach in language acquisition, opted for reliance on his own materials but also made use of some of the available materials. Although known as a gifted language teacher by training, his professional training lay outside the pedagogical methodology of AFL.

When I took the position, coinciding with the district’s curriculum review of foreign language syllabi, I had already decided on the changes to be effected. By then, Ms. Nabila Barada-Hammami had been retained as the other teacher of Arabic at Fordson. She would be the junior teacher, given that my experience was teaching at the
collegiate level. I opted to institute a district wide curriculum, which would also include Dearborn high school’s faltering program. During that year, it was decided to revamp the program, and replace the old materials with a four year curriculum composed of Mahdi Alosh’s series *Ahlan was Sahlan* because of the series’ organisation of material. The program lent itself more to be appreciated by a younger audience. At the intermediate level, along with *Ahlan wa Sahlan*, Mounther Younnes’ *Elementary Arabic* and Al Batal and Brusted’s *Alif Ba’* were also added to the program. Younnes’ work is utilised for its emphasis on communicative and *lughah wusta* (middle language) Arabic. At the terminal end of the program, Arabic 7 and 8, implements Alosh's series, selections from the other programs, and makes extensive use of EMSA 1 as a review because of the high emphasis placed on developing reading and writing skills in those two courses.

After my departure, Dr. Rifaat Dika and his subsequent replacements, Mr Khalil Al-Stouhi and Mr. Fouad Moawad, along with Ms. Barada-Hammami (who is now the anchor of the program at Fordson) have continued to follow the materials and structure that I have instituted. Finally, Arabic, with this material, has had a levelled structure and a program that theoretically suits various learning styles, and allows for pedagogical variability for teachers. Because of the variety of resources the program offers, the current teachers who had not been AFL certified or trained, could now use these structured programs (which are based on sound AFL methodologies) to derive decent outcomes from students. Thus, finally in 1997-98, Arabic in Dearborn Schools is transformed from a heritage, immigrant first language with a native pedagogy—and a poor track record—to an AFL structured and adaptable approach. Given that all teachers are still working within the same framework, materials and syllabi that were established
in 1997-98 have maintained curricular stability, which suggests that some success has
been drawn out of these materials, hence they remain in effect. It is worth noting
however, that these materials were in the main, curricula developed for university level
students, and, therefore, made for adults rather than juveniles, which is an aspect that
remains an issue for students at the secondary levels.

The following chapter, Chapter Six, will address the results of the surveys,
interviews, focus groups and other information that was gathered during this research
process. Focus will be trained on interpreting the empirical data in their context.
Chapter Six
Results of the Empirical Study

6.1 Introduction

As has been discussed in Chapter Two, “Description of Research Methodology”, the qualitative and quantitative portions of this research have been riddled with limitations and dilemmas, ranging from restrictive access to Dearborn High, a high school that boasts a fairly large number of Arab American students involved in Arabic as foreign language programme, to the events of September 11, 2001, which have impacted negatively the Arab American community of Dearborn. Nonetheless, this empirical research has been conducted with rigour and tenacity, and although some of the respondents were reluctant and not fully forthcoming, most of them, however, have fully participated in this research by revealing their thoughts and sharing their experiences regarding the issues facing the Arabic language programme in Dearborn.

6.1.1 Foreground

Below is a general discussion, giving demographic information research participants in the surveys, interviews and focus groups, which included students, parents, teachers, other school personnel and community members. Also, a detailed account is given of the results of the survey questionnaires, interviews and focus groups. The results are placed into the context of each sub-research process, and results are shared accordingly. In addition, other findings are shared as preliminary conclusions are offered.
6.2 Informant Demographic Information

The following descriptive narrative is a generalised profile of the people who were involved in the research interviews. In order to protect identities, their real names have been changed and only general contours and characteristics are reported to give a broad sense of the participants who were ready and willing to talk about the issues this research effort had brought up.

6.2.1 Students

Under the title, “Student Questionnaire: Dearborn Schools TAFL Program,” a battery of questions (see appendix) were developed to gauge the perspective of Arabic language learners in Dearborn’s public secondary schools. Ultimately, only students from one high school were surveyed due to the reticence of one high school principal that, apparently, found no value in the research effort for his building, despite Central Administration approval. The Student Survey was administered in ten AFL class sections at Fordson High School during second semester in 2001.

A follow up interview was conducted in 2004 with four representative students, which were identified to gauge their views regarding the learning and teaching of Arabic in Dearborn schools. They were code-named Hanada, Derek, Abraham and Hagar. Three of the students had completed the AFL programme at Fordson, while the third had undergone the offering of the BBE programme. By the time of the interviews, all students had been in their early college years, studying towards professional and academic careers. One had planned to become a teacher, another wanted to pursue a career as an academician in philosophy and social sciences, a third was interested in applied mathematics, while the fourth was interested in pursuing a medical career. All of the
interviewees are of possessed superior intellectual abilities with exceptional academic records throughout their high school and early college years, and are full of promise and great expectations.

6.2.2 Parents

Although more than a few were approached for the purpose of interviewing, ultimately only two parents agreed to interviewed for this research work. A male and a female, one held a master’s degree, while the other was working on finishing an undergraduate credential. Both parents were eager to address issues brought up by the researcher. They were young professionals in their late thirties and early forties, who viewed themselves as community members with great investment, being parents with children whom they wanted to learn Arabic. Many others were reluctant to speak about their views due to many reasons, including un-ease or being un-sure about confidentiality. Many of those approached were immigrants who always seemed to distrust an authority figure who might use their words against them in some fashion. Many of these immigrants came from backgrounds where persons associated with government or are considered officials are taken to be potential threats to one’s well being. This may be partly due to the fact that many Arab immigrants came from lands run as a “police state” or are under occupation. This trend presented itself in acute ways after the September 11, 2001 tragedy, when Arab Americans were very uneasy about talking to anyone regarding anything for fear of retaliation or misunderstanding.

6.2.3 Community Stakeholders

As mentioned above, the tendency to be apprehensive regarding public officials made the effort to reach and interview members of the community a hard proposition,
especially after the “9/11 Tragedy”. Nonetheless, there were a few who were willing to speak regarding the issues of the research. In a sense, everyone who was interviewed—whether teacher, parent, student, administrator, or other—is a member of the community. Therefore, one may ask why devote a section or develop a classification for “community members” that is ultimately different from other stakeholders. The reason for sorting out “community members” into a separate category is to delineate a different function from the other groups. Obviously, all the other sub-groups ultimately can be brought together under the rubric of community members, however, the intention here is to show that there is a segment of the population that is not directly involved but remains to be a “secondary” source of stakeholders due to a variety of reasons that will be discussed later.

6.2.4 Teachers

Of some twenty teachers who were contacted for the purpose of interview, only seven Arab American teachers accepted to do so. Four taught in bilingual bicultural education program, while the other three had been teaching in the Arabic language program. All of them seasoned teachers. Four had doctoral degrees (three in education and another in sociology). The remaining teachers had Master’s level degrees or higher diplomas in education. Collectively, they have more than eighty years of professional experience teaching at the school level.

At the time of the interviews, two were in-service teachers at Dearborn High School, while the rest were members of the faculty at Fordson High School. Of the Dearborn High School teachers, one taught Arabic and the other taught English as a Second Language (ESL) in the bilingual program. With regard to the Fordson teachers,
one taught social studies, another taught ESL, one had taught ESL and Arabic, and the
latter two taught Arabic as a foreign language. Except for one, all six teachers were in the
early to mid stages of their teaching careers, while the first was in latter third of his
career. All were known among their (Arab American) colleagues as committed teachers.

6.2.5 School District Staff Members

Five school administrators, three support staff members and three secretaries were
interviewed for the purpose of gaining insight into their views towards Arabic and Arab
Americans. Three administrators were of Arab extraction, while the other two were of
European background. Two of the Arab American administrators held doctorates, while
the rest had earned Master’s level credentials or were working on higher degrees. In
regards to the support staff members, they were of Arab background, as well. Three
others were retained by the school district as “community liaisons”—professionals whose
duties involve communicating with parents on behalf of the schools and system. They
were of Arab extraction, as well. The remaining three staff members were providers of
administrative and clerical support. As can be noted, the majority are Arab Americans
who felt comfortable enough to address issues with another Arab American.

Without revealing identities, the following generalised profile gives a sense of the
people involved. Of the administrators, of the Arab American background principals
(males and females) one was a recent appointee, while another had been serving for a few
years and the third had served the district in administrative capacities for more than
decade. Of the two European American background principals, two were females and
recent to mid-career appointees. The three liaisons were of Arab background, having
served in this capacity for less than a decade. The clerical support staff members were all
women, who worked in a variety of support positions, including student services, registration and attendance services. They, too, were of Arab American background. It may be surmised that only or mostly Arab Americans were approached for interviews, however, this is not true. Although there was an attempt to be “even-handed” and balanced, most of those who were contacted declined being interviewed for various reasons. Apparently, the interviewer, the topic or both made the potential interviewees uneasy. But, one cannot make any definite claims in this matter. Reports of interview contents will be made in the later sections.

6.3 Questionnaire Results

The following is are the results of the questionnaire that was administered to students of the AFL programme at Fordson High School. Also, the results of a different questionnaire that was administered to parents and stake-holding members of the community. (Please refer to Chapter Two for rationale for using the questionnaires, and the appendix for copies of the questionnaires).

6.3.1 Students

A total of ten classes, each AFL teacher taught five at various levels of the programme that spanned four secondary grades, beginning with 9th and ending with 12th grade, the final year of high school studies. Among the student survey participants, fifty percent were 9th graders, and 35 percent were 10th graders, while 12 percent and 2.31 percent were respectively 11th and 12th graders. In other words, 85 percent of the participant students are in their early to mid secondary school career and can be characterised as neophytes, lacking full maturity.
In terms of age, 21 percent reported being 14 years old, while 41 percent stated their age at 15. Students who reported being 16 years old amounted to 28 percent, while 17 and 19 year old student amounted respectively to 6.5 percent and 2.3 percent. Differently put, 62 percent of the survey participants were below 16 years of age, while 38 percent were at or above age 16, indicating a low maturity level that has bearing on personal expectations, experience and world view. In terms of gender, 50 percent reported being female, while 46 percent were male. Of the participant group, 3.7 percent did not report their gender; however, it can be surmised that they are equally divided.

The overwhelming majority of the students self-identified with Islam. More than 97 percent indicated Muslim religious affiliation, while less than one percent reported Christian affiliation, another one percent stated “other” for a belief system, and less than two percent did not identify with any religious system. This overwhelming phenomenon, coupled with the limited experience of students and limited maturity levels, has implications for the worldview of these students and their sense of the world. This writer argues that the limited exposure of these students to other dimensions of being Arab (e.g., being Arab and Christian, Jewish or other) allows for and explains their conflation of religion, culture and ethnicity.

In terms of nativity and growing up, 66.6 percent reported U.S. birth, while 33.4 percent indicated a foreign birth but growing up in the U.S.A. These number values have bearing on the issue of identity, indicating, first and foremost, American nativism among these participants and suggesting strong roots in the Dearborn context.

Of 216 students that were involved in the survey, 49 percent reported their ethnicity as “Arab” or “Arabic” or “Arabic Lebanese” – the clear and overwhelming
majority, however, self-designated as “Arabic”. Nine percent reported their ethnicity as “Lebanese American” or “Arab American”. A set constituting 33 percent offered country of origin state affiliations, which include Lebanon, Iraq, Palestine, Syria, and Yemen—all countries that are represented in the Dearborn mix of Arab immigrants and ethnics. Although a little more than four percent did not report on their ethnic identity, less than one percent offered being “Muslim” as one’s ethnic identity, while 2.3 percent suggested “Middle East” as their label of choice.

The above designations and numbers are significant in a number of ways. Firstly, the emphasis on being associated with the Arab world is overarching, while the connexion to the United States seems lost. However, I will argue that this is due to a defensive posture on the part of the Arab American community that stresses its “Arabity” in the face of assimilationist and othering tendencies. The preponderance of the group, 58 percent, reported ethnic identities revolving around being Arabic/Arab/Arab-American and Lebanese-American – designations that are highly seminal in the Dearborn context, pointing to a hybrid identity that is local in nature and fully the product of American life in the city. This issue will be visited later, but suffice it to note at this juncture that what at face value may seem to indicate one thing (Arab ethno-centrism) can in fact be pointing to another, namely, Americanisation.

Of the 216 students in the survey group, 69.9 percent reported some kind of prior learning of Arabic, while 30 percent reported no such experience. However, of the 151 students who had studied Arabic before, nearly 31 percent studied it abroad while nearly 69 percent had studied Arabic in the U.S. Overall, the numbers suggest a language maintenance effort at some level on the part of the students and their guardians.
In terms of studying Arabic as a foreign language in Dearborn Public Schools, 83 percent of surveyed students reported that their parents recommended taking Arabic at school. Sixteen percent reported taking Arabic in accordance to personal choice, while one-half of a percent elected Arabic on the recommendation of friends, and another one-half of a percent enrolled in Arabic classes at the recommendation of school’s guidance counsellor. Glaringly absent in this recipe is the active input of teachers, counsellors and other school pedagogues. These numbers imply Arabic to be a parental choice for students, while the students may offer it lukewarm acceptance, but, on the part of the school system, evidently, Arabic does not exist as an option on offer that is worthy of exploration in educational/counselling venues with Arab American students.

Queried about support for learning Arabic, a great majority of the survey participants—nearly 94 percent reported that their parents encouraged studying Arabic, while a slim minority of some six percent indicated their parents had discouraged Arabic learning. This encouragement, however, may not necessarily be taken as a sign of valuation and support. There may be several factors involved, leading to these high numbers that suggest support. Chief among these factors at play is the parents’ desire to develop and maintain cultural and linguistic links with the children’s ancestral culture; however, reasons pertaining to obtaining easy academic credit or viewing the AFL classroom as a safe harbour for Arab American students at school or for ethno-political reasons in city politics cannot be summarily dismissed as factors that are out of the question.

In fact, as we shall see later through the interviews (Section 6.3) is that what appears at face value to be support can be understood as an act of devaluation or
fetishisation. For example, at least some Arab American parents support push their children, who have prior knowledge of Arabic, whether Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) or colloquial, to enrol in Arabic coursework for the potential of easy credit in order to inflate the student’s grade point average, an important indicator for those who are university-bound. In of itself, this is a form of academic devaluation, instrumentalsing Arabic for other ends, if not straight out prostitution of it. Another example that suggests reasons other than academic or language/culture maintenance revolves around the use of Arabic as symbol of ethnicity. The choice to place one’s children in such a programme stems from a desire to achieve political presence in the city through scholastic or school-based activism, leading to the fetishisation of Arabic – that is, its substitution for a more overt political activism on the part of some parents.

The majority of Fordson AFL students, nearly 61 percent or 131 students, reported their plans to discontinue learning Arabic at some point. Of this group, 38 percent indicated they knew Arabic to some degree, while another 38 percent disliked Arabic or thought it “too hard.” Those who had different plans or who did not think it was a requirement for future studies constituted nearly 26 percent.

Students that planned to continue with Arabic were a substantial minority, coming at 38 percent of the total group (or 83 of 216 students). Of this sub-group 14 percent valued Arabic as useful or important in terms of personal careers; while those who valued it for general learning represented 53 percent (or 44 of 83 students), and those who appreciated Arabic for cultural knowledge constituted 27 students or 32.5 percent.

Significantly, there is an apparent appreciation of Arabic among the students to some level; however, evidently, the approach of the students is very pedestrian and
utilitarian, and their focus is not trained on issues of linguistic or cultural maintenance; rather their agenda precludes further exploration of Arabic in favour of other subjects. This attitude, as the numbers purport, has implications for the future of AFL in Dearborn schools; chief among them is whether Arabic survives as an academic subject on offer, given marginal acceptance on the part of the students. This issue will become clearer in the following narrative as an exploration of the students’ preferences is completed.

The vast majority of AFL students (168 of 216) or nearly 78 percent preferred learning some form of Arabic dialect to Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), the target language of instruction in the AFL programme. Nonetheless, a minority composed of nearly 34 percent of students supported learning MSA. Those who favoured studying a colloquial form of Arabic offered the following dialects as the four most preferred speech forms, namely, Lebanese, Egyptian, Palestinian and Yemeni. In descending order, Lebanese garnered almost 44 percent, while Egyptian was a distant second, constituting 19 percent whereas Palestinian gathered nearly 9 percent and Yemeni gained almost 8 percent. Although there had been other choices, such as Iraqi Arabic, Gulf Arabic or Maghreb Arabic, the previously announced four “dialects” had harvested double digit numbers of students, while the rest did not.

It is important to note that Lebanese and Palestinian Arabic belong to the Greater Syria variety of *Shamiyyah* Arabic, therefore, are not altogether different, however, Egyptian Arabic is constituted as a different family of Arabic dialects in the Nile basin and Yemeni Arabic is another sub-branch of Peninsular Arabic. Thus, choice of these dialects/sub-dialects is highly reflective of the students’ sub-ethnic/national origins. The fact that “Lebanese”—(which is not all that different from Arabic varieties in Syria,
Jordan, Palestine and Israel)—had gained such a high value level of preference suggests inherited provincial parochialism on the part of the students from their Lebanese parents. The same can be said of the Palestinian and Yemeni students and parents, as well. Nonetheless, true to demographic facts in the city, the latter two groups represented a smaller “vote” for their respective dialects. Of course, other dialects based on place of origin gained smaller numbers still, reflecting a smaller demographic presence (e.g., Syrian or Iraqi Arabic).

What is most interesting in this set of responses is the choice of “Egyptian” as a valued target dialect. Only one individual reported Egyptian roots among the 216 student participants in the survey. It is interesting to note that Egyptian presence in Dearborn, if at all, is minute when compared to other groups. Yet, “Egyptian” captured the imagination of 19 percent of the students who wished to learn an Arabic dialect. While the other choices can be blamed on parochialism, wanting to learn “Egyptian” can only be attributed to the proliferation of electronic mass media programming broadcast through satellite into the homes of Dearborn Arab Americans, and that is highly saturated with Egyptian-made television dramas and other artistic outputs, including musical productions. This realisation offers a small window on the media habits of Arab American families in Dearborn in the age of satellites, and calls into recognition the potential effects of Arabic language networks on these families, their children, as evident by the choice, and the potential impact of this as a factor in the trans-nationalisation of the community.

Also, the choice of preference for colloquial Arabic to MSA suggests that students prefer conversational Arabic that is dialect-based, rather than MSA, which tends
to be “high-brow” and book-bound, suggesting academic connotations that do not mesh with their sense of Arabic—being an intimate part of their personal lives. It is the language of growing up and memories, as one interviewee had suggested. Of course, the surveyed group in its majority (65 percent) recognised that dialect Arabic is not more important than MSA, suggesting in fact a bias towards MSA, even though they prefer not to study it. Where does this bias come from? It likely obtains from parents and teachers who assign importance to MSA as a medium of academic and intellectual discourse, as well as its utility and importance in religious and Qur’anic education. In other words, while AFL students, in the main, are aware of the importance of MSA to the acquisition of holistic competence in Arabic, as a group they are likely to sacrifice this competence to maintain a “parochial” Arabic that is their own in the context of Dearborn, indeed, an Arab American “patois” of their own.

When queried about their social life at school, a majority of surveyed students (nearly 87 percent) reported that their friends are Arab American with a smaller segment of nearly nine percent indicating their friends to be “Arab immigrants.” Less than five percent reported having friends who are European American or other ethnic Americans. Significantly, this result implies de facto segregation at school and in the community. Given that all the respondents are from Fordson High School, an Arab American majority populated school, perhaps upwards of 90 percent; it is not surprising that socialising at school is determined by this demographic fact. However, outside of school, this phenomenon suggests social segregation in the neighbourhoods, indicating in the first instance a socially enclosed ethnic enclave that is socio-culturally self-sufficient – that is, capable of culture-making on its own. Secondly, it points to the potential impact of the
school environment and system on the assimilation project and on the issues of self-concept and identity on the lives of these students, given their ethno-political placement. In this way, one may observe the potential for a greater role and a magnified influence of the school and its personnel on the lives of Dearborn Arab American students.

Queried on the issue of using Arabic in school, a minority of 22 percent thought it acceptable for the administration to limit and confine the use of Arabic at school, while a smaller minority of nearly 17 percent remained neutral on the issue, perhaps reflecting the ambivalence of mixed messages that they may receive as students from the school system and culture, and their home life. However, a majority of 57 percent expressed their discontent about such policies, viewing the practice in negative terms, using such words as “isolating”, “alienating”, “unjust”, “hypocritical”, “disrespectful”, “discriminating” and “shaming.” These views suggest that the students are aware of the prejudices of the context in which they exist. Should students be allowed to use their native language at school? When queried on this matter, a significant majority of AFL students comprising some 66 percent responded affirmatively, while nearly 33 percent believed otherwise. The meaning of these numbers suggests that there is a “pro-Arabic speech” stance on the part of students at school that cannot be suppressed easily or hidden away.

As asked to share opinion regarding the school system’s support of Arabic learning, nearly 47 percent believed that the school supported Arabic, whereas almost 53 percent thought it was not. Seemingly evenly split on the issue, those who thought the school supported Arabic, pointed to the existence of the AFL programme and courses and their presence in the school as being evidence of this support. However, those who did not
think there is school support for the project (which is a large portion of the respondents, some 33 students) suggested that the “school doesn’t care”, while another 25 students suggested the school does not provide enough guidance relative to Arabic. Also, five students reported that they were actively told to take other classes, while another 18 students noted they made the choice to take Arabic despite the school system’s stance. Still, a few pointed to racism as a reason for this apathy on the part of the school system.

Queried regarding whether their teachers inquire about their learning of Arabic at school, 200 students or nearly 93 percent of the pool of respondents noted that their teachers do not ask. This indifference towards Arabic is a sign of devaluation—something which is not lost on the students themselves. Such attitude on the part of the school system and its teachers is best described as “salutary neglect” — an act of seeming toleration of Arabic, provided it does not get in the way of “important” things.

Asked if they think their school encouraged cultural maintenance, 53 percent agreed that their school encouraged cultural maintenance, however, nearly 47 percent thought otherwise. Evidently, a majority of students believe the school system is supportive of cultural maintenance efforts because of the availability of the AFL programme itself at school. However, there is a significant minority of the AFL student body (nearly half) that is not convinced offering AFL constitutes cultural and linguistic support and maintenance effort on behalf of students and families. Indeed, these numbers suggest that there is a semblance of consciousness of the fact that the practice of cultural maintenance is not supported, if not discouraged.

When queried as to whether Arab culture and Arab Americans are accepted in the school and greater community, a larger percentage, namely 82 percent, agreed that they
are, as a group and culture, welcome in Dearborn. Again, however, this must be understood in terms of the limited experience of the students, who perceive their existence within a closed ethnic environment to be a sign of tolerance. They live in an ethnic enclave among their family members, friends, and peers, lacking outside contacts and points of comparison. It is therefore natural for them to associate the general success of their community as evidence of acceptance. This is a recurrent theme that has emerged amongst the younger participants in this research effort. Nonetheless, this phenomenon, in the writer’s view, points to a level of confidence among the youth members of the community, indicating their comfort in their surroundings. In other words, contrary to a generalised conception of culturally conflicted youth, they view themselves as part of a viable socio-economic system within the greater community.

This sense of parochialism, if not chauvinism, sheds light on the reasons behind the students’ answers in regards to the comparisons between Arab and American cultural values. When queried as to whether Arab values are equal to American values, nearly 43 percent agreed that they are, while a slight majority of 53 percent disagreed with the notion. Although, objectively-speaking, there is nothing that separates the broad outlines of Arab and American humane values from each other, the student responses point to the persistence of a theme of “difference-making” that is gleaned from a bifurcated vision of life in Dearborn, stemming from “us” and “them”—a phenomenon adopted from the dominant majority’s outlook on life in the greater community.

As resistance to this assimilationist outlook that is bent on dominating the minority group, students disagreed with the notion that the school should teach students to “Americanise”, which they take to mean, “to become white”. In fact, 84 percent of the
responding students rejected this notion as a mainstay of the school system’s mission—even though, in fact, it is the mandate of the public school system to achieve the very thing.

The students’ critique of their school system reaches to their parents and community, as well. When questioned about whether their parents and community system contributed support to the AFL programme at school, a significant minority nearing 34 percent disagreed that parents and community are supportive enough, although the majority had agreed that it did. This theme of a community supportive of AFL at school emerged in the interviews, focus groups and other surveys. Generally speaking, even those who claim that the community is doing enough to support AFL will often change their minds when pressed to give examples of such contributions. In the main, the existence of the Arabic language programme is often used as an example of supportive contribution. In other words, support is assumed to be on going by virtue of the programme’s existence and longevity.

When asked to share their view as to whether learning Arabic and Arab culture assists the student in appreciating pluralism in American society, 62 percent agreed with the idea that it did, even though a significant minority of nearly 33 percent disagreed, while nearly five percent did not respond. Nonetheless, this suggests, again, a defensive posture or a form of resistance against homogenisation. If nothing else, there is understanding on the part of the majority of AFL students of an American pluralism that extends beyond the whiteness of their surroundings, and there is appreciation that exposure to foreign language and culture learning helps in obtaining a liberal education that promotes tolerance.
6.3.2 Parents and Community Stakeholders

The total number of respondents in this effort was 103 informants from a total of 300 surveys distributed to participants. Of the 103 surveys, six responses were not tallied because of a late return (the deadline was in April, they were returned in May after the data had been scrubbed). Another two were disqualified because the respondents identified as non-Arabs, and two surveys that were completed by minors (ages 11 and 12) were ineligible, as well. The total number of the data set reported on below is 94 respondents.

Asked to report on the importance of Arabic to them on a personal level, 100 percent indicated that Arabic is either important or very important. When asked about the importance of teaching Arabic to children, similarly, 100% percent of the respondent indicated that it was either important or very important to have their children be taught the language.

When queried regarding what Arabic represents to them on an individual basis in terms of the following elements, namely, ethnic heritage, religion, culture, home life, family, and communication, 60 percent indicated all of the above. The rest of the participants reported various combinations of what Arabic represented to them, the most prominent of these were “ethnic heritage”, and “religion” and “culture” followed closely by “home life” and “family”. Of the 94 respondents, only one participant indicated “none of the above”.

Regarding the speech pattern of their children at home, of the 78 respondents who had children, 36 percent reported that both languages are equally spoken at home; 42 percent said they speak English only, or more English than Arabic; while 22 percent reported they speak either more Arabic than English or Arabic only. Thus, despite the
overarching influence of English in the Dearborn context, Arabic as a language in viable use reaches 58 percent among the children of those polled, signifying the importance of the language among the Arab American youth of the city. Equally important is the apparent fact that, despite eagerness on the part of parents to maintain Arabic as a language among their children, English is not viewed as a threat to it, as can be surmised from the use of English along with Arabic in Arab American households. In other words, the data so far may suggest that the importance of Arabic is not at the expense of English, rather as a complimentary communicative and cultural tool to it. This theme will be further explored elsewhere. However, it is worth noting that there was no particular correlation between the level of Arabic use at home and the parents’ educational level, suggesting that Arabic is a value onto its own, symbolic of itself in relationship to the respondents. Differently put, Arabic is a sign of the community and not a replacement of English.

When asked to identify themselves in terms of nationality and background, the majority of respondents (62 percent) indicated they see themselves as Arab Americans, while 22 percent identified with their country of origin. It is interesting to note that half of those who identified with country of origin were Lebanese, but it must also be pointed out that 55 percent of the total respondents were also Lebanese, a number mirroring their demographic profile within the Dearborn Arab American population. There were those who identified themselves as Yemeni or Iraqi or Palestinian, while 10 percent of the respondents self identified as Arab and four percent as American.

From this sample, so far, it is apparent that there is emphasis on being some variety of American (namely, 66 percent). This goes to show that, while there is a keen
sense of keeping Arabic alive in the community, nonetheless, it is not at the expense of becoming fully American. Even those that identified as Lebanese or with other country of origin did not do so at the expense of being American, rather as a descriptor of their origins.

When asked to report on the importance of learning English vis-à-vis learning Arabic, participants had a variety of responses: 29 percent reported that learning English is more important than learning Arabic, while 41 percent indicated neutrality on the subject. Only 29 percent observed that learning Arabic was more important than learning English. Although it is possible that the question was not very well understood by the respondents, this writer believes that in fact, the answers do represent the socio-cultural scene of Arab Americans in Dearborn, influenced largely by the assimilation of American values which support English dominance over ethnic languages. In this sense the neutrality of the majority represents the conflicted nature, perhaps ambivalence, of Arab Americans in Dearborn in terms of wanting to maintain Arabic as viable ethnic language while at the same time wanting to satisfy the conditions of becoming and being American as understood by them through the mechanisms of socio-cultural assimilation of the dominant society.

When asked to rate the importance of teaching Arabic in the public schools, the overwhelming majority, 90 percent, reported that the teaching of Arabic is either very important or important. Eight percent indicated that teaching of Arabic was neither important nor unimportant, whereas two percent felt that it was unimportant. When compared to the responses of the previous question, there may appear the existence of an inconsistency between the two sets of answers. However, on closer inspection, one may
deduce that while Arab Americans in the main support the teaching of Arabic as a foreign language in the public schools, the emphasis remains on English competence. In other words, Arabic—for the purpose of this study— is not to be considered a native language, rather truly an ethnic language, not so much a foreign language, rather a language of familiarity and a symbol of ethnicity, not one of common utility.

Asked to report views concerning community levels of support to the teaching and learning of Arabic to Arab American students, 48 percent reported that the community is not doing enough. However, 32 percent disagreed, believing that the community (through organisations and leaders) are doing their share. However, 20 percent were undecided. This suggests that only a minority in the community believe that enough has been done for children relative to language maintenance efforts.

### 6.4 Interview Findings

Interviews were conducted among several categories of stakeholders, including students (at high school and college levels), parents of students in the public schools who are enrolled in BBE or AFL classes, and teachers in the school system who teach AFL and BBE courses. Community members also participated in these interviews: as employees of the school system, as residents and activists in the city, and as community servants and leaders. Interviews were conducted prior to the event in 2001, interrupted in 2002 due to the September 11th Attacks. However, the interviewing process was re-engaged in 2003 and 2004, after some interviewees had gained confidence to speak their minds on issues.
6.4.1 Students

Having grown up in the American context, interviewed students were more forthcoming in sharing their views. Primarily, students noted the importance of Arabic to them as an icon of their home culture. Equally at ease with English as a medium of everyday life and with Arabic—no matter how little they commanded of it—as an icon of their cultural heritage. As one student, Hanada, reports:

“To me, Arabic is my culture, my home life, I mean when I pick up something and I read it in Arabic, this represents me and who I am. It is not just a language to me, [it is] culture, religion, family, our country [of origin], [and] region. This is how Arabic is to me. It is very important.”

When asked how she perceives her community’s position on Arabic, Hanada suggests Arabic to be a factor of solidarity, noting: “I don’t think if it weren’t for Arabic, they [newer immigrants] would have gathered in this one [city].” Equally, however, she was aware of how the greater community viewed her language and culture, noting that they identify “…Arabic with the Middle East. That is it! You speak Arabic, you are from the Middle East. It is a region to them, it is nothing more than that, I don’t think.”

Instinctively realizing that Arabic is viewed as a foreign object that cannot be native to Dearborn, Hanada believes that her fellow Americans are not unbiased regarding Arabs and Arabic: “I don’t think they are neutral. It is a kind of like Arabs, we are them, so if you are Arab, you are a terrorist. It is an interesting view.” Hanada articulates the phenomenon of conflating Arabs and Muslims from abroad with Arab Americans and who are identified with terrorism.

Regarding learning Arabic in school, Hanada points out that a lot of the students are forced into taking Arabic at school, giving her brother as an example of this phenomenon:
“Most of them [students], yes [they are forced to take it]. My brother was kind of forced by my parents to take the class. He didn’t want to. He wanted to take French. He was like ‘I can learn Arabic from you’, but my parents were like ‘you should take it in school, you’ll learn it better’. For me, I want to learn the language—I speak Arabic but I don’t understand classic Arabic, modern [standard] Arabic—like I pick up a book and read it but I don’t understand vocabs [vocabulary words] in it. I took Arabic to understand it better….”

When asked regarding her sense of why her parents and the community want Arabic to be taught to students, Hanada suggests the following:

“There are many Arabs in Dearborn. If you look at Dearborn Public Schools, I went to Fordson. Fordson was 90 percent Arabs. Maybe 95 percent. I mean most students there were Arabs. I would think they would be interested in Arabic. If you have a community this big, why couldn’t you offer them in the public schools their language? The Arab American community did a lot for this state, gives a lot to this state [economically], they should give something back. And that something back should be their language. They have a right to learn their language, and [teaching it] would show an appreciation to the Arabs—that is what it is! I mean offer Arabic in public schools, you are appreciating the Arabs in the community!”

To her, teaching Arabic in the public schools is a sign of potential acceptance of her community in the American mosaic. But, Hanada is aware that things are not as she hopes:

“You know, what I mean? We want you here, we want you to work, we want your brains, we want your hands, you know, work and everything but we are not willing to give you back as much—what you really deserve, at least to teach you your language; to understand your culture, your religion, that kind of thing.”

In her remarks, Hanada makes clear that her community has contributed to American society but seemingly people are not welcomed as an Arab community, and understand that to be a function of the devaluation of Arabs and Arabic, which has been her experience.

Hanada notes that Arabic teachers in the schools are not as well equipped as other teachers due to this devaluation:
“No! I mean there are teachers who were teaching Arabic at school, from what I know, like Mr. Moawad, [who] was not an Arabic instructor [by training] although he is of Arabic descent. He teaches social studies. They are doing it because they loved the language; they were doing it because they wanted to teach students. The schools, they couldn’t even find an [certified, professional] Arabic instructor.”

Hanada picks up on an important theme that has often come up when talking to other students, namely, the qualifications of teachers and their professional standing in the school system.

Derek, now at university, has given his Arabic language experience at school and in the community some thought. He finds the language pregnant with personal significance:

“Arabic is, first and foremost, a language, which is organic to me, a language whose words carry emotional attachments and recall memories. It is the language of my parents, one in which my upbringing is contained.”

Derek is also aware of the political implications of Arabic utility on an Arab American level:

“This is an interesting question. Arabic, on the political and social level, can be used for different purposes in an ‘ethnic’ setting—although, I am not altogether sure that I like or approve of this term [that is generally used in society]. For example, when The Arab American News [a local news outlet] or AAI or ADC [Arab American national organisations] use Arabic as a medium of communication, they can many times exploit the speed with which its use gives them legitimacy in Dearborn, always reassuring us that they are ‘one of us’.

“By using the language, they can claim de facto political representation, even when they are working for interests far beyond those of the community, whether this be Ford Motor Company or the FBI. This highly disastrous politically, and needs to be problematised [as a phenomenon]. On a more basic level, however, Arabic works like any other language, used in supermarkets or bakeries, etc. [having a public use].”

Derek’s perspective offers an intellectual approach to the significance and potential significance of Arabic in local, as well as national concerns that are often lacking when
approaching Arabic language issues in the community. While Arabic can be exploited within the community to further the ends of an agenda beholden to the White majority,

“Arabic is seen as a threat to the dominant language [English], especially (although not exclusively) in the schools, where it is pathologised as unproductive to the assimilationist ideals to the American system.”

Although Arabic may not be welcome in the city, Derek suggests that,

“Sometimes it is not even a matter of whether it is welcome as much as it is a matter of being unable to ignore it. I think it's welcomed, but only because it has to be.”

Derek’s “forced welcome” is an implication of the growing number of Arab Americans businesses in the city who have turned the language into an iconic representation (i.e. used on shop signs). The conglomeration of such businesses in two enclave areas in the city, results in a radiating an effect due to the combined show of strength that otherwise may not have been there.

Looking back to his high school experience with Arabic, although not as fruitful as he would have wanted it, Derek thinks offering Arabic is a great idea because “…languages open people to a whole cannon of literature that may not be available in the dominant language,” therefore, expanding intellectual horizons of students, in addition to the mundane practical curricular requirements of school, which coincide with later university language requirements. Derek believes his programme of study at high school was of substantial quality, given his experience with another foreign language at the university level, and what he has heard of other Arabic programmes in other universities from other students. But is that enough to generate interest in Arabic among Arabs and non-Arabs in Dearborn? Derek thinks not, suggesting.
“It would be nice if more non-Arabs took courses, but this is always a matter of its not being considered as legitimate as French or German or Spanish, since it is not ‘Western’.”

The Arab American is not sure that Arab American students want to learn it either:

“Currently, I think many Arab-American kids do not want to take Arabic, largely because the assimilation process [at school and in society] has taken root at an already very deep level among my generation [who were born in the 1980s and 1990s], and they view learning Arabic as regressive to that process that catapults them into the American cultural code.

“Perhaps learning Arabic would also require a critical attitude toward dominant ideologies, perhaps a critique of this assimilationist tendency in American culture.”

As a corollary to his assessment of the contemporary Arab American youth scene, Derek suggests that the community as a whole is equally indictable in issues of Arabic maintenance. Derek’s focus is on the potential abuse of language for political purposes. He observes that Arabic is only recognised in Dearborn, but not afforded respect as an equal language in terms of inherent worth, like French or German might be considered by the white majority.

Abraham, a biology student who intends to study medicine, affirms the personal significance Arabic has in his life, suggesting the importance of maintaining international links:

“Arabic is an important part of my culture and religion. I think it is extremely important to learn Arabic so as to keep my sense of identity. Because most of my family speaks Arabic as a first language it is important that I be able to speak Arabic to communicate with them, especially when I visit relatives overseas.”

Abraham believes the community’s stress on Arabic is the result of ethnic pride:

“I think the Arab American community takes great pride in preserving the Arabic language. Public schools in Dearborn teach Arabic in large part because of the demand from the Arab American community and there are many private schools that have been established solely to teach Arabic as well as others with a broader curriculum that includes Arabic. I think that the Arab community takes pride in
preserving traditional values and Arabic represents an important part of the Arab American identity and so preserving it is extremely important.”

Abraham instinctively links the issue of Arab American ethnic pride to Arabic preservation, making the latter an icon of representation more than a goal unto itself. However, he believes that “…Arabic is not necessarily embraced but it is welcomed” within the context of the greater Dearborn community, a distinction that speaks to a problematic existence, echoing Derek’s notion Arabic’s forced welcome.

Asked about his perceptions of Arabic being taught in the public schools, Abraham notes, “It is a good thing,” adding, “I think, it gives many Arab Americans an opportunity to learn the language of their native countries, which they otherwise would not have.” Interestingly, his perception of Arabic is one of a “heritage language” instead of a language that is available to all, which non-Arabs might study. This attitude expresses the state in which Arabic is found, aiding further in its “ghettoisation” in Dearborn. However, Abraham recognises that not much has been done to promote the language among non-Arabs, suggesting:

“I think, more needs to be done to interest non-Arabs in taking Arabic classes. Perhaps exposing people to different aspects of Arab culture and the Arab world may spark their interest in learning Arabic.”

However, living in a community whose third have roots in the Arab world apparently is not enough to spark interest, something that indicates complete indifference on the part of the greater community and any thoughts to the contrary are likely delusive.

With regard to Arabic and Arab American youth, Abraham opines that Arabic is both forced and is elected by them as a choice to learn:

“I think the only option parents have to teach their kids Arabic is to send them to Arabic school on the weekends. Kids simply do not want to have to go to school on the weekends so they tend to be against it. This is the situation I was in as a
child. Although it is forced on many of them, I wouldn’t say that this is necessarily a bad thing.

“Personally, I wish I would have learned more as a child. As kids get older, however, they begin to realize the importance of learning Arabic and take it upon themselves to take classes to learn the language. Many of my friends now tell me that they would like to learn or improve their Arabic. I definitely would like to do so myself.”

Regarding the community’s need to maintain Arabic, Abraham is quick to offer the following rationale,

“From my experience, I think that Arabs are generally in touch with traditional beliefs and values. I think the Arabic language is an important part of the Arab identity. I think Arabs are generally very aware of the need to preserve their language and culture. If you do not know Arabic you miss out on a huge chunk of what it means to be an Arab. So I think that Arab Americans place great value on learning Arabic.”

He believes that beneficiaries of learning Arabic are those who study it, but, in the main, it will be the Arab American community, which is therefore aided in its cultural maintenance efforts. Nonetheless, according to Abraham, the onus of maintaining Arabic in the public schools and elsewhere remains a responsibility falling on the collective shoulders of the community. He adds: “I think, it is [supported] in the Dearborn school-system if only minimally. However, I think, it is, ultimately, up to Arab Americans to support the language.” Abraham’s indictment of Dearborn Schools may be arguable, but shifting responsibility to the community places the onus entirely on the ethnic group, therefore relieving the greater community, through the school establishment, if not forgiving it, of any accountability towards respecting and valuing a minority group’s language (and culture).

Hagar, an applied mathematics student, acknowledges Arabic as “…symbolic of the Arab and Islamic culture”, signifying a medium of communication for Arabic-only-
speaking immigrants. However, to the non-Arab community, Arabic poses “a threat” because members of the greater society perceive Arab immigrants being catered to, and one of the signs of this accommodation is the public use of Arabic, according to Hagar. The budding mathematician observes that Arabic is welcomed in the city, “…since the population of Arabic speaking people is so common,” taking their numbers in East Dearborn as evidence of some sort of “acceptance.” However, recognising that this acceptance is due to economic factors, rather than socio-cultural, suggests that there is an interest in Arabic as a result of events of the recent past, but she does not feel that too many non-Arabs try to learn Arabic due to resentment of the Arab people.

Regarding Arab American students learning Arabic, Hagar believes her American reared cohorts who are grounded in English, struggle “to keep their Arab culture [alive] in an environment [ripe] with the pressure of Americanisation.” However, she eagerly adds:

“I don’t feel that most Arab American kids take Arabic because they genuinely want to learn the language. Moreover, they take it because they feel they are supposed to take the language [as a course of study] to maintain loyalty to their culture. Also, commonly, kids take Arabic because it is a language they are already familiar with, and want to get easy credit. In this situation, Arabic is exploited by Arab kids.”

An astute observer, Hagar seems to be suggesting that Arab American youths’ struggle to keep the culture alive in Dearborn is much about filial piety and loyalty to family than it is about a personal choice to learn and maintain Arabic. However, she also points out that the very act of taking Arabic is exploitative, suggesting a devaluation of the academic discipline on the part of Arab American students.

Hagar believes that the greater “community wants [Arab American] society to learn a single language, English, because it makes life simpler and it is more profitable
She explains that societal pressure forces the community to function in English, adding, “Arabic signs and translators in the community, today, are merely tools for the translation to a single language.” Thus, according to her, Arabic is in fact used as a tool of assimilation of the community, for at some point, the limited English speakers will be replaced by English-speaking only Arab Americans who are fully assimilated into the local American system. But, Hagar notes that “the community has a lot of [ethnic] pride among the Arab people,” and this would be its driving motivation to keep the customs and traditions.

Because Arab Americans want to be recognised as a group in the city, they want Arabic to be in the schools, and by having it there, it will “satisfy other Arabs in the community,” thereby promoting a sort of a social peace. Hagar is right to consider Arabic is a politicised icon of the community, whose presence in the public school system, becomes a symbol of political attainment as a derivative of recognition due to community political activism.

However, beyond this politicking, Hagar does not believe the Arabic programme is taken seriously. Her personal experience has taught her that, AFL as an academic discipline, is not appreciated by the students, adding: “The class had a reputation of being a time to have fun and goof off. Students treated the teacher very badly and there was a lot of cheating that went on.” Hagar also complains about an uninteresting curriculum and unprofessional teachers: “My experience made me ponder whether or not the class was really input for education.” Although Arabic had been her only foreign language experience, Hagar notes that,
“… it seems to me like students have treated French or Spanish class like any other academic class, that is, seriously. This would lead me to say that the conduction of the class was more professional than Arabic.”

According to Hagar, the purpose of learning a foreign language is to become acquainted with another culture, therefore,

“studying Arabic is to create diversity and to educate students of another prominent culture. However, unfortunately, majority of the students who take the [Arabic] class are already familiar with the language and culture.”

This state of affairs points to the exploitation or de facto devaluation she alluded to earlier, adding, “…non-Arabs are intimidated to take Arabic for fear of being out of place in a class of Arabic-speaking students who have an advantage over them,” something that serves the cause of alienation from each other.

6.4.2 Parents

Most of the interviewees were parents of Dearborn schools students. Choice fell on reporting the views expressed by Jamila and Abdu since they both represented the majority of views among the interviewees.

Jamila is a mother of three children in her late thirties, working as a professional in an educational setting while attending a university for graduate studies. Jamila was interviewed in April of 2001. She considers herself an Arab American who supports very much the idea of teaching Arabic in the public schools as a way to preserve Arabic, especially now that her children are on the cusp of attending high school. She informed that she had placed her children in privately-sponsored afternoon programmes, but had complained about their ineffectiveness in motivating children to learn. She believes that the inclusion of Arabic in the regular high school curriculum, with its emphasis on grades, might be a motivating factor for students to learn the language.
Jamila, an immigrant from Lebanon, is married to a native born, second generation Arab American, whom she complains did not support her enough in her efforts to teach their children Arabic. But why is Arabic so important?

“Because it represents us. Like, if you have a country, … you have a language, you have a soul and it is part of your [life], it is part of you… I would say Arabic is like, it represents me, you know. It represents a person like, a personality, language, appearance, you know, it is part of the person.

“The culture, heritage. You cannot have a culture without a language. You know what I mean. But if you translate something you’ll loose the meaning…the original. Sometimes I feel sad because, this year, they [her children] did not go this year [to Arabic school]. It is not that they don't care, they don't feel it is important [as I do]. They ask why do we use it.

Jamila is afraid her children will grow up more American than Arab, like their father, who does not encourage the children to focus on Arabic.

Jamila approves of Dearborn schools’ offering of Arabic because it has such a large Arab background population.

“Dearborn schools have the most Arabic population, I would say in the country. And as a community for them to represent themselves, they have to have something, you know, and Arabic represents the Arabic people… because nothing else represents the Arabic people [as much]. Look at it that way; each country has a different flag. Each country has a different kind of food. But all Arabic people have their Arabic language in common. The holy Qur’an is in Arabic, you know, and to keep [the faith], you know, if nobody would speak Arabic, they would not speak [recite] the holy Quran, and read it in English. And you know what, I found it a little bit odd or off to read the Quran in English. It is not the same.”

Jamila’s emphasis on learning Arabic translates into ethnic nationalism and religious observance within an American context. She is worried that by losing Arabic, her and other children will lose their “originality”, as she put it, adding, “They die and then their kids will grow up and they don’t know Arabic and nobody will know they are Arabic (sic.) [meaning of Arab background].” Apparently, Jamila’s focus is not preserving Arabic to offset assimilation effects, for she is content to see that happen,
rather to preserve an Arab flavour to this Americanisation process. Her emphasis on Arabic is also to help buttress religious education and upbringing.

She is proud of her community’s achievements so far, noting that despite what she perceives to be an oppressive social order, where

“Westerners, in general, don’t want the Arab people to have it all… [our] population is growing, numbers are growing, business is growing, and we can see that some of the [people] like, twenty years ago it were not [prospering in the city] like now. The people are getting better [at creating their own success]. They do not want the Arab community, I would say, politically, the government, the [establishment], does not [wish success for the community].”

Jamila perceives Arabic as an icon of this struggle. Keeping Arabic alive in Dearborn implies the community’s survival as a distinct group within the American mosaic in the city. A very middle class approach to ethnic nationalism, reminiscent of the Canadian-Quebecois struggle for French survivance in Canada, Jamila identifies Arabic maintenance with religious inculcation and as an icon of community nationalism that is predicated on the American and Arab values of hard work, personal responsibility and collective support:

“They [non-Arabs] want you to become somehow, some American form, and forget about culture along the line. So, one hundred years from now, [we will] forget who we are. That is very bad. That means that you forget about your origins. You sold your soul to the other people [i.e., non-Arabs]. You just like melt into the bowl. Like say, America is the bowl… I want to melt but I want to preserve my origins, my soul, you know….”

Jamila believes the community is recognising the importance of Arabic and of remaining Arab in the American mainstream, citing evidence she observes in the greater community of more focussed cooperation among leading members and organisations, adding:

“…They are starting…. I was not here long ago, but when I first came 15 years ago it was not like now. I think they are moving rapidly now, very. I mean, it is a lot of progress you know, they are doing good in every way, if you have noticed.”
Jamila prefers Arabic being offered in the elementary levels in order to establish better grounding in the language, but she also approves of the high school focus as “something that is better than nothing.” However, she determines that this state of affairs is due largely to a lack of real commitment on the part of the educational hierarchy and the socio-political establishment in the city. Jamila opines:

“Part of that is that they do not want to teach any other language. I asked, I went to a meeting one time and I asked and they said, "Well, if we teach Arabic, we have to teach Spanish and we have to teach Indian and Urdu… whatever those languages are, Kurd or whatever…. and part of it is racism too, because they want to preserve their English language. They do not want anything else taught in their schools.”

Her critique of the standing educational order does not exclude assimilation, to the contrary she is approving of becoming bi-cultural:

“It is not that I should split the kids in half or their mind in half. Now Arabic and then now go to English. I want [them] to be part of the American culture yet I do not want [them] to forget about our culture, our origin and where we come from, you know. Because the kids, one day along the road he is going to be a father and he has to teach his kids and the people around him about us. Even if he never goes back to the country, to Lebanon, Iran, or I mean Iraq, Jordan any Arabic country. So, he has to have a clear idea what is going on around him…where did he come from.”

Clearly, Jamila’s approach is multi-cultural in nature. She is aware of a subtractive operating socio-educational paradigm in her setting, but she is unwilling to conform to it. Jamila wants acceptance for who she is, as someone offering riches to the American mosaic, and not someone who, denuded of culture, jumps into the American “melting pot” to melt away, absorbing the majority’s characteristics at face value.

In a follow-up conversation on these issues in June of 2004, Jamila offered her apprehensions regarding Arab American presence in the Dearborn community, as well as across America, in light of the changes resulting from the events of September 11, 2001.
However, despite her apprehensions about a future free of racist attacks and characterisations, Jamila still believes in the necessity of valuing her ethnic background, and working towards its preservation as its only contribution to the American national character.

Abdu, a native-born Dearborn Arab American in his early forties, is a corporate professional and a father of three children. He was interviewed in mid-May, 2001 where he spoke of the importance of Arabic as an instrument of “sub-communication in the community,” or an adjunct tool to English in Dearborn. When he was growing up in the 1960s and 1970s, Arabic was completely the domain of home and the mosque, but now, “it has changed from just a home language to a language that is used everyday, you know, in this part of the city [east Dearborn] and community.” However, this progressive use of Arabic has garnered it some trouble, according to Abdu, who is proud to be a limited Arabic speaker, suggesting the greater community views it with apprehension for several reasons:

“They see it as negative in that they view the Arab Americans here are getting everything, plus some. And to them, I mean, they see the bilingual program as a catering tool. They see the issue of…you know changing…the public showers in gym, to having single stalls, whereas when we went to school it was all in the open. They see the introduction of Halal meat now in the school and in society, and you know a lot is happening quickly, and from their perspective they say we are getting everything that we have asked for, plus some. I don’t think they view it as a rich language or culture that they should be able to learn and understand, because if they understand our culture better, if they have a true grasp of the language, Arab Americans would be treated a lot nicer now….”

Abdu does not believe Arabic is welcomed in Dearborn and attributes this disregard to a lack of understanding on the part of the host society, noting,

“…this goes back decades really, they see us coming in, they view us as different group altogether. Albeit, it has gotten a lot better, but you still find that, you know, this stuff is out there—that [prejudice is] still out there.”
He believes this contempt for Arabs is due to ignorance and a lack of education among the members of society. Abdu, however, holds the Arab American community indictable for having an “ethnic pride” that may result in irking the majority group.

In terms of education, while he supports the bilingual education programme in Dearborn schools, he favours a limited approach that focuses mainly on English, noting, “They offer now at the high school level Arabic as a foreign language, like any other languages, so, I think, that is enough.” In his position, Abdu is content to have Arabic remain an adjunct tool of sub-communication, subordinated to English. In terms of the BBE programme, he observes that it has become a “cottage industry” of sorts, benefiting those who work in it, as well as the school system that receives funds from the State. He does agree however, that the programme benefits the students, as well as the parents, therefore, benefiting the greater community as a whole. Abdu observes that English is an empowering language for education and employment – agreeing with the majority’s view on the subject – but he disagrees with the established notion that Arabic is the other side of the coin and a disempowering language, suggesting that “…it is being made out to be [that way] now”.

Abdu observes that Arabic is held as a symbol of the community among its members, suggesting it has become a “rallying point”. He comments:

“Really, I see it as an attempt to exert our influence in the community, especially in the city, to show that we count, not only as residents, but also as a voting block, you know and… Living in Dearborn has taught Arab Americans a lot. It has taught them that, number one, Dearborn has a rich history of not being too kind to people of different races, or in our case, of a different faith. So, I think the rallying point is one point where the community members, the different Arab American organizations, the religious organizations can point to [in order] to help achieve gains in the city of Dearborn. And some of the gains really have been at the school level right now where we have a bilingual programme as really a long-term program.
Interestingly, Abdu recognises Arabic as a focal point of community activism at this juncture of the community’s history, serving to empower its members towards acquiring more political clout in a city that has been historically in the exclusive domain of whites. He observes Arabic as symbol and a tool—both elements of the paraphernalia of ethnic pride—noting that other minority groups have followed this route to political empowerment. He offers:

“I think it is more political now, too. We have seen other communities do this, so… and we are acting out a natural progression, like the Armenians have done, like the Jews have done, like the Irish have done…you know, it is something natural.”

Following his discourse closely, one notes his acceptance of the operating paradigm of “melting pot” assimilation, by announcing his belief that Arabs are white, despite the fact that they are viewed to be different. Abdu’s glossing over those issues suggests an ideological perspective that is closer to the majority’s view of the community than perhaps it is among the other members of the Arab American community, particularly the newcomers, as we have and continue to observe in other personal accounts. Nonetheless, while Jamila’s position, as portrayed above, may represent a majority point of view in the Arab American community, Abdu’s perspective offers in the least a minority position that is likely shared by those native-born Arab Americans who were reared and socialised within the context of a subtractive model of social assimilation.

Addressing Arabic pedagogy in the school system and community wide, he expresses his disappointment on hearing that some of those who teach Arabic in the schools are not appropriately trained. Having different specialities or being less than qualified, suggests the need to employ teachers who have advanced degrees in Arabic
pedagogy, rather than those without such credentials. Asked his views regarding the
community’s response to this matter, Abdu comments:

“I think right now, it is a non-issue. They are just happy and satisfied that Arabic
is being taught without any regard to the actual level of Arabic, you are not seeing
a crying out to have a standard Qur’anic Arabic taught as opposed to the Lebanese
or Syrian or Palestinian dialect right now. I had my children enrolled in the
religious organisation Arabic school program, both the after school program at the
Islamic Institute and at the Saturday program.

“Really all they got out of it was how to read the opening chapter in the Qur’an,
and basic Arabic. Nothing really that will allow them to pursue learning Arabic as
a true language. I base that on watching the teachers in action. One, they are really
not qualified, they are just there, whomever wants to teach Arabic can teach
Arabic. Number two, the instructional delivery was very poor, yelling and
screaming instead of taking time to learn it gradually. And third thing, it was
expensive, for the education that they got, for the money, you know, it was not
used well.”

Abdu’s critique of Arabic pedagogy, and his insistence on providing a curriculum that is
wider than the parochial interests of religion and village-back-home attitudes, highlights a
variant of Arabic that is functional beyond the confines of Dearborn. Abdu stresses that
Arabic is being used in the community “as a symbol” and it is programmed to keep the
children “at bay, basically.” When asked about the purpose of learning Arabic if the goal
of mainstream community is to assimilate immigrants into American society, Abdu
argues it is a matter choice, adding:

“If they want to learn it for the Qur’an language—fine. For religion, Arabic is the
language of prayer… [and] of religious life. Also, Arabic now is going to be an
international language of business, and there are jobs in the Middle East now
available. There are programmes now where children are going off to camps in
Palestine, in Lebanon, two-week exchanges, where Arabic and learning Arabic
gives them an opportunity to work and live in a second market.”

Abdu observes the utility aspects of Arabic over sentiment. He wants a programme that is
flexible to varied needs of students, including gaining cultural competence in matter
relating to Arab customs and habits, but his priority is living in an English world. His advice to the community is to:

“…Emphasise the importance of learning English to not only to help succeed in society, but also to act as a role model here for the city, this way if emphasis is on learning in English this will help break the barriers that exist with the non-Arabs and the Arabs. For example, a lot of religious manuals if you will, books, are in Arabic, there are translated information available, but if you walk into a mosque now and pick up a pamphlet about that particular mosque, that information is strictly in Arabic. If we had that information translated, religious letters or something translated, this way if a non-Arab happens to walk into a mosque, and wants to learn more about it, there will be brochures about it in English emphasising or talking about religion as a whole so that they can understand it. I mean that is a part. I think this is happening now with the newsletters that are going out now and with the newspapers that are being generated now, but I still think that is…just an attempt. I mean, put something out in writing to help attract, but it is not really focused. Most of the information is…the real information is still in Arabic as opposed to English…”

Abdu’s counsel is to push forward the wheels of assimilation and hasten a greater involvement of Arab Americans in the mainstream of American life to break out from what he observes to be a parochial, immigrant mentality. Again, he focuses on learning lessons from the experience of other non-Arab, non-Muslim immigrants:

“…You know the Jewish experience is a well-known experience. The Armenian experience is mainly recent—from the 1900s to the present. But also I do…I also think that religion also plays a major role. Because the Jews have been for the most part accepted wherever they went. So, for them, you know, being a Jew and being a victim of Holocaust led them to be accepted, ok, you know, accepted out of, you know, out of sympathy for the most part, for the Holocaust. The Armenians have been accepted because of the faith, you know, mainly, they are Christians. And you see, too, that the communities here, if you look at the Arab American Christian community and our [Arab American Muslim] community, the Arab American Christians have had it a lot easier to…in terms of assimilating then the Arab American Muslims have, because of their religious orientations, they did not have to change names, they did not have to hide their identity. Whereas the early Arab American Muslims had to change names, had to change identity, had to deny a lot that they are Muslims. That plays a part, it really does…[in impacting the community].
Although he understands that they are more acceptable “others” to the majority in the American mainstream, Abdu thinks that Muslim Arab Americans can learn from these immigrants groups concerning how to manage their “different-ness” from general society. He recognises, however, Islam and its associated elements have had an impact on the image of the community, noting:

“Islam really was not accepted here because of fear, because of ignorance, ok, and it was viewed as very foreign religion due to Hollywood’s portrayal of it, due to the Arab-Israeli conflicts that viewed the Arabs as the ugly oppressors and terrorists. That is why Arab Americans here, you know, in the 50s and 60s really did not go out and say, “hi, I am Arab American,” they had to hide. It was hidden a lot, it was hidden. Hence, you had a lot of name changes from Mohammad to Mike, Ali to Al—all that took place. I mean we have come a long way. And now if you look at the rosters at schools, non-Arab teachers know how to say Khalil and Jaafar and Husain and any type of Arabic name. Now they did not have to say, ok, this is an Arabic why don’t we change Kifah to Casper, you know, so that has changed a lot.”

Abdu commented that in recent years the community has made a lot of improvements in terms of gaining some power and achieving a high profile in the city, especially in the domain of education. However, he thinks more focus and resources should be placed on education in order to safeguard a better future, believing it will not only benefit Arab American children but also the non-Arab American mainstream. He asserts that the educational process will greatly assist in the assimilation project, leading to more acceptance:

“Plus it will also lessen the ignorance that exists out in the non-Arab community. You know, they enjoy our foods, they enjoy our bakeries and our pastries, and our meats and all that, but they still don’t see us overall as residents [like] them, they really don’t! There are still barriers out there.”

Despite his optimism, Abdu regards the extant multiculturalism as nothing more than a “convenient multiculturalism”, suggesting that racism is a factor that cannot be discounted.
In a follow-up conversation with Abdu in June 2004, he suggests that the events of the previous three years have had a devastating effect on the political and social standing of the community. The improvements that have been made on the political front have been neutralised due to the growing antagonisms on the part of the larger community, which conflates Arab Americans into the fold of the perceived enemies of the United States.

6.4.3 Teachers

Seven current and former Arabic as Foreign Language (AFL) teachers, Qahtan, Dalida, Murad, Nur, Raisa, Robert, and Shawkat, and four Bilingual Bi-cultural Education (BBE) teachers, Mahmoud, Lama, Raisa, and Robert were interviewed for this research project. In the main, AFL teachers complained of a lack of suitable resources to pursue their mission as instructors of Arabic, suggesting that different standards are applied for teaching Arabic than other foreign languages. They also complained of a sense of “devaluation of Arabic”, a theme that emerged repeatedly among other interviewees. There were suggestions that Arabic is viewed as “not an important class [or course of study].”

It was observed that for the schools’ administration, Arabic is a “token” language and a “public relations tactic” designed to quiet down any claims for more programming than it was engineered to promote Arabic language and culture. As one stakeholder remarked, “it is all lip service”, pointing to the programme’s lack of support by actual resources or free public will. In other words, Arabic is taught in the two public high schools in order to ward off claims of civil rights discrimination and potential law suits,
and not because Arabic, Arabs or Arab Americans are accepted or welcomed in their Dearborn milieu.

AFL and BBE teachers appear to be frustrated and disillusioned: they speak with a sense of having to fight a losing battle. They continue to teach because they are committed to the “calling”, believing in the benefits of teaching Arabic and in teaching students of Arab backgrounds, but they feel they lack the necessary support from all concerned parties—whether the school establishment, the community and/or the parents—to achieve better results. Although it was remarked that the younger, more recent teacher hires are more accepting of other sub-cultures, including Arab Americans, nonetheless, racism and stereotyping remain a strong barrier among the teachers, especially in light of the tragedy of September 11, 2001. While issues of race, stereotyping and discrimination existed in Dearborn and its schools long before the terrorist attacks, however, the event of so-called 9/11 heightened issues of racism and discrimination for people of Arab and Muslim extractions. Thus, automatic linkages of Arabs and Muslims, conflated and undistinguished to terrorism and acts of violence, have burdened the Arab American community in Dearborn, spilling over into the schools and among teachers. So much so, that a sense of anxiety has emerged among the majority population towards anything Arab and Muslim, and therefore, by extension, Arabic is viewed as a threat. One interviewee, Taysir, comments, 

“Actually what had happened [post-9/11] is that Arabic has become a threat. When you speak Arabic, it looks [to non-Arabs] like you are carrying a bomb in your hand. You feel that when are in a public place when speak Arabic. It is a threat. It is a negative attitude. You feel [it] from your [non-Arab colleagues], from people you are working with. After 9/11, the Arabic language became a threat to your existence [as a native speaker]. I would say, it becomes more safe to run away from you history, you language, and seek refuge in the English language—no matter how poorly you speak it, but don’t dare to speak it [Arabic]
in the workplace because maybe you would be losing your jobs and put yourself in a non-comfortable [i.e., hostile] environment.”

Shawkat is a highly educated and experienced teacher, who affirmed that while on assignment at Fordson, a place he regarded as the most hospitable to Arab Americans in the city, he consistently felt alienated from his non-Arab colleagues. He believes it was due to his ethnic and subject matter background. “You have to be better to be equal, but you will never be considered their equal,” Shawkat opines, paraphrasing Rev. Jesse Jackson, an African American civil rights activist.

Murad, a veteran teacher, recalls how he was treated in the building when he began teaching:

“I had hard time communicating with the teachers, even talking to someone because they all left you and deserted you. When you used to walk in the room and say, ‘good morning’, either you get no answer or sometimes they say ‘what is good about it’… But soon enough my way of getting close to the teachers is to make them realize that you are working for the kids. You are here to help these kids to learn grammar, English and fit in the American society and be a good citizen. Using their own native language in order to bring it back and teach English. And this is all politics! I mean if you really look at education, it is 95% politics! Letting these kids learn, not holding them back till they learn English so they can learn the other [subjects]. It is politics! Freedom to all language and then bring them back to English. And then 5-6-7-8-10 years, these kids are not speaking their own language at all, they are ashamed to speak their own language.”

Murad is not happy that the kids’ ethnic identities are drained out of them, leaving them to want “…to be identified with the American [white] culture.” He recognises a culture of education in Dearborn schools that is basically anti-native language and pro-English, resulting in the promotion of student alienation from their backgrounds. He adds:

“We cannot separate politics from education. All educators, administration, board of education, they are all [about] politics. They play politics. And the rule of education is overly politicised. I would say it is 5% education value, and the rest is propaganda, and information and public relation. Politicians are over
We have to come to the needs, what are the needs of these kids, and we have to meet their needs no matter what.”

In regards to the social standing of Arabic in the schools, Murad notes that there was a time when Arabic was nearly completely prohibited from use in the schools:

“speaking Arabic was a [discipline matter]…kids would be sent down to the office or disciplined for speaking Arabic on the field…. I don’t think the administration really eased off on this, or they just prefer that the kids just to speak English…they are playing politics.”

Lama, another highly credentialed teacher, recalls her experience as a newcomer student in the late 1970s:

“Some of us who did not know the [English] language, and we had to speak in Arabic… they would call us, just passing by in the hallway, they would call us camel jockeys go home, if you want to speak Arabic go speak Arabic in your country. They did not look at us as part of the building. We had a lot of problems especially the girls in the gym. We were not used to the cold weather, first of all, coming from a very Mediterranean weather to run outside during snow time—below zero. And not being able in the gym … just forget our privacy, in terms of we don’t want to take our clothes [off] in front of other girls. They made fun of us and they used to call us names. They had no curtain in the shower to protect you…not protect you…your morality [modesty] as a person….”

Lama is thankful that things have improved for the kids since those times, suggesting there are more caring individuals and more academic and educational support programmes but there remains some issues of concern:

“Administration stresses the fact to all teachers that Arabic is not to be spoken, you know, it is an English school you should be… at the mainstream level. However, at the bilingual level, Arabic is a basic component, is a fundamental component of our teaching methodology.”

But, there are those who don’t approve of this approach, especially among the “English only, white teachers” who promote a different mentality. Lama spoke of not only devaluation of the bilingual education but bilingual educators who were viewed as less than professional despite the fact they received more training and more studies than
regular teachers. Although her workplace, a secondary school, is much less hostile to her ethnic background than it was when she was a student, she feels that much of the animosities of the past still persist.

“Sometimes I feel, I get to a point, you feel, they look at you…oh you are the stranger, you are coming from another country, you came in and took someone else’s job, but they don’t look at you as that you have potential, you are extremely good, you have it and they don’t. They don’t understand, they don’t see behind the colour. You know…. They don’t see beyond the colour. They just see you, ‘oh you are an Arab’.”

Nur, another teacher, echoes Lama’s feelings, stating that she and her Arab American colleagues are not welcomed at school:

“I don’t feel we are welcomed except by very few people, very few people, and not from everybody.

“…By the way, it did not start after September 11th[2001], it was like that before. I don’t want to blame it on September 11th. Some teachers were kind of rude prior to September 11th, saying disrespectful comments, sometimes in front of me. I did not want to complain.

“…This tension, you feel it all the time. When they see you in the hallway, they ignore you all the time. You say hello and they don’t answer you, what kind of attitude is that? Or when the kids also tell you they have the same feeling, this is an attitude that makes me feel uncomfortable. But I keep my distance now, I go teach and do my job and leave.”

A teacher of Arabic, Nur believes in her calling:

“I have a mission and I don’t care if I am not appreciated by anybody. If I can reach 1%, 2%, the more percentage the better, if I can reach these students and teach them the Arabic language in a very sophisticated way, if they can learn it and use it in the future, if I encounter one of my students 10 years from now and they have a good position because they speak Arabic as a second language, then I have reached my goal. It is not about putting words together to make a sentence….

“It is true that when my colleagues ignore me, it does bother me, but teaching the culture allows me to validate myself and keeps me going. It does not stop me from doing what I want to do and fight for what I am doing. If they don’t appreciate it, it is too bad for them, because this [is] their attitude, their mentality, and it does not do me any harm.”
But one has to question whether it is not doing any harm, particularly to students who are of Arab American background, given the power differential extant between teachers and students.

Nur suggests that her building is divided between Arab and non-Arab:

“We are a segregated school. If you look at all my students, most the Arabic kids are taking the Arabic language as second language and you hardly see Arabic kids taking French, German, or Spanish anymore. You see them, but not a lot. Most of them, when they take second language, they go for the Arabic language. Because when they go to the counsellors, they tell them…and, their parents tell them also, take the Arabic language. But American parents, I don’t believe they are encouraging their kids at all in Dearborn to take Arabic as second language. Yes, there is a kind of segregation.”

What can the community do to support the AFL programme? Nur answers:

“I don’t know. Nothing really. Maybe it is my fault, I don’t do enough to promote my work. Maybe I should take the initiative and do something. Like attend meetings or go to ACCESS and ask them to do something for the kids. I don’t know if there is any cultural programs for the kids. I know they have for adults, like poetry, but not for the kids. I feel very limited, there is not much out there. It is a difficult issue. Look at the French teachers for example, every year they go somewhere. I worked so hard to go to Egypt [for a field trip with the students] but I ended up going nowhere. I tried saving money and raising funds but we went nowhere. I know these trips are expensive but some parents are wealthy and can afford it. But I got no support and ended up cancelling the trip.”

Blaming herself for the lack of support, Nur is taking upon herself too much responsibility for structural problems extant within and outside the school system.

However, she recognises that Arabic is a devalued language and discipline:

“… [Arabic is supported] by the Arabic teachers only…and some parents. They look at what the kids are learning and what they are accomplishing by the end of semester. They sit down with them and find out they can read certain words and understand them and they say ‘wow’! Those parents really appreciate the efforts; these are the parents that really care for what their kids are learning. Others don’t care or value the Arabic language.”

Nur expresses anger concerning the use of the Arabic programme as “dumping ground” for the Arab American students:
“It feels very segregated. Kids need to learn English and computers. They need to be sent to English or bilingual classes, they need the support to learn. Sending them to Arabic classes only will not help them. They would be bored and would not learn. They get frustrated and it makes me angry. I am not an English teacher. They should be sent to appropriate classes. They can get better help in other classes. I talked to … [the principal] about it.

But, Nur said she didn’t ask for any help anymore because it does not come “from the heart. They make it sound like an obligation and I don’t like to do things at this level.” She has arrived to the conclusion that her class is dumping ground for students who are not counselled well regarding their academic programmes, rather than advised to pursue a liberal education in its truest sense—all because they do not value them enough to do right by them. Although she doubted and faulted herself for not being active enough on behalf of Arabic as cause, she recognises that the pre-requisite parental support for a prosperous and successful programme is not there, despite “lip service”. She is cognisant of her alienation within the school setting from the administration and from her colleagues because of their racist attitudes. Ultimately, her fight is against social segregation that is the result of a culture that refuses to accept the “Other” as a mirror of the self.

Similarly Raisa, complained about a culturally hostile environment in which she and others work. She was hired as a teacher of Arabic, but she felt limited competence to teach the language. She criticised her hiring as a poor practice, suggesting that the act in of itself posed a form of devaluation of the discipline and its constituent students. Although a certified teacher in an area unrelated to Arabic, ultimately, Raisa left the programme because felt she was not serving the programme or her students well. Speaking Arabic does not make a person qualified to teach the language, she said, adding, they would not hire someone who is unqualified to teach Spanish, but for Arabic
anyone may do. Raisa is aware that there is no certification process as yet for Arabic in
the State of Michigan, but that should not be a deterrent for administration to hire
competent individuals who have actually studied Arabic at the university level at the very
least. The un-orthodox way her hiring as an Arabic teacher suggests to her a lack of
respect and commitment to Arabic as a serious discipline.

Raisa also faults parents for not taking Arabic seriously. Those whom she taught
expected to achieve easy grades because of their limited exposure to Arabic at home,
adding that there were parents who advocated for their students on this basis, too. To her,
this was a clear sign of parental devaluation of Arabic as a serious school discipline.
Raisa is happy that this has changed somewhat with other teachers who have come in and
professionalised the programme after her leaving. But, during her stewardship, Raisa, like
other respondents, did not feel the programme was supported by the school
administration. The programme exists as “a favour to show somebody [the Arab
American community] that ‘look at us, we care, we are offering Arabic’. It is just PR
[public relations]!”

Raisa stated that AFL and BBE were perceived to be the same thing in her school.
Teachers and others could not, or did not want to, comprehend that bilingual education
was a form of English as a second language educational programme, while Arabic was
part of the foreign language department. This lumping together is a sign to her that the
devaluation is the result of stigmatising the constituent group the programmes serve.

Her Arabic-teaching colleagues regard Dalida as a very competent teacher. When
she was hired, Dalida recalls her pre-employment interview in which the conversation led
to issues pertaining to an acceptable English language culture that made “… [me] feel
alienated and it made me feel this word ‘foreign’ language had to change to ‘world’
language.” She remarks that it was “othering” and devaluing her language and ethnic
background.

Within the walls of the school, Dalida believes she has the support of her (new)
principal and from teachers who are of Arab origins, but beyond that there are very few
non-Arab teachers who understand her educational mission. Dalida does not regard the
support offered to her at school, as it stands, as one of choice, rather by necessity,
attributing this to the number of Arab Americans students in the school. She affirms that
she and her colleagues take Arabic as a discipline very seriously; however, she
understands that there are those who are confused or ambivalent about AFL:

“I take it very seriously. Some students take it seriously. Others don’t even care
but they are there because their parents want them to. Other staff members, who
may teach other foreign languages, like Spanish and French, they probably don’t
understand why we teach Arabic and they [the students] are already of Arabic
[sic.] origin and they feel since they are already Arabic why don’t they take
French or Spanish.

“You learn Arabic because you want to learn Arabic and because you want to
maintain your heritage and culture through learning Arabic, which they don’t
seem to understand. We do not have a conflict but you…but we have that feeling
coming from a lot of staff members that they [the students] are taking Arabic
[when they should not]. Look, [the staff might say] …they [students] are born in
America, they may die in America and they still want to maintain their Arabic
language? As if we [staff members] care! But, yes, we [Arab Americans] do
care.”

Asked her viewpoint regarding why non-Arab staff members do not care about heritage
maintenance, Dalida offers her interpretation:

“They don’t care because …they feel that anybody who lives in America has to
only learn English because English is superior, as well, as America itself, so all
the third world [peoples] have to stay inferior and the only way to keep them
there, well behind us, is by suppressing that language that they are trying to keep.
You provide them with a new identity, which is the English-based identity …,”
thereby co-opting any potential for future challenge to the over-riding ideology that
animates the host society. But Arabic is problematic in the eyes of the majority because
of its associations:

“Well, with Arabic, it is a higher degree [of suspicion] because of the Middle East
problem and because of the propaganda [media coverage] and because of the
preconceived idea that we are terrorists regardless of what we are fighting for. …
It is because of the political situation in the Middle East...as simple as that.
Probably once the Arab countries agree on that, so-called peace process, maybe
they will start liking us a little bit more.”

It must be noted that this interview was conducted in June 2001, weeks before the attacks
on the World Trade Center, complicating the situation for Arab Americans on grand
scale.

Dalida claims receiving moral support from the students’ parents not so much
because of her teaching position; rather she marshalled her previous community activism
in service of AFL. However, practically speaking, Dalida indicates she does not get a lot
support. Without real support from the community or from the school system, Dalida
suggests she and her AFL colleagues are “swimming alone”, chartering a future for
Arabic in the school district.

Dalida is committed to her ethnic nationalism. She observes the teaching of
Arabic as an important task in her life, offering synopsis of her beliefs:

“It means I exist as an Arab. It means that I am aware of the political trouble in
the Middle East. I am aware of what is happening around me [in this country]. It
means that my culture is still the richest. It means that I am able to teach my
students Arabic— not my students, my kids, my children—and my children will
do the same. It’s existence. If I don't exist through my language it means I do not
exist anymore. I am like second generation or third generation of American and
that kills me. I want to multiply. I don't want to fade.”

Dalida expresses concern over the issue of professional preparation of Arabic
teachers, noting that there are teachers out there who can do the work but are not
certified. She supports a movement towards certification because, while the school district is obligated to hire certificated teachers, they need to be competent in the target language as well as methodology, suggesting, in the long run, this issue will determine whether Arabic survives as a foreign language in the public school setting.

“Unless we all swim in the same ocean, we end up swimming alone and the program will fade day after day and there will be no one interested [in the programme] anymore.”

To her mind, the AFL programme’s best defence against extinction is strong professional teachers and a good curriculum that can withstand neglect and assault from outside. An example of such “assault” on the programme is the guidance counsellors’ disinterest in AFL. While some do not care at all about it, others have actively encouraged their counselees not to take Arabic, according to reports from students Dalida has received. Although unwilling to characterise it as antagonism towards Arabic, she recognise it as a “structural problem” in the general culture that results in the devaluation of Arabic. She points out, however, the ultimate beneficiary of her work is:

“…America. It is America. We are the ones [benefiting, too.]. … [But,] we are teaching them about who we are and what we are. We are not dictating it on them but they have to deal with us on a daily basis so they are the ones learning from us.

“You know, be it whatever—language, culture, history, literature, people, we are teaching this whole country a lesson …in [cultural] survival.”

Dalida and the other respondents are concerned about the potential demise of Arabic due to a perceived improper handling on the administration’s part, and because of a general culture that does not value any language other than English, let alone one as distant and foreign as Arabic; a language that has a lot of socio-cultural “baggage” of bias and stereotyping attached to it. Although there is limited support from the community,
the school system and the general culture of the setting, AFL teachers, in the main, view their work as a bulwark against culture-loss among Arab American youth. While others in the greater community devalue their work in a myriad of ways, they maintain their programme as best as they can with limited resources and in a state of salutary neglect.

6.4.4 Community Members

The voices of community members portrayed in this section include all those who are, in one form or another, a stake-holding individual in Dearborn’s educational system, including the teaching and learning of Arabic. Thus, community members should be taken to mean such individuals as residents of the city, who may or may not be parents of children in the schools or children taking Arabic classes, or school staff personnel other than teachers involved in the BBE or AFL programs, such as clerical support staff, language support paraprofessionals (i.e. teachers’ aides) and school administrators, as well as city wide community activists. The reason these people are brought together and combined in this section is for the purpose of protecting identities from exposure (especially for those that work for the school district), and because, in the broadest sense possible, they represent the community.

Mary, a leading community member and long time activist, indicates that Arabic is an important element for the community because

“it is the basis for how one defines oneself as being Arabic [sic.]. I have been told on many occasions that I, born to parents of Lebanese and Syrian ancestry, am not Arabic because I don’t speak it. It is also the means for which Arabic culture and history is perpetuated [in the United States].”

Mary ponders if “…Arabs, as human beings, are not welcomed in the greater community, how can we hope to have our language accepted?” She adds:
“For the larger community, Arabic is frequently seen as a means of secret communication or speaking in a code language. Because the larger community has an extremely limited knowledge of Arabs and of their language, they are fearful when they hear it spoken in their presence because they think Arabs are talking about them [towards doing them harm].”

Mary notes that Arabic might eventually gain legitimacy in the eyes of the host society:

“Perhaps with Arabs being labelled as a legitimate minority [in official circles], their language will not simply be relegated to the miscellaneous category of languages included in ESL programmes.”

Mary, a third generation Arab American, offers a diverse perspective on the issue of assimilation, suggesting that it may not be the goal of the community, adding:

“…I know there are many who want that to happen, but when one asks just what is American society or culture, it is difficult to answer without including all the different cultures that constitute it. That means that as their numbers increase so does the influence of Arabic culture. All one has to do is look at Dearborn as a microcosm for American society as a whole. Arabs have had more of an influence on Dearborn and its school system than has been the reverse and it has not had to give up its language or heritage to do so.”

Despite her hesitancy regarding assimilation, Mary recognises that “many” want assimilation to happen. The question is how and what form it takes. Clearly, from her viewpoint, a multicultural approach towards assimilation is espoused, which supports the notion of an ethnic mosaic that is America, which Arab Americans form a part.

Hana, a first generation Arab American, occupies a prominent professional role in the school system. She supports the preservation of Arabic in the community, opining:

“The Arabic language is important to me because it’s my native language. It carries within its walls all the traditional values and characteristics of a whole rich nation that influenced the World, and specifically, the Western civilization with its many significant contributions.

“It’s important for every Arab American and the community because it’s the only hope that continues the development of children’s primary language and learning about the traditional values, culture, and religion.”
Hana, is a long-time resident of the city, and has reared several children who attended the public schools. She suggests that,

“Learning Arabic will help students to assimilate into the American society. It will help students to come out of the cultural shock and feel more confident to deal with the new American system and establish a role for themselves. If schools establish a great sense of community, parents will assist their children to assimilate into the new American society.”

Hana is accepting of an assimilation model of interaction within a multicultural perspective, whereby the minority uses its background as an asset to be deposited in the national pot. Interestingly however, Hana’s view presupposes that there is some identity or values conflict ensuing as a result of an Arab/non-Arab interaction, resulting into a “cultural shock” that is ameliorated through parental coaching. Although no evidence was presented to support the claim, it is nevertheless an all too recurring theme of conflict that characterises youth and their elders, or Arab versus non-Arab, while never explaining in detail those issues.

Asked her view of the AFL programme, Hana opines:

“Arabic as an academic program is not being strongly supported in our district. The reason is that we have people who make decisions and are not educators [referring to the elected members of the Board of Education, who wield funding and policy power]. Their decisions are biased and not based on research or [sound] educational [principles].”

Hana’s assessment goes to the heart of the problem: the focus of the blame for the lack of a better programmer lies in the absence of educational leadership that steer it to better efficacy. Hana believes the beneficiaries of the AFL programme are the whole community:

“The beneficiaries of learning Arabic are the whole community, students who are learning the language, parents, and the whole society. The reason is that the bilingual students will graduate with two languages and be able to serve a larger number of people in their future careers and make a great impact on society.”
Hana’s take on Arabic learning is functional and utilitarian. This is a theme that had emerged in the focus groups and among other interviewees, suggesting a widespread approach towards Arabic and its value in the community. Regarding the purpose of maintaining Arabic in the community, the school worker also notes,

“The Arabs who live away from their Arabic countries are concerned about losing their culture, their language, and their traditional values. They are so protective so they encourage their children to learn Arabic, especially when public schools, teaches a foreign language, they prefer their children to choose Arabic as a foreign language.”

In Hana’s opinion, the Arab American community is an immigrant society with shallow roots in Dearborn. She echoes the majority’s view of Arab Americans, while ignoring historical facts regarding Arab American presence in Dearborn for several generations. Ultimately, Hana is interested in maintaining Arabic as a tool of socio-economic empowerment that can be used in support of the assimilation project, while Arabic remains a secondary tool for the preservation of “traditional values, culture and religion… for the Arabs who live away from their Arabic countries”, as she had proposed.

Ihsan is a second generation Arab American who works in the school system and is a mother of several children, some of whom had graduated. She also takes a utilitarian approach towards Arabic, suggesting the teaching/learning of the language may assist in the communication gap between immigrants and non-immigrants at the service-provision level across the city. However, she does not feel any immediate attachment to Arabic, perfectly content with her mastery of English and her limited competence in Arabic. Nonetheless, Ihsan is happy about having Arabic in school:
“It is about time! When I was growing up, I did not have the opportunity that my children have now. It is a widely spoken language with a beautiful history and a very rich culture that should have been shared a long time ago.”

Her happiness, however, is for having choice, not necessarily for Arabic, per se. She recognises the connexion with culture and history, but from a distance. There is no passion in her support; the language might as well be Japanese, which she may support for being another option. When queried regarding the community’s “insistence” on maintaining Arabic in Dearborn through the school system, Ihsan, unabashedly states:

“I am an Arab American and I do not insist on maintaining Arabic in the schools, but in the upper levels of education, one year of a foreign language is required for graduation, so why not give our children their own language to excel at and maintain.”

No doubt, Ihsan is sincere in her support of choice for Arab American students—however, her distancing is suggestive of ambivalence towards Arabic that is a hallmark of Arab American alienation offered in the face of mounting animosity. Ihasan, in fact, unwittingly points to this phenomenon when assessing the degree to which Arabic is welcomed in the Dearborn context, addressing her experience at the workplace:

“For a while, I did [think Arabic is welcome], but, after 9/11 I have noticed a change in moods of people toward Arabic in all aspects, i.e., people, culture and language. I feel that people get very offended when the Arabic language is spoken in a professional setting.”

Queried on her views concerning assimilation in the community, Ihsan states:

“Assimilation is a welcome fact, but one still needs his native language to communicate and most importantly, to be proud of. Your native language is of great importance to you and your descendants, but you must also be fully equipped with the dominant language. Learning another language will in no way demean your native language.”
Ihsan’s discourse supports the assimilation project, which can be understood to mean the absorption of the Arab community into the mainstream with whatever distinctive remarks it might choose to keep, provided it submits to the requisites of the “dominant language.”

Taysir, a first generation Arab American in his sixties and a leading member of the community, agrees with the view that, “the Arabic language is the country, the nation, the religion, the culture—it is everything for the people of the community,” hence the importance of preserving it. Unfortunately, it also represents something else for the non-Arab, host society:

“I don’t think the majority looks at it in a positive way. Nowadays Arabic is connected to Islam, Taliban, terrorism, and terrorists—as the mass media have described the religion, culture…. This [portrayal] does effect how people look at it.

“It is not a positive phenomenon in their minds. It goes back may be 40 to 50 years ago, but the culmination [of this antagonism] is what happened after 9/11 and in the aftermath of 9/11. Actually what happened is that Arabic has become a threat. When you speak Arabic, it looks like you are carrying a bomb in your hand. You feel that when you are in a public place when you speak Arabic. It is a threat. It is a negative attitude. You feel (it) from your colleagues, from people you are working with. After 9/11, the Arabic language became a threat to your existence [as a native speaker]. I would say, it becomes more safe to run away from your history, your language, and seek refuge in the English language—no matter how poorly you speak it, but don’t dare to speak it [Arabic] in the workplace because may be you would be losing your jobs and put yourself in a non-comfortable [hostile] environment.”

He further adds:

“The sad thing is that you can hide your tongue, but you cannot hide your face [meaning features]. I mean by that, as I said before, you [can] seek refuge in English, but still the moment they look at you, you are an Arab, you are Muslim, [therefore] you are a terrorist. Your face will say will say [announce] you are hiding that bomb of a language [i.e., the vehicle of your culture]. The people of the host society have become lately more hostile. Before 9/11 there was enmity under the skin, but after 9/11, the floodgates for those feelings of hate for Arabs that had been inhibited have opened. They came out strongly from co-employees. From personal experiences, I could say they became very hostile.
Despite his grave assessment of Arab presence in Dearborn, Taysir is not all too pessimistic, rather he is hopeful concerning the future and Arabic language learning in the schools, suggesting that he is happy that Arabic is offered in the schools because:

“You are the enemy of what you don’t know. If you are to teach Arabic in the context of the schools, you are getting people to know about us—that we are not a threat, that we have the same feelings they do, we have a history, language, art, music and that there is nothing to separate us from them save ignorance.”

He laments the fact that the majority of students in the AFL programme are of Arab background, but, ultimately, he believes that the teaching/learning of Arabic has economic benefits in addition to cultural value:

“[When] you identify with your language, you are identifying with ‘you’, with ‘yourself’. Parents are the beneficiaries, students are the beneficiaries, and the community as a whole is the beneficiary of teaching the Arabic language in the school setting.”

Queried regarding the importance of teaching Arabic in the public schools, Taysir notes that Arab Americans insist on having Arabic in the schools because it is allows them to be recognised:

“They do insist on teaching Arabic! Why do they insist? I want to identify with my culture. I want to be me. In that stage [at that moment] when I am me [fulfilled/actualised], allow me to say this: that [this position] will fill me with confidence, respect, honour, and it makes me feel important. I, too, identify with my language, with my people. I want to be myself in my language. I would say, it is the most important thing to let me be myself.”

Furthermore, he believes that by learning Arabic, Arab American kids, if not others too, will play the role of “intercultural liaisons” between the two communities, effecting understanding and working for change that results in mutual respect and honouring of each side. Taysir’s emphasis on the learning of Arabic as a tool for cultural exchange that can be spearheaded by Arab American reared children and future leaders is predicated on the notion of full assimilation in American society, albeit on a more equal footing. What
Taysir supports is a progressive partnership of equals, Arabs and non-Arabs, who are mutually respectful of each other, working towards a common cause in Dearborn’s microcosm of American society. Thus, here again it is observed that Arabic is becoming fetishised as a tool, not for cultural preservation per se, rather for cultural exchange. The key is his belief that non-Arabs can equally use the language towards the same ends. The substantial difference, however, is that Taysir is non-racist, non-ethno-centrist in his approach, willing to enter into cultural dialogue and exchange on equal terms, something that ultimately will find barriers in an American context that is structured on race, white ethno-centrism and alien bashing.

Taysir believes the schools system is trying to make Xerox copies of the American idealised self. Nonetheless, he notes,

“So, then why try to alienate me as a personality [an entity] that has different attributes. You are different from me, I am different from you. Let’s respect the difference. Let’s accept the other. I don’t want to be you. I am different: I am an “other person”. You have to respect me as the “other”, and I have to the same.

“In the essence of democracy is the acceptance of the other…. In our case, there is always a generalisation that paints everyone with the same colours. And that is sad. There is the ‘Other’ who is an extension of me. There is also the other who is the negation of me, and that is the Arab.”

Taysir advocates acceptance of the other in whom one sees the light of one’s self and not the shadow of an anti-self that is predicated on all that is different from “me”, an ideology based on an organising principle, if not a cornerstone, of American social life.

When asked to give his assessment of being Arab American in Dearborn, Taysir states:

“Are we treated as second degree [class] citizens? I cannot say [for certainty], but by drawing a conclusion [from the social evidence], I would say, you can conclude that we are [second class citizens].
For evidence of such an incendiary indictment, Taysir suggests that one such example of this socio-political pedigree is the state of AFL in Dearborn. He notes that historically more emphasis in placed on other foreign languages (e.g. French and German) in a city where at least fifty percent of the student population is of Arab descent, and yet there has been no substantial movement to press the State government into recognising Arabic as minority language and as teacher-“certifiable” language, adding: “[u]p to now, no [Dearborn AFL] teachers are certified in the art of teaching Arabic… They are doing it by the force of habit.” This theme of professionalisation and devaluation has also emerged in the interviews with teachers of Arabic who observed the issue to be of important significance. Taysir and the teachers have called for raising the professional bar and for instituting of state certification system for the Arabic language.

Taysir, who is active in school issues in the community, commented regarding the lack of viable involvement of parents in school affairs, noting the community’s minimal involvement in school matters, especially support of AFL programming, is largely due to cultural barriers, since they are not used to the principles of community involvement in the schools. Moreover, Taysir suggests members of the community do more to support the AFL programme, adding:

“They can do another thing. They would at least start participating in the schools’ activities. They could do that by meeting with the teachers, by conferences with teachers, students and parents. Regarding AFL teachers, we could improve the AFL programme by making the AFL teachers part of a broader cultural environment and strategy that would give a lot of support to Arabic in the schools.”

As for the school administration, they can improve their involvement by hiring “professional [certified] teachers… [by] get[ting] more materials, and answer[ing] any demands from the teachers of AFL that is to benefit students and of the Arabic discipline in the school. I don’t see that happening!”
Taysir, who is also a school staff member, notes that generally speaking, Arabic is not welcomed in the broader school community. This became even more evident after the event of 9/11. He explains this phenomenon by suggesting that in the public mindscape Arabic is considered the language of Islam, and:

“Islam and Muslims were accused of responsibility for the catastrophe of 9/11. There is a sector of the broader community that identifies Islamic radicalism with Arabs. If you are speaking Arabic someplace, you will be viewed negatively—as if it is against the law! The larger community views Arabic negatively after 9/11.”

Essentially, Taysir believes that Arabic is identified with Arabs, while Arabs are identified with Islam, and Islam is identified with terrorism, and terrorism is targeted as the enemy of America. Therefore, Americans of Arab descent, who are conflated with the Arabs overseas, are the enemy without any distinction or differentiation.

Debra, an administrator at an elementary building who considers herself an ally of the children of the Arab American community, was interviewed in June 24, 2003 to get her sense of what has went on in the community since the terrorist events. She recounts how parents in her majority Arab American school reacted to the devastation of the 9/11 Tragedy:

“The response of the parents to the beginning of the day’s events on 9/11 was predictable in that their first reaction was to gather up their children and head home. Some chose to do so simply out of fear, others because they wanted to be the ones who explained the tragedy to their children. I never had the feeling that the parents were concerned that the school staff would not take care of their children, just that whether it be civil unrest or war, as a natural reaction, families cling to one another.

“The following weeks were full of student questions and much need for reassurance in terms of safety. Some families began to fear retribution for the act, which would affect their families still overseas, but this calmed down with time. Still, it was apparent that adults and children alike felt as if they were indefinitely adrift on sea of the unknown.”
Despite her poetic rhetoric and positive take on the events in her school, Debra publicly recognises the precarious situation in which her stake-holding community found itself. She organized activities to allow students “…to express compassion through a variety of activities designed to demonstrate concern and empathy for all those affected by the disaster.” However, she declares:

“Many teachers were surprisingly ignorant about the history and culture of the Middle East, so this may have served us well by creating the necessity to learn. I, also, feel that more parents began to come to school to just visit, although I have no data to support that. Although the number of PTA [Parent Teachers Association] did not rise, the involvement of Parents in school activities occurring outside the school day has increased.

“… One result of 9/11 may be greater interest by and presence of parents. Teachers became learners. …As I interact with students daily, my gut feeling is that much of their frustration, anxiety, anger and fears are generated from the sense that they have little or no control in their own lives.”

Shielded by her own whiteness, privilege and power, Debra, who is clearly a liberal-minded individual, glosses over the issues, spinning folly into virtue. Although the Arab American parents are not seemingly invested in the school at the beginning, the events of 9/11 drew them into the schools in order to retrieve and later to protect their children from harm during a time when Arabs, Muslims and other associated people were being targeted in America for their guilt by relationship. Yet, she appears oblivious to the fear that produced this seeming rise in parental involvement. Also, equally alarming is her admission of her teachers’ ignorance of Arabs, their history, culture and the Middle East—a staff that educates a school populated by a majority of Arab American students.

Rather, she observes her teachers’ ignorance in a positive light, since, now, they will engage in learning in order to better understand their students. One has to wonder why did it take such a long time and so much devastation for Debra’s teachers to get
motivated to learn about their students backgrounds. Lastly, she shares her evaluation that her students’ issues ensue from lack of control in their lives, however, she does not explore that avenue, shielding herself with platitudes, and suggesting that, “…We need to embrace the concept of demonstrating that we value the children by taking the time with them and for them.” Thus, ultimately, Debra and most of those who consider themselves allies of Arab American children will shield behind their comfortable lives, pleading innocence and goodness, while their students pay a price in the form of ignorance visited upon them by teachers, well-meaning or otherwise, and while their lives in their formative years are moulded, transformed, and fortified with ideas that may alienate them from themselves.

Stacey is another white administrator, early in her career at the secondary level. She, too, considers herself a supporter of students, who preaches multicultural acceptance and tolerance. Aware of the Fordson and Dearborn high school experience, she agreed to an interview June 12, 2001. Liberal minded and staff-centric in her approach, Stacey had joined the secondary institution less than five years earlier. Queried about her views of offering Arabic at a Dearborn public school setting, Stacey affirmed her approval, stating:

“I think it is really necessary. I mean I think it is really important. I think at first, it kind of surprised me because I have never heard of that [AFL], you know, when I first came to Fordson, but everything was new three years ago when I came. I think it makes a whole lot of sense to have students have the ability to learn, that from which they come. And I know that is true in my own life too, for my own family, so I value that.

“Students who are in Fordson, who live in an Arabic community, surrounded by Arabic people, who are bilingual, it seems to me, it is important for them to have that literacy as well. I mean, a lot of kids who are taking Arabic at Fordson, I think speak Arabic or a dialect [of Arabic], but by learning it as a subject and becoming literate in it, at least on a level, I think it is important for them in terms of developing truly who they are and that from which they come. To make
choices from themselves because our students are caught. They are caught between two cultures and Fordson is unique that way.”

Stacey’s worldview assumes that AFL learners in school are bilingual, therefore, already having experience with Arabic, and that their learning is for the purpose of cultivating a degree of literacy in the language. She supports AFL because she believes that it helps such students understand their backgrounds – and therefore find themselves – in order to make choices and resolve outstanding issues:

“But I think, there is a unique aspect of it for students who may be first generation or from some place else or growing up in a community that is bilingual. Now you take that one step further in the community of East Dearborn, which is Arabic predominantly, and so the culture is manifest even more than it would be like Fordson. The Arabic culture there is pervasive…because it is the main one there and so people carry the tradition a lot, the traditions of the cultures a lot more than may be true in some other communities, at least from my experience. And so, these kids become caught, and I do not mean that in a negative necessarily, I am just saying, I see in them a unique experience because they come from a culture that is extremely conservative in terms of what is allowed for them socially, what is expected of them in terms of their families, the relationships they have with each other, the relationships they have with adults, the decisions they make in their lives and yet they are growing up in a country where a lot of those things are decided very differently by many of the other members or Americans, you know, it is decided and the media is giving them all kinds of different…, as well as people they come into contact with in school. So they definitely are getting mixed signals from that from which they come and are surrounded by, on the one hand, and on the other hand, that within which they live as well, whether it is at school or through other people.

Clearly, Stacey believes Arab American youth, in addition to the angst of the teen years, are in turmoil due to their variant cultural backgrounds, particularly if they are first generation. In this, she, like many of her peers, assumes a conflict exists in the minds and lives of Arab American students regarding their Arab ethnicity and American citizenship. Although evidence of this is never produced, the belief portrays a mindset predicated on a deficit model, where by the individual “caught” in the middle between cultures needs “fixing” by means of proper socialisation. In fact, Stacey all but suggests that teachers in
the schools, operating on this assumption, are presenting a view of America and of Arab American children that are at odds: one is modern, liberal and consensual in decision-making processes versus a community assumed to traditional, conservative and therefore authoritarian (see Gary David’s work). In essence, Stacey’s words, despite her multicultural, liberalist facade, begin to suggest an underlying pattern of cultural misinterpretation if not condescension on the part of the non-Arab community towards Arab American culture. This theme will be further explored in Stacey’s discourse.

Asked about her views as an administrator and a curricular leader, to assess whether Arabic is well supported as other school disciplines, Stacey notes her lack of knowledge in this area and how it is positioned in the foreign language system. With respect to the issue of AFL and tokenism, Stacey skirts the issue suggesting that,

“… [I]t seems to me at Fordson that Arabic is very necessary. There is certainly a lot more sections of Arabic than there are a lot of other languages and that I think for Arabic, it is important for Arabic to be taught at Fordson because of the need of those students. I mean it is valuable to them to have that opportunity.”

Her position is that Arabic serves to anchor Arab American youth in their culture as part of their process of self and social discovery, essentially making room for themselves in American society.

Pressed to give a professional assessment of how AFL is viewed at school relative to other FL programmes in the schools, Stacey admits not everyone accepts Arabic as a school discipline, although in her mind, they would be a minority of professional staff members. She adds:

“I have heard rumours over the past few years. One is that, Arabic is a cop-out [easy out] for these kids because they know how to speak Arabic, may know how to write Arabic already, so it is an easy ‘A’ [grade]. It is a way for them to be able to take foreign language and pass the requirement or whatever…. In other words, it is a cop-out for them.
“…Well, there are a lot of teachers who, that I have talked to, who support it. They think it is a great idea, like it, you know. It is important. I mean, and, I think that it is not just the Arabic teachers that feel that way. When I say Arabic teachers, I mean Arabic-American [Sic.] bilingual teachers or other teachers that are of Arabic background. It is not just those teachers that would be supportive, I don't think. The counsellors support it for example, they will, put the kids in and you know, there is cooperation in that sense.”

Indeed, the other respondents agreed that Stacey’s sense of the rumours is valid; however, her characterisation of the limited scope of those who have acquired this outlook regarding the AFL programme is very conservative. Nonetheless, Stacey was aware of some anti-AFL stirrings in the schools, although she dismisses them as minimal – perhaps, because, as an administrator, she did not want to assist in open conflict. It is interesting to note, however, that while this veteran administrator suggests there is a lot of support for AFL courses—giving as an example the counsellors who “put kids in [the classes]”, and interpreting it as an act of cooperation and support—others in the AFL and BBE circles have called it “dumping”.

In fact, if the rumours of a “cop-out” phenomenon are true, in the main the responsibility for this matter falls on the shoulders of administrators, counsellor, (and, to a lesser extent, teachers) who are charged with creating coursework, testing and evaluating students, and assigning placement. However, clearly, the lack of leadership on the part of these school professionals and in the absence of owning up to their duties, responsibility is shifted to the parents and the students in the programme, implying parental lobbying for easy classes in order to inflate grade point averages. However, in order for this phenomenon to be factual, the parents must be conversant with the system and aware of their right to influence the school as relates to their children, which is often not the case for new immigrants.
This also assumes that the children who are candidates for an easy “A” are the children of newcomers who are literate in their mother tongue. It must be noted that there is an official policy that prevents the duplicate awarding of credit to students who may have taken Arabic overseas. In regards to those who may have studied it independently, the regulations do not prevent a student from what is commonly called “testing-out”, a process to acquire credit by special evaluation and to determine appropriate level of academic placement. Thus, given these options, all pedagogically sound and academically well within the bounds of proper practice, in the case of Arab American youth and in the context of AFL, this becomes a liability and a supposed avenue for unethical or improper gain.

“I think another argument or another story I have heard, and I don’t know that I have heard this explicitly but it may have been sort of a subliminal that, this does not help students become Arab-Americans, in the sense that it keeps them focused on the Arabic culture.

“I do not want to use the word assimilate, because that would be explicit and I am saying that this whole message I am getting is subliminal. I do not want to out that strong of a label…because I have trouble with that but maybe that is my own bias. I don’t know.

Though they are minimised in influence with their “subliminal message” and are framed as marginal, invoking their “underground” nature, Stacey admits to the presence of those who believe AFL does not help students become American. This statement presupposes that the students are somehow not American enough already, at least according to some in the school. Moreover, this attitude hints at the workings of a subtractive operating paradigm in the school setting, animating a culture of assimilation that suggests that a non-Anglo individual person must relieve him/herself of background elements of
personal culture in order to become American. Indeed, it is very evident that this melting pot view is very much the standing order in the school setting.

Although unwilling to admit to the existence of a problem among staff members, she cannot escape describing it in such terms:

“I don't [see a problem]… the only sense I have gotten at all really, is that there is, to some extent… a sort of invisible—I do not want to say ‘line’ but there is. And it is not tension either. But there is something there between those staff members that are Arabic [Sic.] and those staff members that are not. I do not think that that is negative necessarily. I am just saying, [there is] maybe a boundary.

“Most of the time I am not sure that within the frame of the school, it is a problem. I do not see it as a problem. I do not see it impacting the students negatively. That is my way of measuring it—it would be, how does it impact kids.

Stacey recognises a separation between the two sides, and although she does not believe the issue impacts the students, she provides no evidence of that. However, based on a subtractive operating culture in the school system, one begins to understand how the two “camps” may become—a dominant majority of not less than ninety percent demanding a minority group to abandon elements of its cultural stock in order to prove their American- hood. Stacey apparently does not see this as a problem impacting the students.

When queried regarding her views of staffing a majority Arab American populated building, she noted that she had taken time to think about this issue, recognising a structural issue:

“I have [thought about it] in the sense that I see a school where the staff does not reflect the student population, in terms of its ethnicity.

“I don't know. See, I don't know. I don't know if it has to. I think that it is important for kids to have adults who are [like them] that they can identify with. I know myself, on some occasions, as an administrator, sometimes it has been very effective for me to either include an Arab-American or go to an Arab-American with a student because I know there are going to be able to [assist in the process], whether it is the community liaison, or if I need a female or attendance person,
you know, relying on them or either another administrator who is Arab-American, sometimes is able to help me connect better with students because, you know, ... I use that, very definitely, that is, this sounds cold but I use that resource as a tool for myself. I don't mean to say that they are people and I understand that but ...I do not know if it has to be you know, if affirmative action needs to take place and there has to be total percentage based equity.”

Although she is accepting of using Arabic and Arab Americans as a tool of communication and in order to conduct school business, Stacey is unwilling to concede to the presence of a problem that needs “affirmative action” to ameliorate. Interestingly however, she invokes the concept of equity but glosses over it dismissively, negating the need for action and maintaining a shield of innocence that promotes the status quo.

Queried regarding her position on Arabic speech in school, Stacy noted that, “...some teachers are quite uptight about students speaking Arabic in the classroom” because:

“... They would feel a lack of control because some teachers really have a hard time not being able to [be in control]. I mean, if I am sitting and I have two kids myself in my office or in the hall that I am working with, I do not want them speaking Arabic. I do not want them talking to each other but I certainly do not want them speaking Arabic to each other because I do not know what they are saying. I need to control that situation in my office. So, to that extent, you know, I do not like it either.”

Although liberal in her approach to the use of Arabic, Stacey understands that at least there are some staff members who are “uptight” about Arabic in the classroom (and elsewhere in the school building). Essentially, she reports from the perspective and wishes of the staff members: the teacher who does not want the students to talk in Arabic; the administrator who needs to communicate something to a student being disciplined; the psychologist who needs to do an assessment; the social worker who needs to get a message across, etc. But, what about the students, especially those whose comfort level is still Arabic? One has to wonder about the reason for “the lack of control” of teachers
and other staff members when students employ Arabic in communication, because in fact the power differential at any given moment favours the staff over the students.

Faqih is a highly credentialed Arab American educator in the school system and a recognised community leader. Faqih states that Arabic has personal and community significance because it a vehicle of ideas:

“...From day one, actually in the school system, Arabic was looked upon as a foreign language that children need to unlearn so they will be able to learn English. There is no space in their brains for inserting English unless they move Arabic out. And that was really the philosophy that we’ve dealt with for many years. The ‘subtractive bilingualism model’ vs. the ‘additive bilingualism model’, wherein, we always said, by improving the native language, by learning the native language, by developing the skills in the native language, we would be helping students do better in the second language. ...In that sense, the educators who are able to read the research were not perceiving the Arabic language with a value that they should have or ought to place on it.

“Why are they living in this society if they are not going to learn our language. They’re here, they’re in ‘Rome’ and they need to speak in English. If they are not doing it, they should be asked to leave.’ That is the attitude, and, again, too, language is one of the cultural expressions that people have: it is like clothing and music and all these things suffer the same way because [majority] people look down at these things and they consider them ‘un-American’ to use the language or to dress in a ‘traditional’ way in the fashion of the country of origin.”
Faqih suggested efforts of cultural and linguistic preservation are viewed as “un-American” in Dearborn’s wider society:

“It is the philosophy [among majority society] that many people hold: it is the ‘melting pot’ [viewpoint]. They think like we should, for immigrants, if they have the motivation to become American, to take off the type of clothes they come with, and to switch to all-American ways of [being]—whether clothing, language, eating, social behaviour; whether they know about it or they don’t, whether educated or not. So, we all know that the acculturation process is a long process. It doesn’t get started in a year or two or three. … It is the expectations they have for the immigrants that stand between them and understanding the limitations that immigrants have in making the transition, and making the changes in the behaviour and their lifestyles.”

Faqih commends the school system for offering Arabic, noting his support of second language learning regardless of which, let alone one’s mother tongue or language of ancestors:

“Well, I was always an advocate for teaching Arabic. … And I consider myself an advocate for helping generations for Arabic and non Arab Americans learn Arabic or any other foreign language, but especially for Arab American students. They need to have familiarity and fluency and proficiency in the Arabic language for many reasons. One should be utilitarian [and think of] the future of the global economy…. A second reason is cultural; it is really an identity (issue). The person is strong in their identity and they would have a positive self-concept and they are able to deal with people from a level of respect that will build bridges in society. Otherwise, we don’t have any foundations to build bridges. Either I lose everything to become like the other person, or I stay away from the other person and [this is] not the best options we can have in our society.”

Faqih suggests that heritage students are not too keen on learning Arabic because:

“Really many of them refuse to learn Arabic because it is not the popular thing to do. They see the actions of the mainstream counterpart, whether adults or young people, [that they don’t present] really a way to appreciate languages. It is actually a way to look down at the Arabic language as an option. And I see many Arab American students ‘revert’ to Spanish or French as languages while they could take Arabic because Arabic is not a popular [i.e, valued] language as the other languages. And that is a peer pressure factor. Period!

“And, adult pressure. The teachers send in always their signals to the students that, by maintaining fluency in that language, you’re jeopardizing your learning of English, and, we heard it many times from ‘traditional’ teachers, saying that by
using the native language with the children, we’re delaying their learning of English and were not helping them in English. And the research speaks to the opposite, that the using of the native language of the children will allow more comprehension, and more interest in the text, and they will learn faster and better.”

The veteran professional offers a damning indictment of the operating ideology of the system, suggesting:

“The whole philosophy behind the whole thing is really that, ‘you don’t behave like I do, you don’t speak like I do, you dress differently. How long is it going to take you to become American!’ This is a message that you really need to hurry up and join the mainstream… That is what the hidden message is: ‘that you hurry up and exit your culture and join the mainstream, as if the mainstream is one culture—a monoculture and there is no room for diversity!”

Faqih believes members of the Arab American community do not insist on maintaining Arabic just for its sake, rather because they come from a culture that supports language education and multi-lingualism, thus, when adding,

“…The fact that the language that is in question is the native language of the parents and the grandparents, and of the hopes and dreams of the families for the children, their emotional attachment to the language as a means for rituals, prayers and information, and, too, to connection with the homeland. There [then], Arabic becomes really very important ingredient to the educational program for the young children.”

Offering his view on the AFL programme, the veteran teacher noted,

“I think we are fortunate to have had many talented and skilful people who developed and supported the program. But, again, I feel like anything that doesn’t improve and advance will retreat in education. So, I am worried that if we keep the status quo from year to year, the program will start deteriorating and with the budget the way it is in the state of Michigan, the school system…

“The community needs to show their full support of the programme. They need to! If you consider really request for classes as support, it is there. Beyond that—no, you don’t see much support. Parents think it is given; it is going to be there.”

Asked if he believes the community offers any support to the programme or teachers in other ways, Faqih states:
“No! Like anything else, even with BBE, until they are threatened to lose it, there is no positive stand on the issue and say you are better keep this program. Our community—the Arabic speaking community is not familiar with those strategies where you are proactive and you are able to make a difference without fighting. We are more ‘reactionary’ [reactive] than people who will demand action, restitution, this is not happening in the community. Unfortunately, this is the case with everything.”

Moreover, at the high school, given his experience, Faqih believes the overriding ideology of “assimilation by melting” is at work, whereby the expectations are for the students to shed:

“… your habits, your culture, [because your] background will always stand between you and becoming full American. You will always carry those things that will keep you outside the mainstream, and, unless you are willing to shed your language and your culture, way of believing and behaving, you are not going to become fully mainstream.”

Clearly, Faqih’s assessment of the situation, although essentially optimistic, stands in contrast to Stacey’s views. He believes in an additive paradigm, favouring blending of characteristics that are enriching of the society in which he lives. He is not afraid of assimilation, provided it is not about erasing particularities of individuals and the community, rather, his focus is on creating a dynamic Arab American identity that is a hybrid of Arab and American life patterns instead of the overriding dominant operating paradigm, which is to do away with elements of ethnic culture.

6.5 Focus Group Findings

The main aim behind the use of focus groups is to investigate and identify attitudes of stakeholders in the community regarding the learning and teaching of the Arabic language in the context of the city of Dearborn, particularly in its public schools. As such, stakeholders, Arab Americans and non-Arab Americans, students, parents, staff
members, and other community stakeholders are envisioned as equal participants in the research process and as data providers—situation informants and issue consultants.

6.5.1 Student Group (Fordson graduates)

In a focus group organized and implemented in April 23, 2003, six former Fordson AFL students were brought together to discuss their experience as Arabic language students and their views regarding the program and other related issues. When asked to comment on the importance or value of Arabic to them on an individual basis, respondents affirmed earlier information gained through student surveys—namely, to know the basics of Arabic, to acquire understanding of “their language”, to be able to read it, especially religious literature, to speak it and communicate better with members of their community/family, and to relate to the culture better.

According to one participant, Hasan, learning Arabic helps him to navigate Dearborn better, reading commercial signs in the Arab district of the city. “Since we are Arabic [Sic.], we should learn it—it comes in handy”. Another respondent, Fatima, states, “if you are Arabic, you should learn it; it is used a lot around here. It is good to know,” suggesting the importance of the language to these youth, who see in it a symbol of themselves. Adam notes that, although he knew Arabic to be important to him, as he grew older, he wanted to learn more so that he can understand better Arabic speakers and learn first hand of Arab news through Arabic broadcasts and newspapers. Fadhil and Hasan agree that Arabic is “everywhere in Dearborn” and “people speak it everywhere in Dearborn”, thus, it makes sense to know it. Amir, buoyed by his co-participants, suggests that they are immersed in Arabic and English so it makes sense to know Arabic, since
they already know English, intimating that knowledge of Arabic as having value and meaning to him.

Asked regarding the involvement of parents in their decision to learn Arabic, they unanimously agreed that their families support them in learning the language. Amir notes, “the family was happy and they even helped me with my homework.” Adam suggests that parental support included pressure to enrol in Arabic classes. This theme corroborates findings of the survey, suggesting parents had a major role in getting their children to take Arabic classes at school.

When queried concerning their sense of whether the Arab American community and institutions offer support to students of Arabic, interestingly, Fadhil opines that there is more support in the confines of the community for learning English than Arabic. All other participants agree with him. Pressed to clarify this point, they all suggest that Arab American community institutions have their focus on teaching/learning of English. Fatima states, “outside of high school, or Saturday (religious) School or after school, there is no push for it. You got the mosque, the school and family but no community-based programming.” Fatima and her colleagues are suggesting that there is no investment in supporting the learning process outside of a classroom structure.

When asked, in light of their line of thought, whether Arabic is a priority for Arab American civic organisations, they unanimously agree that it was not. Adam said, “There are no initiatives for helping to learn Arabic. Basically, it was all lip-service.” Ibrahim adds,

“Their focus is on preserving culture. They are getting rid of the language. They want the American language, but they want to keep ‘Arab American culture’. They care about culture, politics and heritage—but not language.”
Although Ibrahim makes a distinction between Arab and Arab American culture, noting that the Dearborn hybrid is what is being preserved, with a focus on English, Amir, goes farther, suggesting, “There is no real support of culture”. He invokes the Eighth Annual Arab Festival in Dearborn, which he describes as pedestrian and commercial, noting the vacuous nature of the endeavour in the absence of a comprehensive content. Adam agrees with Amir’s assessment, taking the festival as an example of Arab American cultural life in the city, suggesting, “there is no real sense of culture at the festival. It is about rides!” Fatima, also a critic of the phenomenon, sarcastically suggests there have been no improvements at the festival except for rides. Hasan echoes their feelings, adding that whatever may be considered as a celebration of culture is not for members of the community, rather for visiting non-Arabs. In short, they all insist that, while there is some support for the maintenance of a local brand of Arab culture in Dearborn, the community, as represented by its civic institutions, offers no support for a language maintenance effort. Surprisingly, they were adamant in their view that the community is more interested in developing competence in English and becoming American, noting that these items were the majority’s concern. Moreover, there were suggestions that the Arab American organisations’ focus was on other issues, adding that organisational leaderships seem to expect families to handle the teaching of Arabic—not including it as a task for the organisations, believing it to be a job exclusively for parents and the schools.

On the topic of Arabic in the school building, respondents at first were eager to suggest that Arabic was a welcomed presence. However, when pressed further another narrative emerged. Ibrahim recounts being subjected to unbecoming comments. He
narrates that one teacher advised him, “You are in America, speak American!” Ibrahim, with unease in his demeanour, recalls being sent down to the school office for discipline.

They agreed that Arabic was natural to them and its use, to whatever degree of competence, was something that “just comes out”. They weren’t pressured to speak English because that was their first medium of communication, in which they felt completely at home, but they felt that Arabic was equally a part of them they could not deny. Ibrahim, who was the only one of the six participants to have learned English later in childhood at age seven, suggests that he was very happy to have peers and teachers speak to him in Arabic while learning English, making him feel affirmed and welcomed in school.

Queried regarding acceptance of Arabic amongst school personnel, they state that school professionals did not overtly support Arabic in school, noting there was support for foreign language learning because it was a requirement, but not for Arabic per se. All agree that their counsellors did not advise them to take Arabic, rather to simply enrol in a foreign language course because of the graduation requirement. However, interestingly, not knowing the background of how Arabic was instituted in the school curriculum in the first instance, and since Arabic was offered in school, they deemed it a form of support which the establishment had offered to the Arab American community and to the Arabic language. Nonetheless, they recognise the “salutary neglect” aspect of having Arabic in the school curriculum, and its lower caste status, blaming this state of affairs on the over-emphasis of English.

Ibrahim suggests Arabic was too isolated in the AFL classroom. “You walk out of the classroom and you forget everything because there is no reinforcement.” Fatima
agrees, noting that it is the case for all foreign languages, but suggests the implementation of a multi-lingual approach in the school whereby signs and other public writings can be rendered in all the taught languages in the building in order to support student learning. The participants, however, recognise that the emphasising of English went counter to this idea. Nonetheless, Fadhil offers another reason why Arabic is not on par with other foreign languages in the school, blaming AFL teachers for not being assertive enough on behalf of the discipline and the students. Amir suggests Arabic was a new discipline and therefore lacked seniority. However, all recognise that Arabic had no real support from the mainstream of the school system. Adam notes that his class once had worked on cooperative learning presentations that were to be publicly displayed in the school but were exhibited instead somewhere in “Fordson Heights” (the uppermost eastern hallway, a part of the school where the majority of students do not go). Interestingly, the French class had their presentations displayed at the Media Centre (the school library), where the majority of the student body travelled daily by them, offering the works more exposure, thus, hinting at the secondary, if not devalued status Arabic had acquired in the school.

6.5.2 Parent/Community Members Focus Group

A parent focus group was convened December 1, 2003 to discuss issues pertinent to Arabic language learning and teaching. Of those who were invited, some six individuals, three took the opportunity to be present and share their views. They were three women in their early years. Another focus group with emphasis on community members as stakeholders was conducted December 4, 2003, in which the remaining number came together to discuss the issues, separate from the other women. The second group was composed of two women and one man. An overriding theme that had emerged
from the parent and community members’ focus group was the importance of Arabic as a vehicle of cultural maintenance within the Arab American community, and the general agreement that Arabic is not welcomed in the greater Dearborn community. Also, they agree that offering Arabic as an academic discipline in the schools, while appreciated by them, constitute nothing more than “window dressing”, that is, at best a cosmetic fixture or at worst a patronising effort.

Nisrin suggests that Arabic is important because “our language is the Qur’an’s language, Arabic is part of our religion.” She adds: “It is our culture, religion and being Arab.” Sawsan agrees with Nisrin, but Samara adds that the importance of Arabic is in being Arab. They all agree, however, that preserving Arabic is about the maintaining elements of culture, tradition and religion, since they feed into each other, “Arabic, Islam and culture.” Sawsan notes, however:

“Outside of the Arab American community, people, as soon as they hear the word ‘Arab’ or ‘Muslim’, they just…[think] being Arab is almost a crime. They hear you saying Arabic [speech] or whatever, it is like they are automatically sacred or something like that.”

Nisrin agrees, noting that, “Maybe before September 11th it was positive, but [now] it is negative.” Sawsan differs, believing it was never positive to be Arab or Muslim in the public mindscape, adding: “I don’t think they consider us Americans!” Samara and Nirmin concur with that statement, noting their alienation as a community from the mainstream of America at this time.

Queried concerning the importance of Arabic to the community, they insist that the language links them to religion. But, the greater community is fearful of Arabic and its presence in their midst yet at the same time inquisitive in its regard. Sawsan offers this view:
Arabs have become a big thing: immigration…being Arabic and being Muslim, too, I think, that intimidates them [the greater community] and I think that makes them want to learn more about it. Even religion, Islam itself, intimidates them. They want to learn like what is this religion that we have that everybody is converting from Christianity…always people think that people are converting to Islam. So, it is like what is this religion about?”

The other ladies agree that the pull of Islam in the public eye makes Arabs and Arabic a point of interest and an object of fear. The respondents believe that offering Arabic at school and other academic institutions will somehow help those who are interested and fearful to learn about Arabs and Islam to think of it in a more positive way.

Certainly, they concur that, given the preponderance of Arab presence as a major minority in the Dearborn area, Arabic ought to be offered in schools for Arab American students, at least. The participants express an ethnic nationalism in regards to Arabic, while favouring a utilitarian approach towards the language, suggesting Arabic to be a good tool for inter-Arab use in the city—in such areas as business and services.

When asked concerning what the community is doing to help maintain Arabic as a viable tool of communication, they note it being on offer in certain public schools, in private Arabic schools, and in after school programs (which are extensions of religious and/or private organisations). They all believe that it is not enough “but it is better than nothing,” said Samara, while Sawsan adds that it is up to the parents to teach their children to maintain Arabic:

“…this country is all about English. They [the parents] do want their kids to learn English and stuff, but mostly they do want them to excel in English because that’s what they’re being taught….Even if they teach Arabic [in any kind of school], it is for one hour a day…almost like an elective or, it is not important as the rest of the subjects.”

Sawsan has touched upon a recurring theme, and that is the limited investment in Arabic maintenance efforts, which does not go beyond what is generally referred to as “lip-
service.” Nisrin points out that ACCESS offers a lot of social assistance programming for the community, including some English as a second language support, but they do not do so for Arabic, something that the agency could be doing. Samara concurs on this point, also indicating that Arabic seems to be more “like jewellery”, an accessory artefact, and not a main item.

Sawsan offers her experience as a young child, learning Arabic in the Mosque’s weekend program, stating that she hated it, as others of her peers did, because anyone who knew “enough Arabic” was placed to teach—even though they didn’t have experience with children, understanding of pedagogy or good knowledge of Arabic, implying the devalued nature of Arabic pedagogy even within Arab American circles. Nonetheless, the three women agree that there ought to be minimum expectations of Arabic tutors and teachers in the community, and schools should have training in Arabic and pedagogy at the collegiate level before they can teach the language, lamenting the current situation where seemingly limited knowledge of Arabic can make one a teacher. Nisrin and Sawsan suggest that at a minimum a teacher candidate must have overseas certification in Arabic teaching, while Samara was lenient about such requirements, noting support for a college education and some pedagogy background in community education contexts.

However, the participants feel that in the public schools, Arabic teachers should have similar or equal credentials to those teaching foreign languages, e.g., French, Spanish and German. Nisrin states:

“They [teachers] should have the same level of credentials. Teachers of French and German or other languages have certification [state licensing] from over here [in Michigan]…but Arabic teachers should have it, too, even if [they have
credentials] from overseas. In a charter school, I know that some teachers [of Arabic] are not well trained but are teaching, anyway.”

Sawsan agrees, adding: “My expectation is that they should be highly trained and have good education in the Arabic language.” Samara concurs with the idea that Arabic teachers should have a bachelor’s [degree] in Arabic or related field and that they should somehow be “certified” [i.e., institutionally-recognised as competent] in teaching the language.

Asked regarding the seeming assimilationist project at work within the community and its effects on Arabic maintenance, the women insisted on the need to keep Arabic because “it is our language” for “culture’s sake.” As Sawsan put it, “No, matter how long you live here [in Dearborn], you are going back home [in the Arab world]. You need you language!” An interesting observation that may suggest Arab Americans in Dearborn do not necessarily feel secure about their presence in Michigan, thus compensating for that insecurity with a growing sense of trans-nationalism.

This theme was validated in the next focus group, convened December 12, 2003, in which Salman affirms his support for learning Arabic by declaring, “I believe learning as second language [to English] of Arabic is a great [thing]… but let us remember we are in America,” (offering primacy of English over Arabic), adding, however,

“The way this country feels towards Arabs and the Middle East is not very good nowadays. With all the brain-washing the media and government in portraying Arabs, we are very vulnerable.”

Clearly, there is a sense of anxiety and ambivalence that runs through Salman’s take on the state of Arab American presence in the city, which helps illuminates the functional utility of this emerging trans-nationalism in Dearborn.
Salman echoes the other participants in the previous focus group regarding the importance of maintaining cultural heritage, noting, “…The vast [number] of Arabs in Dearborn, [are] people [who] want to keep their heritage in such a close community,” suggesting that “it is easier to maintain your culture when most of your neighbours have the same ethnic background,” highlighting the ethnic enclave nature of the East Dearborn community.

Samira, another young participant, notes that Arabic is observed in the greater community as a source of threat instead of an asset of potential economic utility, enhancing and bettering the community as a whole. She notes her support for having Arabic in the schools, especially as a potential learning choice for non-Arabs, while deploring the fact that American society, though polyglot, does not require second language learning from the earliest school years (other than English). However, she warns that Arab American children do not really want to learn Arabic

“…beyond the scope of their daily schedule. It should only be one of the required [or offered] languages at school where surveys have been conducted to learn what the parents want. Some parents might choose Arabic and others will choose French or Spanish….”

Clearly, Samira’s sense of Arabic maintenance is voluntary and non-committal; however, she supports learning Arabic from an economic point of view, noting that students who have foreign language skills are better suited “…to be competitive in the job market in a global society such as the one we are living in today.” Interestingly, the idea of Arabic learning and globalisation correlate in the discourses of participants, buttressing a sense of Arab American trans-nationalism, which implies that speakers of this language serve as bridges between two parts of the world.
Citing research she does not identify, Samira suggests that, “…Arab Americans [in Dearborn] do insist on maintaining Arabic, but they do not refuse to learn English. On the contrary their knowledge of Arabic has helped them and assisted them to learn English faster and become successful both in the job market and their own persona lives in a very short time, 1976-2004 compared to other immigrants.” Here, again, the secondary nature of Arabic relative to English is evident, and it is used as a tool to attain standing in the American Anglo world of Dearborn. When asked about the purpose of learning/maintaining Arabic if the greater purpose is to assimilate into American society, Samira states,

“Assimilating into the American society has nothing to do with learning or not learning Arabic. Knowing another language is beneficial to one’s mental and social aspects, and, in turn, makes our society more open and accept[ing] of new learning instead of staying in a box while the whole world is moving on.”

Although she seems to believe that there is no connexion between assimilation and Arabic, her emphasis on language learning for economic utility betrays an enlightened, liberal view of American society, perhaps multicultural in thrust, but, nevertheless, one that is based on assimilation into the mainstream of American society and is premised on acceptance of the majority of her group.

Siraj, a self-styled stakeholder who is in her mid to late thirties, associates the importance of Arabic to Arab Americans who are Muslim, stating:

“It is extremely important. The continuity of Arabic is singly the most important key to unlock the door of knowledge to Islam. While our parents, community leaders fail us in propagation of our religion [on the community level], if a person can read [Arabic], there are no obstructions to …knowledge [on one’s own].”

Interestingly however, she adds:

“Arabic is unfortunately used as a way of gauging who is ‘in’ and who is ‘out’ of the clique. This is absolutely the wrong concept. You are not better or worse
because of it, but we will suffer as a people who do not know it, and are not able to make the all important un-filtered journey to the holy books and teachings [on one’s own].”

Siraj’s complaint suggest a dividing line at the communal level between those who have a command of Arabic and those who do not, implying the presence of two groups in divergence, that are at odds. However, based on her previous statement, the tide seems to favour the loss of Arabic as a vernacular of communication. Even she seems to agree inherently that the best use of Arabic is for religious learning, a liturgical language, and not one of communicative value. Thus, in this way, while her emphasis is religious, she is not unsympathetic to the assimilationist project at work in the community.

Siraj opines further that, if the Arab American community does insist on maintaining Arabic in its midst is, it does so

“[f]or the wrong reasons—they are afraid of losing their heritage, when in reality, they should be afraid of losing their faith. It is a racial identifier, and what determines of the ‘in’ versus the ‘out’ crowd.”

Thus, Siraj is not worried about losing the heritage of Arab Americans, for she is accepting of an assimilation project that will render Arabic a liturgical language and Arab Americans an assimilated group in the city in whatever form they take; rather she worries about the loss of Arabic and its impact on preserving the faith, Islam, which, interestingly enough, she does not believe is under threat by the assimilation project that inherently she advocates. However, the most interesting aspect in this discourse is her depiction of the status quo in which Arabic speakers are defined as an “in” crowd with racialised terms.

Typically an American response, racialisation implies variation based on biology with dominance of one group over another due to supposed inherent superiority. Siraj’s view of Arabic speakers as an “in” crowd imbued with different characteristics,
tendencies and divergent values which are juxtaposed against an “out” group that is composed of the majority population. Her comments reflect the fears of the dominant group in society of its minority community, reinforcing the “US/them” dichotomy in American society.

6.6 Other Findings (Preliminary Conclusions)

Overall, in the main, participants espoused positions concerning the importance of Arabic to them individually and collectively. Largely, there was an overarching agreement among respondents about the significance of the Arabic language as a symbol of Arab American community in Dearborn. Thus, Arabic was object and representation of “ethnic pride”, (suggesting a form of community nationalism) that situates the language as an icon of politicised identity, indicating it to be the rallying point of a political struggle towards inclusion and acceptance in the greater community. While this sought-after “inclusion” in the mainstream is an object of Arab American political activism, mainstream society can offer only a sense of detachment, exclusion and alienation. Although the host society is eager to absorb and assimilate the Arab American community out of existence as a visible ethnic group, rendering it a secondary and beholden mass of people, the Arab American community is equally ready to integrate in Dearborn society. However, while the first is operating on a subtractive model of assimilation whereby the “alien” is “de-foreignised” and “homogenised” through an Americanisation process that subjugates non-white to white majority, the Arab American community evidently offers an additive operating model of assimilation, favouring blending of characteristics that are enriching of the society in which they live, implying a partnership in society formation.
This approach in the community is expressed in two ways; the first is observed to be a variation of the subtractive “melting pot” hypothesis that is espoused by at least a minority of Arab Americans, especially those born and reared in Dearborn’s operating paradigm. This group stresses the subordinated status of Arabic as a tool of intra-Arab communication and as an adjunct to English. Being a symbol of the community and its identity has implications for the secondary status of “Arab-ness” in its American framing. The other approach is based on the additive paradigm that subscribes to an open multiculturalism, predicated on accepting the “other” as a reflection of self (majority society) instead of its antithesis—the “alien-making” stance of majority society that enhances estrangement through fears, and by observing efforts of cultural and linguistic preservation in Dearborn’s wider society as “un-American.”

Arabic in this context is perceived as a foreign and a heritage language because of its connections to the “Middle East/Arab world”, therefore, observed to be alien to the American context. Thus, as one respondent noted earlier, it is pathologised as unproductive to the Americanisation process. If nothing else, this suggests a devaluation of Arabic among all Dearborn residents, regardless of background and social role. Reports of devaluation emerge in the discourse of participants who have laid blame on a school system administration found to be guilty of “salutary neglect”, allowing Arabic to exist in order to stave off further claims; a community that provides lip-service in support but offers nothing else, save utilising it for political ends; parents who are eager to have their children learn Arabic, but do not view it to be of the same order or standing as other school subjects, especially English; and a majority community that observes it to be a threat to the standing cultural order, and therefore, to their dominance.
This ambivalence towards Arabic has situated it as an icon of distrusted group, especially in the post-September 11, 2001 American national environment, in which Arab Americans are conflated with Arabs and with Muslims abroad, highlighting their “otherness” within American society and rendering them alienated from the mainstream. So much so, that the Arabic language has become the equivalent of “a bomb in one’s hands”, as one respondent suggested in describing the precarious state Arab Americans faced in the aftermath of the Twin Towers Tragedy. Even though Arab Americans recognise their problematic existence in Dearborn, as in other places across the country, there is a tendency to blame this hardship on Middle East and world politics as the reason for their debasement. It is largely an act of exoneration of the majority society of its responsibility not to conflate Americans of Arab background with others overseas. Equally damaging is their failure to recognise anti-Arab and anti-Muslim tendencies as preceding the political troubles of mid to late 20\textsuperscript{th} and early 21\textsuperscript{st} centuries. Thus, what emerges is self-indicting assessment that neglects to take into account the effects of historically rooted American Orientalist tendencies, which have been adopted by Arab Americans in their quest towards assimilation and acceptance in Dearborn society. The following chapter is the last part of this work, addressing the overall results and emphasising interpretation and meaning of the information that has been gathered and reported.
Chapter Seven
Discussion of Results and Conclusions to Study

7.1 General Discussion

The United States is a polyglot society, giving home to many ethnic groups—both historically and in contemporary times; however, despite these cultural and linguistic riches, languages other than English traditionally have been devalued in favour of the language of “establishment America”—namely, “Standard English”. From earliest times of American history, there has been a tendency to promote or to impose English on speakers of other languages. Indeed, Benjamin Franklin, one of the most respected fathers of the American Revolution and statehood, actively campaigned against the use of the German language in schools in his home state of Pennsylvania, favouring English as the medium for building a patriotic American nationalism (Spring, 1986:12). When the Americans acquired the “Northwest Territories” (the lands Northwest of the original colonies in early 19th century), the new political order promoted the use of English, while permitting French and local aboriginal languages to fall in disfavour (Cumming in Hathaway, 1989).

Although one may argue that the nascent American Republic had to support English as its medium of cultural harmony in the earlier period of its history in order to create “a more perfect Union”, however, since then, the United States also engaged in a discernible pattern of systematic discrimination against languages other than English. Interestingly, while the United States to date does not have an official language, English
has played that role throughout its history, whereupon its proponents and supporters used it to drive other languages out of the way, so to speak. In fact, where the United States has established its dominance, English has followed the Stars and Stripes: In the American Southwest (e.g., California and Arizona) and the American deep south (Florida and Texas) where Spanish flourished along with other local languages, in a short time these languages gave way to the primacy of English under the tutelage of an Anglo-white cultural order. Similarly, French lost its primacy in Louisiana (named after the French King Louis XVI) and in the American Northeast, where French Canadians, forebears of many Franco-Americans had immigrated. The same story repeats itself throughout American history, especially vis-à-vis Native American languages that were relegated to “Indian Reserves” and were made to compete against English in a losing battle. Also, the historic and continued emphasis on “Standard English” of the times, which is the language of the dominant Euro-Anglo white society, is another expression of disenfranchisement and de-value of other speech forms, particularly, lower class and non-white dialects, especially African American speech forms.

Therefore, it can be plainly argued at this point that other languages, which potentially posed a challenge to a white, Anglo-Saxon and Protestant America, were forcibly relegated to the background because of socio-political reasons that relate to cultural domination, if not oppression. In other words, in order to ensure the political sovereignty of a growing white-based United States, other languages, the vehicles of equally plausible bases of American culture generation, were shoved to the side in an attempt to safeguard the fruits of American Independence to certain segments of a privileged Euro-Anglo population, bent on assimilating into its image those that can be
“melted” into compliance. From such an ethnocentrism a language policy arose, ultimately restricting access to education, political activism and social advancement. One only has to remember the deprivation of African Americans of literacy during times of slavery and later the availability of meagre educational resources in post bellum United States, notably under Jim Crow laws.

The same kind of social policy continued in 20th century America. Although unwritten in law or code, it served to disenfranchise more Americans of non-Euro-Anglo backgrounds, permitting further alienation and exploitation of ethnic and racial groups. Whether French Canadian immigrants in Maine or Mexican Spanish speakers in California—and many others of Eastern and South European and “Middle Eastern” backgrounds found themselves discriminated against for their ethnicity, and the languages they speak. But, equally, disgraceful, if not more so, is the devaluation of certain Englishes because they do not represent the dominant groups’ cultural repertoire, nor do they reflect their ideologies. The most obvious forms of such Englishes are lower class African American Spoken English (often referred to in contemporary America as “Ebonics”), or Spanglish—the patois of Puerto Rican American Spanish and English speakers in New York.

Clearly, this brief description of American social attitude towards other languages is predicated on the “will to power.” That is, an approach that commands and maintains all forms of power in the hands of a select group, whose ideological bend necessitates their cultural hegemony over others. They are, therefore, bound by their own ideological philosophies to promote English as the underpinning of their cultural, social and political dominance over others. Given this socio-cultural historical pattern in American life, it is
reasonable, therefore, to believe that American dominant groups have utilised coercively language and education policies to suppress diverse learning in order to prevent oppositional thinking. No greater evidence to support this observation can be given other than the infamous reading ability requirements imposed on African Americans in the South under Jim Crow laws regime, America’s own race Apartheid in the earlier to middle decades of the 20th century, in order to limit their full participation in public life.

Similarly, the systematic deprivation of Hispano-Americans from the use of Spanish as a tool of learning or as a support for learning English (as in the case of Bilingual/Bicultural Education)—where English has been often imposed on students under the guise of educational remedy (see Wiley, 1993), is intended to promote behavioural norms and values of Euro-Anglo Americans at the expense of Hispanic culture. This holds equally true to other groups in American life that gradually came to prominence on the national political scene later in the 20th century. These include Chinese Americans, Americans of South Asian and Southeast Asian backgrounds, as well as other “white” groups who are thought to be “un-meltable” because their cultural backgrounds are “too foreign” to assimilate or because they resist assimilation forcefully. People of Arab backgrounds are held up as an example of the first group, while “fundamentalist” Muslims and Orthodox Jews are thought to be exemplars of the second. This is the case of Arab Americans in the city of Dearborn, where language is used as a tool of coercion in order to prevent oppositional literacy. It is the result of dominant group structures in Dearborn attempting to maintain their primacy through the promotion, and subsequent imposition of behavioural norms and values of the mainstream group.
7.1.1 City of Dearborn, Michigan

In the main, the largest ethno-linguistic segment in the city of Dearborn, other than the dominant Euro-Anglo group, is the Arabic-speaking population—currently, estimated at 30 percent of the total inhabitants of the city (Census Bureau, 1990). Dearborn is a suburb of nearly ninety thousand people, abutting the major city of Detroit, the hub of the motor industry in the United States. Indeed, Dearborn is the hometown of Henry Ford, the founder of the Ford Motor Company, whose world headquarters are housed in that little city. In this setting, which originally attracted immigrants to work in the automotive manufacturing industry, Arab immigrants, largely from the Eastern Mediterranean regions, arrived into Dearborn in search of better economic opportunities as early as the 1900s (Naff, 1985: 76-117). As has been observed earlier, family chain migrations, spurred on by political turmoil and economic dislocations in the Middle East, helped strengthen the numbers of Arab immigrants in the city (David, 1999:7-12). Today, the Dearborn Arab American community is reported to be the largest concentration of Arabs in North America (DPS Bilingual/ESL Handbook, 1998: 2).

Arab presence in the city has dramatically increased since the late 1970s and early 1980s due in large measure to the Lebanese Civil War that began in 1975, and the Israeli invasion of that country’s southern regions and their subsequent occupation, leading to dislocation of masses of people, some of whom—through chain migration—arrived into the United States and into the Dearborn community (Suleiman in Suleiman, 1999: 1-21). Along with the Lebanese, many Palestinians arrived into Dearborn, also, escaping horrid conditions under occupation in the West Bank and Gaza strip (Seikaly in Suleiman, 1999: 25-73). In the aftermath of the Second Gulf War, many Iraqi refugees found their way
into the city in a second immigration pattern after arriving into the United States

The presence of a growing Arab community, a group considered suspect because of Orientalist beliefs that are deeply ingrained in the American psyche (Said, 1979; Allison, 1995), in the midst of a small white town with a history of white bigotry (Dykes in Hathaway, 1989: 291-318), has raised alarm among nativists who viewed the newcomers as a threat not only to the status quo, but also to their way of life. This view has only grown in magnitude in recent years in light of the events in September 11, 2001. This exclusionary stance ultimately led to increased friction between the two communities, one residing mainly in the Eastern section of the town near industrial installations, while the mainly Euro-Anglo community made its home on the West side.

No more is this friction (or sometimes low intensity cultural war) more apparent than in the arena of education. Dearborn Schools, charged as they are with a mandate to educate all in order to become productive members of society and transform them into American citizens, is in many ways a theatre for warring sides. While not many will take up issue with the mandate, the concern for most revolves around the definition of “American-ness” and the meaning of citizenship. The Euro-Anglo community emphasizes itself as the model of “American-ness” and “Americanisation”, whereas, the Arab American community has increasingly maintained its sense of “Arab-ness” within an “Arab American” framework that stresses “mediated-assimilation”, that is, the hybridisation of identity based on conscious efforts to preserve the best of the ethnic traditions, and to adopt best American practices (David and Ayoubi in Haddad, 2001). The school grounds are situated between those two poles: an empowered multicultural
approach and a traditional white view of America. This conflict, sometimes victimises students, and sometimes hurts the system, but often it leaves the children less serviced than they deserve.

Arab Americans have a community that has chosen to maintain cultural and linguistic ties to its homeland (possibly because of a host society that did not openly welcome them), while an overarching dominant culture seeks to assimilate the minority group into its ranks on the latter’s terms. The proposition in and of itself constitutes cultural imperialism, and the act of imposing the dominant group’s language and culture amounts to cultural aggression against Arab Americans. Conversely, the will to protect one’s cultural heritage in this context amounts to cultural resistance. How are this aggression and this resistance exhibited? The following will show glimpses of life in Dearborn and Dearborn Schools, addressing this question.

The Arabic language in Dearborn Schools is problematic both as a heritage and a foreign language. In either instance it is viewed as an immigrant language that is foreign to the whole context of schools. Being the native or background language of more than fifty percent of the whole student population, it impacts the school district in many ways (DPS Student Services, 2001). For one thing, it makes Dearborn Schools the largest school district in the state of Michigan with the biggest number of Limited English Proficient (LEP) students, which necessitates special expenditures (Ayouby, 2000). From the perspective of many in the Dearborn community, including some school personnel, and from perspective of the official position, as well as the unspoken prejudices of staff members, Arabic is considered problematic on multiple levels:
First, Arabic, instead of being considered a linguistic asset of students, is viewed as a language that interferes in the acquisition of English—a nuisance. Secondly, it is the mother tongue of a minority group that is perceived to be “un-meltable” in society because their ethnic background is viewed as suspect—given the overall Orientalist mindset of the greater community towards Arabs. And thirdly, any language-maintenance efforts on the part of Arabic-speakers are perceived as a move in the wrong direction—that is, away from “Americanisation”—which means assimilation on Euro-Anglo terms.

In fact, the stance adopted by the host society vis-à-vis the Arab community is one that can be summarised by the concept of power talking on a social level (Andreoni, n.d.: 24). Since much of the public discourse involved in these issues is uttered by educators (teaching and administrative), community activists and elected officials (politicians), and legal practitioners, their discourse centres around exerting control, thus shaping the agenda of the community for all concerned.

Arab American students or newly arrived Arab students whose English language skills are less than adequate have been supported with bilingual and bicultural services since 1976 in Dearborn schools because of State of Michigan mandates (DPS Bilingual Handbook, 1998). Throughout the years of service, the school district has offered what has been termed “Maintenance Bilingual Bicultural Education (MBBE).” While there are many forms of bilingual and bicultural education, the district elected the MBBE format because it offers basic academic services, using Arabic (and other minority languages in the district) to support English learning. Although in theory, bilingual/bicultural education may imply parallel instruction in two languages, in Dearborn Schools, that approach was considered as “too radical”, and as “counter-productive” because the goal
was to “Americanise” students and not “Arabise” them, according to one Student Services Liaison, working with community members and representing the schools (Bazzi, 2001).

From the beginning, school officials were and remain hostile to the development of linguistic skills other than English. However, upon closer scrutiny, there is evidence that supports the opinion that discrimination exists even between languages. Bazzi believes that the school environment, while hostile to such languages as Arabic or Romanian or Spanish because of their immigrant connections, the school staff is quite supportive of foreign language learning, when it is French or German. This attitude on the part of school staffs throughout the district implies the valuation of some languages over others for reasons that are cultural and power-related. Moreover, this attitude impacts students in a fundamental way because it not only reflects the prejudices of the teaching staff toward English and other “approved” languages, rather it communicates to students this outlook, implanting in their impressionable minds unwholesome ideas regarding language use that translates to the formation of cultural biases and prejudices.

What is more devastating in this instance, as well, is the impact of this attitude on the speakers of those “un-approved” languages, and the effect it has on their self-concepts, and their collective self-esteem. The idea that one language is more appreciated than another in the context of schooling can damage the psychological well-being of a child who hails from the background of a language and culture that may be considered pedestrian, alien, or suspect by his or her own teachers. Clearly, this attitude has the potential to harm many in the school system, leading to cases of self-hate and self-loathing because of the power of teachers to shape the minds of their charges.
It is evident that the emphasis is placed on English and development of skills in that language. Students are expected to develop those skills as soon as possible. Although it is not quite a “sink or swim” environment, it is not one that entirely supports natural growth through development of extant skills; rather it seeks to stunt the growth of available skills in order to develop new ones. The reason given for this approach is that the district is doing what is right for children because they live in a social environment that demands it. While to a degree that is true, the school system, as originator of education, espouses this ideological view and serves to maintain it.

Moreover, the approach is one that has been freely chosen and not mandated from any outside agency. Nonetheless, the system has put in place a programme of education that represents its ideological leanings, and has acquired a staff, whose ideological views and prejudices serves the overall purpose of the school system’s goals—whether manifest, hidden or un-articulated.

To illustrate this point, two accounts from the writer’s personal experience will be given. First, during the mid 1990s the assistant to the head of the bilingual and bicultural programme, a committed and respected leader-teacher, announced that “English is a power language”, meaning that students need to know English in order to empower themselves to do anything in the United States. No doubt it is true that students need to know English in order to survive and thrive in an American context. However, the emphasis was so placed on the acquisition of English under the banner headline of English equals power, and the need for active acquisition at any cost, that it led to the under-valuation of available assets, which students already bring with them to the learning process. This is so apparent to students who come to feel that what they have in
terms of language skills and cultural norms is somehow lacking in value because of the overarching negative, though mostly subliminal, messages being communicated to students.

This idea of devaluing extant skills available to students can be seen in the name the bilingual and bicultural education programme has chosen for itself in the school district. Under the title name of “Special and Compensatory Education” readily one can see that the immigrant student’s lack of facility with the host society’s language is conceived of as a problem to be lumped with other special needs students, implying somehow that a perfectly capable student is to be served the same as a less functional student. Moreover, the term “compensatory”, in its own right, suggests the lack of something for which some remedial service is needed. Clearly, this approach goes to illustrate the prejudices of the system toward the students it purports to assist in becoming fully functioning members of society.

Another example of this linguistic totalitarianism is also part of the experience of this writer who during the latter part of 1990s witnessed first hand the linguistic oppression at the school level. At one large high school in the city of Dearborn, students were directed not to speak any language other than English, no matter how low proficient they may be in it. The idea behind this dicta is that students who are in the majority immigrants, and mostly of Arab background, needed to practice their English skills at school since they did so less out in the community. Clearly, there was no research done on the part of the schools to suggest that students did not practice their learning outside of the school setting; rather it was based on the assumptions of some administrators who thought in these terms based on their ideological leanings.
Also, the notion of speaking English only — no matter how academically reasonable it sounds, (and this is very debatable issue when framed in those terms)— goes against democratic values and protected civil liberties (especially, the right to freedom of speech), which evidently can be sacrificed because it was not representative of the right sort of speech.

What is more, the same dicta would make students who have limited competence in English become silent instead of using their mother tongue to communicate when they need to. Furthermore, the same policy does not recognise that language is part and parcel of the person’s identity—at several levels, psychological, social and cultural; therefore deprivation of the expression of these fundamental elements of personhood is essentially an act of oppression. This policy was applied by committed administrators who fully believed in the academic and social efficacy of their project, admonishing students to speak English or else. The “else” in this instance is in the form of disciplinary action toward students who spoke languages other than English in the classroom or out in the hallways or during school hours. Not only were Limited English Proficient (LEP) students unable to fully communicate in English without lapsing into their own tongues, also fully bilingual students, many of them natives to the USA, were using their Arabic or Romanian or Italian to speak their minds, and express themselves during school hours; it was only natural for them to do so. Yet, this behaviour on their part meant they contravened school policy and students were subject to detentions after school or possibly even suspensions for persistent acts of insubordination because of their use of other, unsanctioned, forms of communication.
Eventually, the policy proved a failure but this form of language planning persisted in the school setting, relaxing the original policy and modifying it. Now, the policy states that students must speak English at all times while in the classrooms or while engaged in a school functions, allowing students freedom to be themselves while they are during their lunch time or some other recess. Clearly, however, in pure freedom of speech terms this convention remains problematic, nonetheless.

Unmistakably, all these examples show a continued pattern of oppressive behaviour that this writer believes is directed, whether intentioned or otherwise, at minority language groups in order to delimit the contours of their lives. Its ultimate purpose is to control the lives of others and makes them pliable to the majority’s wishes. By depriving students from learning in their native language in parallel format with English, whether it is Arabic or Romanian or another, or when prevented to speak their Italian or Polish or Arabic, students are deprived not only of their basic free speech rights, they are also being suppressed, and prevented from developing their oppositional literacy. Furthermore, the schools attempt to impose their official norms and standards (unmediated by any other influence) under the guise of education, is the promotion and imposition of the norms and values of the dominant group (Wiley, 1993).

7.2 Reflective Summary

The following discourse reflects on the issues of this project. It deals with the hypotheses that were introduced in Chapter One and revisits the matter of the significance and adequacy of the AFL Programme in Dearborn Schools. Also, it deals with the issues of research methodology, including validity, reliability and limitations of the study. Subsequently, the summary draws lessons from the discourse on Arab
American history and life. Lastly, it offers a review of the research results, paving the way for final conclusions.

7.2.1 Reflection on Hypotheses Posed

In Chapter One, it was hypothesised that the more integrated members of Arab American society in the mainstream will value Arabic less than the less assimilated, perhaps, newcomers and/or those less educated. Also, it was hypothesised that regardless of the level of assimilation, Arab Americans will highly value the learning and teaching of Arabic. It was further hypothesised that, regardless of how they feel about Arabic, Arab Americans will support maintenance efforts in order to keep Arabic as an ethnic marker vis-à-vis non-Arab background citizens in the city of Dearborn. Lastly, it was also hypothesised that friction and unease felt on either side of the ethnic divide in Dearborn expressed itself in the school arena.

In terms of the first hypothesis, it was found that the scene is more nuanced than the binary suggested earlier. While “assimilated/integrated” Arab immigrants and Arab Americans may have emphasised Arabic less than recent immigrants and less educated members of the community, to varying degrees, all had valued Arabic as an icon of their ethnicity and their presence in the city. This emphasis suggests the political and cultural nature of the use of Arabic as a symbol of self-empowerment in the community, and as an ethnic marker of the sub-group in the city.

As regards the second hypothesis, there is no evidence from this research, supporting the position that regardless of assimilation/integration Arab, Americans highly value the teaching/learning of Arabic in the community. Rather, in this matter, the research effort has found a mixed approach. In the main, there is a desire to keep Arabic
alive in the community and among the descendants of Arab Americans, but the community’s focus is on English development. Also, it has become apparent that the focus of any Arabic learning is ultimately familiarity not competence; therefore, Arabic is subordinated to English, and not as highly valued in the community as once was thought.

The third hypothesis posited that regardless of their feeling or sense of Arabic, Arab Americans would support a maintenance effort for cultural reasons. While, to some extent, the research suggests some level of support for Arabic maintenance efforts, there is agreement among respondents that Arabic constitutes symbolic representation of the community; and there is recognition – if not implicit support – for it as an ethnic marker and icon of the community. However, it is the view of the writer that the community values and supports the iconic function of Arabic more for political reasons than cultural. In other words, Arabic functions as the barometer of achieving acceptance and political self-empowerment in Dearborn; that is, the more Arabic is accepted and/or obliged onto the greater community, the more Arab Americans will feel they have “arrived” on the political scene in terms of becoming American.

The last hypothesis claimed that friction and unease over Arabic would be felt on either side of the ethnic divide in Dearborn, expressing itself in the school arena. The hypothetical claim proved itself right in many ways. It was found that friction exists in the school setting between Arab and non-Arab staff members, due to reasons of prejudice and bias, resulting in the devaluation of Arab American professional contributions (e.g., devaluation of bilingual teachers), as well as devaluation of programmes that serve or thought to serve Arab Americans (e.g. Arabic as a foreign language). This phenomenon expresses itself in ideological dissociation and staff alienation. Additionally, given the
iconic status of Arabic, the latter becomes a symbol of the friction between the two communities: the Arab American community offers Arabic as a symbol of itself and its acceptance and a measure of their attainment and recognition in the greater community, while the majority non-Arab community uses Arabic as an emblem of foreign-ness (e.g. Islam), alienation and othering. In this low intensity cultural war brought on by the mainstream, the referents of Arabic mean different things to each camp.

So, what has the research effort revealed? In terms of meeting the needs and expectations of Arab American heritage learners in the AFL programme, the school system in technical terms has offered a programme that is on par with university programmes. This development is the result of the efforts promulgated in 1998 (with the participation of this writer). However, at the more intangible level of moral and socio-cultural support, the school system has failed to offer students an environment that values Arabic as a foreign and heritage language and that reinforces the desire on the part of many members of the community to instill in their children familiarity with Arabic for cultural reasons. The school system has offered teachers, rooms, and books for learning but does not integrate it in the culture and overall curricular identity of the system, remaining a proverbial stepchild on the outside looking in.

Equally the research offers no major evidence on the part of the community, supporting language and culture maintenance efforts. In fact, testimonial evidence suggests that the community as a whole is more interested in a process of becoming American, with a great deal of focus on English development and acculturation in American norms, than there is on Arabic maintenance. Exceptions are observed in the privately instituted after-school programmes and religious-based parochial educational
institutions in the community in addition to AFL in the public schools. However, beyond these institutional responses, there is nothing else. A cursory review of the priorities of community organisations did not present any emphasis on youth issues or language maintenance, a point noted by youth participants, remarking that issues of young people are all but nonexistent in terms of a community agenda.

It has been suggested that real support on the part of the community would involve more active participation in the school setting, particularly in the AFL programme, not the least of which, developing an advisory group for the programme, drawn from the community and academics. This idea was implemented for the bilingual education programme (AFL), where the focus is on English development. In fact, AFL grew out of the recommendations of one such bilingual advisory group. Also, the idea of a contest and a prize for Arabic can be offered in the community for Arabic language students, including special scholarship for Arabic scholars. Ironically, community organisations offer thousands of dollars each year in academic scholarships (e.g. media studies scholarship offered by the Lebanese American Heritage Club), but none are related to Arabic learning. In terms of prizes and contests, community organisations sponsor essay writings and the like, but the focus is always on issues of related to the local scene (e.g. topic like “what does it mean to be Arab American?” with focus on American, of course). Additionally, a serious language maintenance effort requires some investment on the part of community organisations in such things as language clubs and tutoring centres (which exist for building English language skills, e.g.: ACCESS Community Centre).
Naturally, there are other ideas that can be implemented, such as “language in the community” programming, whereby participating locales offer language practice spots in the community for persons wishing to improve their language skills. One such example is implementing an apprentice model of learning, whereby young individuals in the community are paired with masters/elders to learn and/or improve language and culture skills – an arrangement that offers the bonus of added cohesion between the generations and serves to dispel the myths of generational conflicts. The absence of such active measures of community initiative and community based education is evidence that the community does not back efforts of language and culture maintenance.

7.2.2 Reflection on the Adequacy of the AFL Programme

How does the AFL programme fit into the overall culture of the school district? As alluded to earlier, the school system as a whole is governed by policies, conventions and a culture, emanating from an ethos that devalues non-white, non-Anglo-Saxon, non-European cultures and practices. Largely un-enunciated and sub-textual, the overarching ideology that informs attitudes is based on a “subtractive” state of being; that is, in order for people to become American, they must subtract from their identities elements that prevent them from emulating the majority’s white, Euro-Anglo ways. The school system is charged with the socialisation of students into the American mainstream, as per the local norms of this sense of being American. Therefore, by adopting a subtractive model of education, inherently, the school system does not meet the needs of heritage learners and their community, which, as the evidence bears witness, is involved in becoming American but on its own terms. Thus, in essence, the extant pedagogical philosophy to
which the school system subscribes runs counterpoise to the needs of students or parental
efforts at cultural maintenance—as limited and as non-threatening as they are.

The AFL project, a pioneering undertaking in Dearborn, is a unique experience in
American society. However, where is this project headed? As far as can be discerned,
given minimal support from the community, the programme is likely to stay because of
what Arabic as an icon has come to mean in the school setting and the city. Now more
than ever an argument for teaching and learning Arabic can be made in terms of
American national needs in the post-9/11 global environment. Some in the Arabic
language teaching community have suggested that the Tragedy is to the Arabic language
the equivalent of the space race and Sputnik, which at the time constituted the motivation
for supporting Russian language and culture learning and pedagogy. Therefore, it is an
opportunity for Dearborn Public Schools to lead the nation in this pioneering effort.
However, up to this point, there is no evidence to suggest Arabic will be brought out of
its state of “salutary neglect” in which it exists. At a time when Dearborn personnel
should be taking more interest in motivating non-Arab students to learn Arabic, the
language remains the province of othering and devaluation, despite the national security
needs of the United States.

This state of affairs demands comprehending the purpose of this programme,
which has not been fully stated. The best answer that can be determined is simply to keep
the Arab American community in Dearborn at bay, suggesting a form of cooperation; but
in fact, this sense of collaboration is minimal if not nil. From the perspective of the
community, apparently the availability of the programme is enough, as long as it serves a
platform that familiarises students with Arabic and elements of Arab culture. What is the
pedagogical framework within which it is conducted? While in its earliest beginnings it was wrongfully taught as native language in Dearborn (based on the evidence of earlier curricula and materials), the current AFL structure is conducted in accordance with methods and theoretical underpinnings of foreign language pedagogies, heavily drawing on the English as a foreign and as a second language model due largely to the bias of the programme teachers who are trained in this model. (It is important to note that only one teacher of those who taught Arabic in the system had been trained in AFL pedagogy).

This issue brings into question the matter of whether teachers are adequately prepared to give instruction in this discipline. The answer to this question is, no, they are not because of their limitations in Arabic pedagogy. And, without proper in-servicing in support of the teachers in the area of Arabic pedagogy, the programme, its teachers and students would suffer deficits. Thus, it is highly important to enlist the help of Arabic academicians at the university level in the process of in-servicing, and to work on achieving licensure status for AFL teachers so that actual training in AFL pedagogy can be available at the university level for those who wish to pursue careers in Arabic.

While the training of the teachers is currently adequate in practical terms, it is not ideal. Arabic, given its diglossia and distance from other cognate European languages, has a different set of priorities in the classroom when teaching native English speakers. Additionally, Arabic in the classroom for Arab American students poses another set of issues, namely, its status as a second and a heritage language, necessitating pedagogies that would take it into consideration – something that is not the case in terms of the official curricular structures of the programme.
The major success of the Arabic programme, aside from its continued longevity, is its provision of a safe harbour in the school setting for the Arabic language and its proponents. For teachers, their success is measured in sharing with students a new outlook on Arabic, Arabs and the Arab world in order to offset the devaluing and orientalising effects of education in the mainstream. In essence, this is what they want to achieve. For parents and the Arab American community as a whole, success lies in the exposure of students to elements of ancestral culture and their familiarisation with Arab norms. Certainly, teachers are eager to obtain more from parents and the community. The support they want is a holistic approach to linking classroom to community, given the existing organic ties. But, this is lacking, and absent is the will to do more, which does not appear to happen because the focus is on integration and English development.

7.2.3 Reflection on Research Methodology

In Chapter Two, methodology of the research effort was introduced, elaborating on the ways and means of bringing it to fruition. Adhering to a qualitative theory of knowledge, the aim of this research is to understand the pedagogical environment through a scholarly and methodical plan in order to effect some changes in the writer’s (socio-educational) approach, and with others with whom he interacted. Thus, as a form of “action research”, this effort is a “reflective inquiry” (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1982), centred on the idea of “self-reflective problem solving” to achieve understanding and problem resolution in social settings (McKernan, 1988). As an approach, this investigative method is “collective, collaborative, self-reflective, critical, and undertaken by the participants of the inquiry” (McCutcheon and Jung, 1990).
The hallmark of qualitative practitioner research is a critical spirit. This is the work of someone on the inside, studying a setting of which the researcher is a true participant. In this sense, this research effort and its products must not be considered somewhat different from qualitative research where the investigator tends to be an outsider, according to Anderson et al. (1994). Qualitative practitioner research is concerned with asymmetries of power and issues of equity, thus, promoting scholarship that is predicated on reflective autonomy, sense-making, personal responsibility and empowerment, in addition to a democratic process (Alvesson and Kaj Skoldberg, 2000).

Reflective of this investigative stance, this researcher adopted the “case study” approach to investigate the institution of Dearborn public schools as a single entity as it relates to the learning and teaching of Arabic as a foreign language *in situ* (Creswell, 1994). According to Gall et al. (1996) case studies are used for one of three purposes in qualitative research: to produce descriptions of a phenomenon, develop possible explanations of it, or evaluate it. In this research effort, however, all three purposes have been invoked.

This research also utilised the historical method to a great degree: Through a comprehensive investigation of Arab American history, nationally and locally, an exhaustive history of the institution of Dearborn public schools and its ethos were offered, producing a descriptive narrative of the phenomenon within its socio-cultural and historical context. Additionally, the experiences of Dearborn schools and the city of Dearborn were addressed in its varied dimensions, including bilingual and bicultural education, and Arabic as a foreign/heritage language.
The significance of Arabic as a potent symbol on either side of the “accept or reject” equation were explored, delivering an holistic explanation of the phenomenon, by using the voices and words of participants in analysis to draw a portrait of how and why things are as they are. These explorations were carried out by focusing on the “mentions” of participants – the themes and ideas that are generated by respondents, as well as the “noticings” (Mason, 1992) or the ability to perceive and assimilate, which Hunter (2000) suggests are observations without judgement to achieve a better sense of a reality.

A. Validity of Research: The validity of this research approach, being a qualitative action research project, is predicated on the following criteria identified by Anderson et al (1994): democratic validity, outcome validity, process, validity, catalytic validity and dialogic validity. This research effort has met the requirements of these criteria. By consulting the widest possible base of informants (not less than four hundred individuals, including students, parents, community members, school professionals and others), the researcher sought out a community of interest of stakeholders that helped decide the issues of the research by listening to them and in carrying their voices to the pages of this document. In terms of the outcome validity criterion, it is achieved via the proper framing of research issues against a background of other issues, setting the stage for other activity, research, or otherwise. This criterion has been accommodated through sharing and consciousness-raising that was the result of interactions with research participants, leading to increased sensitivity and a higher level of willingness to engage in efforts of social change, thus, additionally, confirming the democratic criterion.

Also, the variety of methods used to attain reliable data (e.g., interviews, focus groups, surveys, conversations, mentions and noticings, and documentary evidence, etc.)
have guarded against over-simplification of the issues involved in the research, thus, accommodating the process validity criteria that is concerned with data gathering. In terms of catalytic validity, this criterion is provided for through continuous re-appraisal of the research effort and its trajectory, safeguarding against falling prey to one-sidedness. This criterion also is confirmed by the outcome validity criterion, where the consciousness-raising and sensitivity to issues create (or magnify) commitment to action. All of the previous criteria are woven together and are under-girded by the dialogic criterion: the willingness to lay open the research process, its ideological premises, and trajectory to continuous critique.

In accommodating this all-important criteria, the researcher engages in reflective dialogue with a “critical friend” in order to ascertain and guarantee “goodness of research” (Anderson et al, 1994), reinforcing the collaborative nature of action research at the intellectual and processual levels. This criterion has been provided for in this research through countless discussions the writer has had with colleagues within and outside the school establishment in order to maintain quality. However, moving beyond average critique, this writer acknowledged and accepted seriously the premise (and role) of a “critical friend”, engaging Ms. Madona Mokbel, a researcher and fellow graduate student (at York University in Toronto, Ontario, Canada), as a dialogic partner, who acted as a third party auditor of the “goodness of research” effort, as well as an active conscience of the project.

B. Reliability of Research: Reliability of this research rests on impeccable documentation and outside auditing, but, even more importantly, is the use of a dialogic partner—someone who is a third party auditor of data gathering and processing. In the
end, however, dependability was achieved through continuous reflection on the problems and issues of the research, and through continued dialogue with stakeholders and peers in various settings, enabling this writer to form reasonable conclusions that can be grounded and explained by the data.

C. Limitations of the Study: This research effort was originally intended to canvas all secondary education AFL students throughout the Dearborn Public Schools system. This would have included students in Fordson and Dearborn high schools. However, because the-then-principal of Dearborn High School (Mr. Louis Guido) had objected to the conduct of the research, this researcher was unable to gain access to the students. This objection came despite the approval of the-then-Superintendent of Schools, Dr. Jeremy Hughes, and the Director of Testing and Assessment Department in the school system, Dr. Shereen Arraf, (who functions in the capacity of Human Subjects Research Approval monitor). Mr. Louis Guido objected on grounds that the research would interfere with students’ learning.

Although at face value, this is a legitimate concern, the principal intentionally failed to recognise the potential importance of such study to generate outcomes-based data that can benefit the programme, curriculum, the students and the district as an academic institution, as well as, to adding to corpus of research on Arabic language pedagogy in settings other than tertiary education. Primarily, this rejection the research effort was due to two reasons: first, because he was locked in conflict with the superintendent of schools, and, secondly, because he was not committed to the improvement of the programme, a sign of devaluation that has been emblematic of Arabic in Dearborn public schools.
The events of September 11, 2001 created a special set of challenges to the progress of this research effort, as well, necessitating accommodation. Such changes that had to be implemented included a halt in the work for a time throughout 2002 due to issues related to participant apprehensions. Also, some changes in the approach and conduct of the focus group process were effected. Although the researcher originally had intended to convene several focus groups and explore themes more aggressively, political and other events had a “chilling effect” on members of the community, impacting the research effort and causing a downsizing of number of interviewees and focus group participants in order to adapt to the new exigencies. Although the researcher has kept faith with his original intent of using appropriate research methods and approaches to the study that included the interview and focus group format, he must admit to a limitation in the pursuit of certain ideas or themes due to the formulation of new “taboos” in the community, given the political realities of the times.

In addition to this problem, because of his ethnic background, the researcher’s access to majority community members speaking their mind on the issues was severely limited in the post September 11, 2001 climate. Originally, the researcher had planned to interview non-Arab background teachers and other school personnel in order to compare/contrast viewpoints on issues. However, this element of the research plan had fallen victim to social retrenchment and parochialism, reflecting fears and apprehensions in the general community.

7.2.4 Reflection on Arab American History and Life

In Chapters Three and Four, Arab American history and life were extensively explored in order to create not only the context of Arab Americans in Dearborn but also
for this study. In essence the American outlook towards the Arab East is marked by three elements: conflation, essentialisation and normalisation (David and Ayoubi, 2004). An early American history that is characterised by fear and distrust of things Arab and Muslim, a tendency inherited from America’s European background, as well as a propensity to lump Arabs, Muslims and associated peoples as one, conflating them into a monolith, essentialised into an “anti-self”. Essentialisation refers to a process of reductionism that renders persons and groups as “others” with opposite cultural norms and practices that threaten a historically dominant group and/or one that has acquired power to label.

Early American negativism towards Arabs and Muslims stemmed from historical views that are rooted in rivalry between Europe (Christendom) and the Arab and Muslim East (Dar-ul-Islam, the “Abode of Peace [Islam]”). This competition between civilisations took the form of military confrontations with Maghreb Muslim states and vice-regencies (i.e. the “Barbary Wars” and the hunt for corsairs), events that informed the attitudes of the earliest Americans and affected the cultural mindscape of the American Republic. Although economic in its imperative, the Barbary Wars became emblematic of the American Republic’s desire and ethos concerning a self-chosen and pro-active mission of advancing Christian Liberty in the face of what was perceived as Muslim tyranny. Therefore, the early contacts served the cause of estrangement due to ideological othering, predicated on conflation and essentialisation. In no small measure, this viewpoint had been buttressed by the use of Biblical interpretations concerning Arabs and Muslims (known as the “cursed Ishmaelites”), contributing to an outlook that generated political and social consequences for all concerned throughout the intervening
centuries. Therefore, the religious dimensions of this confrontation cannot be underestimated.

Not only Arabs and Muslims had been vilified, but also in America they had become the object of fear. Moreover, during the time of nation-building in American history, an ideology of racism prevailed, objectifying all non White Anglo-Saxon groups as inferior. Naturally, this phenomenon impacted Arabs, Muslims and associated peoples. Therefore, it is not surprising to discover the association of Arab/Muslim brownness with African American blackness in American history, given the accessibility of the black experience in America as phenomenon that subsumed brownness. If the Black African increasingly became the anti-American-self, the antithesis of White European, being Arab or Muslim became included under the former category. Thus, if an African American is a “nigger”, an Arab is a “sand nigger”. What better evidence of this subsuming (and historical form of conflating) than the historically consistent and persistent depiction of Shakespeare’s “Othello” in America by white actors who blacken their faces, or (later) by African American actors, suggesting the “African-ness” of the character and the people he belonged to.

Of course, the “Moor-cum-Black” theme is a phenomenon of othering. However, it is not the only way Arabs in America have been viewed and othered. Gradually, as American fears of Maghreb invasions subsided and the outcome of wars had favoured the American side, the Arab/Muslim/Ottoman “civilisational” threat that the Moor had posed in America’s early history subsided, and gave way to process of “niggerisation” that included the Arab category. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, however, Eastern
Arabs emerged anew as objects of vilification and ethnic controversy. Of course, their Ottoman, Muslim and Oriental connexions were at the core of their status degradation.

The issue of the racial identity of Greater Syria’s Arabs emerged in the annals of Arab American history as the “Asian Controversy”, which speaks of conflation and devaluation. While the former colour burden had been brown-cum-black, the new racial designation was intended to be “Asiatic” (i.e., “yellow”), a location bestowed by the American racist system due to the association of Eastern Arabs with the Turkic (hence, Asiatic) Ottoman Empire. Of course, at face value this may seem logical in politico-legal terms, at a time when nation-states were emerging from empires. But closer scrutiny reveals not only conflation through lumping of variety of peoples together, but the choice of label indicates othering and devaluation, since historically Asians (e.g. Chinese and Japanese) have been the objects of dehumanisation, mistreatment and exclusion in American society. Although eventually, Eastern Arabs gained recognition of their Caucasian credentials as members of the “Semitic race”, their “whiteness” remained tenuous. In fact, in the American South especially, many Arabs remained “niggers” in the eyes of White Americans, according to historical accounts.

America’s eugenic preoccupation with racial ideal types rendered Syrian Arabs, with their proverbial swarthy features, in the early parts of the 20th century, into a “visible” minority that betrayed signs of “difference” from the white norms. Anti Arab prejudice transcended racial and ethnic categorisation to include a confessional dimension. Syrian Arab Catholics and Orthodox Christians were unwelcome in the midst of Protestant America, while Muslims, mistaken for Turks, were also targeted and discriminated against for their ethno-religious background.
Throughout the latter half of the 20th Century, the Arab-Israeli conflict and the rise of American Christian fundamentalism, also known as Christian Zionism for its favouring of the State of Israel, impacted the American view of Arabs at home and abroad. Hearkening back to earlier times in history, the Arabs as Muslims, therefore, as non-white others, were configured in the contemporary American mindscape in the context of an unending problem, re-enforcing negative stereotyping of the group. The Arabs, now conflated with others and observed as Muslims who are portrayed as having different gods, religious beliefs and ideals, were epitomised as the “other” and “anti-self”, the opposite of American ideals. This problematised them as a group on the world stage, and equally pathologised them in America, rendering the community the focus of estrangement and subject to dehumanisation and essentialisation.

The tragic events of September 11th 2001 had devastating effects on the contemporary American psyche, especially in regards to feeling secure and safe in the American homeland, however, for Arab and Muslim Americans the tragedy produced far more disastrous effects for them. Arab Americans, considered thus far Caucasian and officially belonging to the White race, were shifted overnight back into the category of other, non-White. Thus, historically and currently, Arab Americans (as well as Muslims) stand sandwiched between an American assimilationist project that marginally and provisionally accepts them (until further notice, depending on socio-political exigencies of the times) and a racist system and ideology that is fundamentally prone to rejecting them for being the epitome of the American anti-self.

It is this context that frames the Arab American experience, situated in a historically white suburb of the Detroit metropolitan area, a small city known for its
historical anti-black, anti-non-white tendencies, Dearborn Arab Americans strive to make a home for themselves and their progeny. While the American mainstream is guarded about the future and is fearful of terrorism, Arab Americans, across the nation and in Dearborn, are additionally fearful of hate and terrorism from fellow Americans. Therefore, they are doubly terrorised and marginalized due to historical, cultural and political reasons that are entrenched in American society.

7.2.5 Reflection on Dearborn’s Educational System and Arab American Involvement

In Chapter Five, Dearborn’s educational system was explored, setting the stage for this research effort and Arab American involvement in it. Since its earliest beginning, the American system of education conceived of schools as tool of moral and civic instruction. However, as the country expanded geographically and demographically, the purpose of the school evolved to include another purpose, the promotion of national cohesion, whose hallmarks are the values of the dominant members of society, namely, white Anglo-Saxon Protestant culture.

This national imperative became even more important in the latter decades of the 19th and throughout the 20th centuries as America experienced first the “Great Migration” which brought millions of southern and south-eastern European and “Near Eastern” people to its shores, and later in the 20th century, a variety of peoples from across the world. The new immigrants and their descendants were obliged to become American in terms set by the host society, which perceived Americanisation in terms of shedding previous ethnic identities and adopting the cultural norms and lifestyles of white America. In addition, the need of an increasingly industrial economy demanded an educational system that promoted a utilitarian approach to learning, placing a higher
value on pragmatism that ultimately produced John Dewey as a major figure in pragmatic philosophy and American education.

As a corporate educational institution, Dearborn Public Schools historically and currently is vested in carrying out the purpose of an American public education system, namely, to socialise students into becoming “productive members” of their part of American society. Therefore, the mandate of the school system is to develop students whose values reflect the broader values of American society, which are representative of those who have “cultural power” locally and nationally, namely, white Americans. While the overt “melting pot” approach to assimilation has given way to more subtle forms of Americanisation based on Euro-Anglo white norms in the post 1960s civil rights era, nonetheless, the latter approach to schooling remains the standard in American education, including Dearborn’s school system. This standard is unabashedly based on white, Anglo-Saxon culture to the exclusion of other traditions.

Thus, in this ideologically driven milieu of education, hostility to Bilingual and Bicultural Education (BBE) (and other forms of educational practices that are, or perceived to be, in this mould) is bound to erupt due to clashing philosophies. Since the overriding ideology of the school system is based on subtractive exclusion, BBE practices embrace an additive approach to education, whereby skills and other assets of the learner (especially, including home and ethnic culture) are valued as important elements of the individual and his/her educational and socio-cultural development. Proponents of subtractive assimilation necessarily view this approach to education as a direct attack on the school’s mandate to absorb and homogenise students into an American ideal type, reflecting the values of white America. Therefore, as a result of this
attitude, any educational practice, programme and/or outcome of bilingual education or any educational idea or programme that are linked to or perceived to be associated with BBE (e.g., Arabic as a Foreign Language education) will be held suspect and viewed as counter productive in terms of the philosophical underpinnings of the school system. As such, this backdrop offers the arena for conflict between two ideological approaches, while recognising that the terrain is not equal between the two systems because the subtractive ideology has hold over the reins of power in society.

7.2.6 Reflection on Empirical Research Results

In Chapter Six, the results of the research effort were presented in total. What was learned? On the whole, respondents spoke of barriers that hinder the teaching of Arabic in Dearborn schools, namely lack of resources, especially in the nascent stages of the programme. Although, it has developed into a full programme, there is a sense of lack of qualified teachers, whose training is specific to that discipline. Unlike other language programmes, anyone who can speak Arabic can qualify to be a teacher in the eyes of the non-Arab community, suggesting a downgraded programme. Therefore, an Arabic language teacher is not necessarily certified to teach in that field, making for different standards being applied for AFL than for other languages. Overall, the devaluation of Arabic language as a theme emerged repeatedly in the discourses of respondents, especially the teachers.

By and large, Arabic was perceived not to be adequately supported by the community, parents and students, and each segment of the population seemed to lay blame on others. Apparently, it is a programme that is devalued globally, viewed as “not an important class”. In terms of school administration, Arabic is surmised a “token”
language on offer in the curriculum and a “public relations” tactic to ward off unwanted encroachments. It was observed that everyone pays the cause of Arabic “lip service” but not much else.

Educators use it to “dump” students in the classes to make scheduling easier and to circumvent conflict with parents over educational careers of students. Moreover, Arab American students are not considered beyond the binary of Arabic and English, whereby English is dominant and Arabic is secondary (e.g. a tool towards English acquisition); hence, it does not hold the status of other potential world languages worthy of exploration by students. This occurrence seems to indicate devaluation of Arabic and Arab American students. Also, this devaluation extends to reach teachers of Arabic or bilingual educators who are viewed as teacher aides in the system by a significant group of colleagues, as reported by teachers.

The use of Arabic as an educational tool or the teaching of Arabic foreign language is authorised by law and promoted by the state’s Office of Civil Rights (for bilingual education), which allow for the existence of Arabic in the school system. In other words, it is not necessarily utilised or taught because the culture of the system accepts or welcomes Arab-background people, rather due to political considerations.

For the parents, Arabic is a language that represents heritage, culture, and religious tradition, however, parents, aside from wanting and “forcing” their children to learn it, have not shown much interest in supporting it in other ways. This is due to several factors: (a) a segment of the population whose parents’ low level of education does not permit full participation in the school institution, or because they are recent immigrants and are not familiar with the American education system. And, (b) because
there seems to occur a deeper focus on the process of socio-cultural integration, of which English acquisition is a major part, stressing assimilation over language maintenance. Nonetheless, (c), Arabic is equally used as a subordinated tool in education, as in the case of parents seeking to inflate grades and general point averages for their children’ school careers, thereby requiring them to enrol in Arabic courses. Although, at face value this can suggest linguistic and cultural maintenance, in reality it points to devaluation, since the discipline is not treated seriously.

Students evidently are equally disinterested in learning it unless they can benefit from an easy grade. Some would rather learn another foreign language since they already know Arabic from home, which may imply distancing from the home culture. Most AFL students are Arab American, which entails a \textit{de facto} form of segregation—unlike other foreign language programmes such as Spanish or French where many students come from “the mainstream” with mixed backgrounds. This occurrence suggests majority alienation from Arabic, obviously due to its connexions with the Arab American community in Dearborn and its Arab world background.

In terms of students and their school setting, Arabic is not treated equally to other languages. Learning a second language is a right available to other students, yet it appears to be discouraged for Arab children in practical terms due largely to the binary thinking of associating Arab American students with Arabic and English, i.e., in two dimensional (cartoonish) terms, unwilling to admit to complexity on the part of the school establishment. Historically, there have been restrictions (and they remain in some ways) for Arabic-speaking Arab American students (i.e. in the school hallways, cafeteria and classrooms). This kind of language planning policies is a way to discourage or even
shame the language, and, by extension, the culture. It stems from a subtractive operating paradigm in school that is predicated on removal of background and inserting a new system in its place. Thus, students are forced to mould into the expectations of mainstream, that is, to assimilate into white, Euro-Anglo culture.

By the same token, values that are perceived as contrary and oppositional to American culture (i.e., Arab culture students) are not condoned by the school administration, suggesting a belief in divergence of values (that are in fact never articulated and contrasted), an hierarchy of acceptance of certain cultural norms and behaviours—relegating the Arabic language and Dearborn elements of Arab culture to the lowest levels, furthering the cause of devaluation.

Prevalence of anti-Arab stereotypes is persistent in the school community in spite of long term working relationship between Arab and non-Arab teachers, which apparently did not help in demystifying these stereotypes. Racism is entrenched in the school culture, but it originates from outside the school walls. It exists on personal and institutional levels, and this attitude spills over to the students. As one Arab American teacher noted, they are taught with “no sense of feelings towards them, not understanding what is going on in their lives”. In terms of adults, according to Arab American personnel, peers look down upon and/or with suspicion towards those who speak Arabic. The message being perceived is one that is intended to make Arab Americans feel as though they are of a lower social standing, lesser professionally and academically, and inferior racially and ethnically.

AFL and BBE teachers are frustrated and disillusioned, according to their discourses. They feel as though they are fighting a losing battle, especially after the
events of September 2001. However, they continue to teach because they believe in the benefits of teaching Arabic to their students, even though they lack real support from every party concerned. Also, BBE teachers believe they are the best hope for the children against an unwelcoming mainstream that seeks to obliterate the basic elements of these children’s cultural and linguistic backgrounds. However, there is a bright silver lining in the clouds, since it has been remarked that the younger more recent non-Arab teacher hires are more accepting of other cultures including Arabic.

Among AFL teachers there was concern regarding the unequal distribution ratio of Arab teachers/students, allowing for practical segregation. The administration does not seem concerned enough with this discrepancy nor is it doing anything to correct it. Overall, because of above noted problems, the AFL programme has had many challenges such as curricular inconsistencies in teaching and staff turnover. Although these issues have been ameliorated since 1998 through establishing standards and choosing appropriate curriculum (largely due to efforts spearheaded by this writer), and staff turnover has been largely dealt with by hiring teachers with experience in language arts teaching (primarily reading and ESL), there remains other obstacles facing the programme. They are in the sphere of attracting non-Arab background students, securing better support from the school system and community, as well as students, in addition to the development of an AFL syllabus that is age-appropriate, Arab American friendly (heritage learning) and youth-culture-appropriate materials for students. Attending to these issues will go a long way in helping the retention of Arab American students and in supporting the placement of higher values on Arabic as a foreign language.
Taken as a whole, the AFL programme to date is a devalued and marginalised programme – much like the people it represents. This, too, is applicable to the BBE programme and its students. Moreover, being bilingual (Arabic-English) is a stigma, a negative attribute in the eyes of majority citizens. It is subject to jokes and put downs, sometimes overtly. According to the operating subtractive paradigm in Dearborn, in order to be accepted, you have to divest of the elements that make up your soul: assimilate, become white, and adopt Euro-Anglo norms of culture are the standards that must be accepted. This must mean in essence that one must give up one’s dignity and comply to the standards of the mainstream in order to become American. Evidently, the overriding belief is that one cannot be simultaneously American and Arab, for they are mutually exclusive categories, as can be surmised from the evidence of the discourses. These attitudes and issues naturally existed from the beginnings of the community’s presence in the city (and from the start of the BBE and AFL programmes), thus, are unrelated to the events of September 11th. However, the Tragedy had heightened issues for Arab Americans and Muslims in the city of Dearborn. Automatic linkage of Arabs to terrorism perpetuates their otherness and makes permanent a sense of overall anxiety in mainstream white culture toward anything Arab or Muslim (David and Ayouby in Oliveira, 2004); hence, Arabic is regarded as a threat.

7.2.7 Reflection on Interpretive Discussion

In Chapter Seven, an interpretive discussion is put forth highlighting the main themes that have emerged through this research. Testimonial evidence suggests that Arabic as a foreign language programme and as a representative of a culture is considered of a lower (or marginal) status. Students are made to feel ashamed of their cultural
backgrounds by mainstream’s emphasis on English and white Anglo-Saxon norms.

Through the teaching/learning process and through the school experience, Arab American students cannot escape internalising a message of devaluation and othering. In terms of learning Arabic, unless it is convenient for them or has utility (i.e. easy grades), they, by and large, are dissociated from their own ancestral heritage, identifying largely with their American context, but hybridising their own version of American culture.

 Nonetheless, thanks to the dedicated work of bilingual educators and their friends in the system and community activists in the city, the programme of bilingual education has had a positive impact on the lives of immigrant students, adding value to their existence. Many students have graduated to become successful professionals and academics and other productive members of society. Also, as adults, they act as cultural and economic brokers between their countries of origin and their new homeland—this phenomenon of *trans-continentalism* appears to be more and more common among Arab Americans, resulting in economic benefits for the community in which they live. Even though Arab immigrants and Arab ethnics have affected some positive changes in Dearborn, (which otherwise was a stagnating city), their language, culture, and their physical presence appears to pose a threat to the mainstream white, Euro-Anglo culture, causing estrangement and alienation. In the main Arab Americans are not made to feel truly welcomed, but viewed as a transient presence (Abu Nab, Arab American News, May 22, 2004).

 In terms of the AFL programme, despite rhetoric to the contrary, the Arab American community at large has not made much effort in contributing to the support of the programme other than calling for it and initially pressuring the educational
establishment to offer it in the schools. Lack of interest in sustaining the programme and
teachers at a higher level of commitment suggests that the priority of the community does
not lie with Arabic, rather elsewhere. Testimonial evidence suggests that, as a
community, there is more interest in the process of integration and English acquisition
than there is in Arabic language/culture preservation. It appears that, at least in part this is
due to internalising the racism of the general community that is expressed against Arab
Americans, having accepted the priority of assimilation as set by the mainstream. To their
credit, however, there is some evidence suggesting the integration is being processed in
terms acceptable to Arab Americans, i.e., preserving elements of their culture within an
American framework. However, in terms of Arabic, their lack of sustained support to the
Arabic programme at least indirectly, if not inadvertently, supports white, Euro-Anglo
mainstream’s agenda (to devalue Arabic and Arabs and their culture).

Nonetheless, at some basic level, it is still very important for parents and
community members to teach children the Arabic language because it is the ancestral
language and the vehicle of culture. Arabic is also the language of Islam, and the medium
of religious experience. The Arab American community in Dearborn, unlike the national
community, is largely Muslim. For practicing Muslims, it is essential to learn Arabic, and
for that reason the language will always play an important role in the lives of community
members. (Interestingly however, despite national claims by American leaders following
the tragedy of September 2001 of welcoming Muslims in America, the fact of
devaluation and marginalisation of Arabic, being the liturgical language of Islam, points
to the suppression of both).
The learning of Arabic serves to benefit the community in general: For Arab Americans, it is a symbol of belonging, and, consequently, solidarity and strength, hence the iconic nature of Arabic in Arab American experience. At the collective level, Arabic is also the representation of culture, religion, country, family, and a way of life—all are powerful factors in the lives of Arab Americans in Dearborn. On a personal level, it is the expression of oneself: “Arabic represents me and who I am,” as one respondent offered. “You cannot have a culture without a language,” said another, while a third added: “If you forget your language you forget your culture,” meaning who you are. Therefore, the teaching (and learning) of Arabic is believed to help in demystifying the “threat” they pose in the mindscape of the majority, as one respondent explained:

“If you are to teach Arabic in the context of the schools, you are getting people to know about us—that we are not a threat, that we have the same feelings they do, we have a history, language, art, music and that there is nothing to separate us from them save ignorance.”

In this potential cultural exchange, Arab American youth become essential bearers of culture to the greater community: they are the vertical transmitters of culture to progeny, and the horizontal sharers of this heritage with their compatriots in the mainstream.

7.3 Conclusions

From evidence in the discourse, Arabic emerges as a sign of the community, an emblem that has long been denigrated and vilified by the mainstream community as a representation of an unwanted group. Indeed, Arabic is an ethnic marker and an oppositional symbol of socio-cultural and political self-empowerment in the city that is offered (along with the language’s attendant cultural repertoire) as the Arab American community’s gift to mainstream American life. Differently put, the writer believes efforts
at preservation of Arabic in the Dearborn community, if they do truly exist, owe themselves less to a desire to maintain any sense of “Arabity” in Dearborn as much it is an indicator of sustaining a specialised local identity, namely, a Dearborn Arab-American distinctiveness—the parallel of the youths’ Arabic uniqueness.

Not surprisingly, there was a near unanimous consensus concerning the reasons behind the rejection of Arabic in the greater community. Largely attributed to anti-Arab, pro-Israeli American form of politics, and, after the Tragedy of September 11th 2001, to the politics of fear that vilified Arabs and Islam, Arabic was perceived as the victim of political beliefs. There was a focus on blaming the media for creating and/or perpetuating anti-Arab stereotypes, however, there was no indictment of the greater culture that fosters the ease of stereotyping other than blaming it on politics. In other words, among those who responded, Dearborn Arab Americans were not aware of “natural” American Orientalism that preceded the existence of Israel and the tragic events of September 2001. In this sense, there is a case to be made for Arab American acceptance of an America that was less welcoming of them than they were aware of it.

Additionally, there was a clear sense that the beneficiaries of Arabic learning in the community ultimately rebound in America’s favour—whether culturally or politically, but especially economically, given a globalised world, giving America an added advantage. This attitude further reinforces the claim that Arab Americans are engaged in acculturation and integration in the American mainstream, for their emphasis is rather on benefiting America. In fact, the idea of Arab Americans, (whether youth or adults), acting as bridges between cultures, especially in service of America emerged consistently throughout the discourses of research participants. Of course, how best to
serve America was the prerogative of Arab Americans to decide, yet there was a decided flavour of American patriotism on the part of Arab Americans. However, there was a sense of loss and sadness that America does not esteem them and their overseas cousins in the same way they do. Clearly as well, there is an awareness of trans-nationalism among respondents who place themselves comfortably at the intersection of two worlds, but who are also committed to one side—their America.

In terms of community support of Arabic pedagogy in the schools, respondents largely supported the offering of Arabic and thought the current programme, with some curricular modifications (in order to interest the students more), would go a long way in securing a better future. Students especially were eager for curricular changes and for the professionalisation of teachers, i.e., the licensing of Arabic language teachers as specialists. This theme had emerged among all segments of the participant population who asserted the need for state professionalisation in order to attain the same level of competence and equity for Arabic as a discipline in the school system and across the state. In fact, the writer, based on the discourses of participants and personal experience, is convinced that Arabic professionalisation is a very important theme and item for those who participated.

7.3.1 Hybrid Identities

Language, power and education in Dearborn are intersecting factors that impact Arab American youth, their parents and community. In short, they are factors at play in Arab American life in general. Since they are oppositionally placed to the norms and standards of society, the Arab American community is thus located beyond the pale of the normal and familiar. Arab Americans are obliged to engage in a struggle for
acceptance in their Dearborn and American context in order to achieve recognition from the majority population as equal Americans. Contrary to general assumptions concerning a community (and persons) conflicted about identities and loyalties as being Arab and American, Arab Americans are perfectly content to combine their heritage and American-ness in a productive hybrid. Indeed, it is not they who are conflicted about this identity, rather the majority population that does not want to concede that Arabs (like the Irish or the Italians) are capable of becoming American, rather they are always observed as part of the foreign—a part of the “other”, the “anti-self” of the normal (white, Protestant-Catholic-Euro-Anglo-Saxon) “self”. As such, Arab Americans are forced to engage in their own form of identity politics in order to assert a presence on the American scene.

Ethnic and racial identities are a fundamental fact of modern American life. According to Gollnick and Chinn (2002:83-89), ethnic identity is determined by the immigration experience and in maintaining ties to ancestral cultures, while racial identity is predicated on the concept of colour. Interestingly Gollnick and Chinn point out that, “[m]any whites see themselves as raceless. They are the norm against which everyone else is other” (Ibid: 87). According to Thomas H. Eriksen,

“…it is doubtless true that groups who ‘look different’ from majorities or dominating groups may be less liable to become assimilated into the majority than others, and that it can be difficult for them to escape from their ethnic identity if they wish to. However, this may also hold good for minority groups with, say, an inadequate command of the dominant language. In both cases, their ethnic identity becomes an imperative status, an ascribed aspect of their personhood from which they cannot escape entirely” (in Guibernau and Rex, 1997: 35).

Arab Americans in Dearborn find themselves oppositionally placed as non-white ethnics, who are “other” and who not only look different from the majority, but their perceived or real deficits concerning their command of English position them in
subordinated status. Moreover, their association with the Arab world and Islam offers the majority another avenue to distance them further from the norm. This positioning, which stems from an ideology of Orientalism, adds to their alienation from the American mainstream. According to Edward Said,

“the construction of identity…involves establishing opposites and ‘others’ whose actuality is always subject to the continuous interpretation and re-interpretation of their differences from ‘us’” (1979: 332).

In other words, identity is formed oppositionally to some “other” in order to delineate “difference.” However, while this creative process of formation can serve a standing order, if its building components are controlled, nevertheless, it can be a subversive process unleashing new characteristics. Homi Bhabha suggests identity can occupy a third and liminal space, where in-between two varying identities can flourish another one that is neither of the two but a hybrid, which he calls “a space in-between the rules of engagement” (1994). In addressing the possibility of occupying the twilight or being on either side of in-betweenness, Bhabha explains:

“The liminal figure of the nation-space would ensure that no political ideologies could claim transcendent or metaphysical authority for themselves. This is because the subject of cultural discourse—the agency of a people—is split in the discursive ambivalence that emerges in the contestation of narrative authority between the pedagogical and the performative. This disjunctive temporality of the nation would provide the appropriate time-frame for representing those residual and emergent meanings and practices that … [are located] in the margins of the contemporary experience of society” (Bhabha, 1990: 299).

However, this space of cultural production is not immune to manipulations of power. Steinwand (2002), in interpreting Wicomb, suggests that “the celebration of inbetweenness” can serve the cause of conservativism (e.g., status quo and melting pot assimilation) as much as it can promote the cause of liberation (Wicomb, 2000).
While on the Arab American scene in Dearborn, one can observe that Arab American hybrid identity tends to exhibit features of conservatism more than characteristics of liberation. However, among young Arab Americans, whose hybrid identity is more organic and natural in the writer’s estimation, the situation may differ in matter of degrees. Nonetheless, overall, one might observe with Robert Young that such hybridisation of “…mobile and multiple identities may be a marker not of contemporary social fluidity and dispossession but of a new stability, self-assurance and quietism” (1995: 4). Young also offers a framework for our understanding of the phenomenon:

“Hybridity in particular shows the connections between the racial categories of the past and contemporary cultural discourse: it may be used in different ways, given different inflections and apparently discrete references, but it always reiterates and reinforces the dynamics of the same conflictual economy whose tensions and divisions it re-enacts in its own antithetical structure. There is no single, or correct, concept of hybridity: it changes as it repeats, but it also repeats as it changes” (1995:27).

From this perspective, however, one may come to conceive of a framework that “takes identity, ethnicity, culture, etc. out of an ‘either/or’ dichotomy (e.g. American or Arab, and the more one belongs to one category, the less one is of the other) and more into a concept, framing a combined and blended sense of ethnicity, identity, culture, etc., thus, rather than speaking of cultural loss or gain, we can speak of cultural emergence or genesis” (David, 8/24/2004; personal communication).

In terms of the Arab American experience in Dearborn, local hybridisation is not only evidence of integration and indication of a focus on and quest towards combination-making, but also is confirmation of viable blending that showcases the unique American-ness and Arab-ness of Arab Americans in Dearborn. Clearly, this modality assists the observer in understanding, as well, the trans-cultural-national phenomenon existing in the Dearborn context as a dimension of other forms of diasporic and/or trans-nationalisms in the modern, globalised world. In addressing this issue, Nederveen Pieterse suggests that,
“Globalization/hybridization makes, first, an empirical case: that processes of globalization, past and present, can be adequately described as processes of hybridization. Secondly, it is a critical argument: against viewing globalization in terms of homogenization, or of modernization/westernization, as empirically narrow and historically flat” (2004: 81).

In other words, the trans-nationalism, and “trans-localism” (as the local equivalent of the global phenomenon), are representations of viable culture-making processes that obtain from hybridisation and that are highly authentic in their local environments. An example of this authentic and trans-global and trans-local hybridisation is the Arab American identity in Dearborn, which is predicated on a pro-active and a collective will to be integrated.

The most compelling representation of this hybrid identity is the Arab American youth’s “Arabic” identity in the city, which is the organic and distilled essence of Arab American identity. According to Maalouf, personal identity is a holistic enterprise that cannot be compartmentalized or divide it up into separate segments:

“A person's identity is not an assemblage of separate affiliations, nor a kind of loose patchwork; it is like a pattern drawn on a tightly stretched parchment. Touch just one part of it, just one allegiance, and the whole person will react, the whole drum will sound” (2000: 26).

From this standpoint, one can see that Arab American identity is a natural occurrence, not only native to its parts, but holistically fundamental to the sense of being of the Arab American community. This is particularly evident in its young cohorts who are the bearers of their localised culture and the intercultural bridge to their fellow Americans, provided their compatriots are willing to accept them as fellow (i.e., non-othered) citizens in their society.
7.3.2 **Double-consciousness**

All throughout, in terms of this discussion, the institution of the schoolhouse, as a locus of power, is an important site and agent of identity formation and culture making that can promote oppression, liberation or anything in-between, depending on the extant forces. It is, therefore, a contested space whose control is important to any long-term cultural formation project, especially for those who control its content and mechanisms. As such, this public space is a relevant issue for Dearborn Arab Americans who are engaged in their own engineering of identity, asserting some level of self-determination, to the degree that they can—filtered through their double-consciousness (DuBois, 1903/1989)—by negotiating their distinctiveness within the context of white power, and the resultant colour demarcation in the city of Dearborn.

Indeed, it was W.E.B. DuBois who suggested in the dawning decade of the 20th century, that the “colour line” is the overriding problem of the ensuing epoch in America. DuBois’ analysis not only proved correct for the United States, but also the whole world, auguring, however sadly, the state of things to come at the beginning of the third millennium. Addressing the state of being African American, DuBois suggests,

> “After the Egyptian and Indian, the Greek and Roman, the Teuton and Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world,—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness,—an American, a Negro; two warring souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder” (1903/1989: 3).

It is the proposition that the African American is neither just American nor just Black, rather one is ever the two entwined, however, conceived to be distinct from the
“mainstream” of society because one is perceived to be different in some fundamental way. Therefore, this “twoness” of one’s (African American or other) consciousness is expressed through looking at one’s self through the eyes of the dominating, white Euro-Anglo other. Consequently, double-consciousness has the effect of making one feel different from others based on some variable (in this case the “colour line”), which is held as a mark of inferiority (or deformity). This suggested and/or perceived inferiority (or deformity) ultimately is intended to cause or lead to the co-optation, devaluation and/or exclusion of the marked individual or group from the mainstream of society.

Similarly, Frantz Fanon understood this double-consciousness to be the result of an arithmetic of domination in which a colonial relationship emerges. As a “coloured” immigrant in France, Frantz Fanon explains his alienating experience as one in which: “I am being dissected under White eyes, the only real eyes. I am transfixed… [T]hey objectively cut away slices of reality. I am laid bare” (1967: 82). Accordingly, it is the white eyes (dominant society) that have the power to shape reality. However, there is a price for this reality that is wrought: “The Negro enslaved by his inferiority, the white man enslaved by his superiority alike behave in accordance with a neurotic orientation” (Ibid: 60). This “neurotic orientation” is a dialectic that is predicated on the fact that

“one is a Negro [or Arab] to the degree to which one is wicked, sloppy, malicious, instinctual. Everything that is the opposite of these Negro [Arab] modes of behavior is [therefore] white” (Ibid: 192).

In other words, the Negro (or the non-white in general) is the anti- (white) self that is the good, efficient, kind, and cerebral—all characteristics of “white (European) civilisation” that Edward Said exposes in Orientalism (1979), where this line of thought is applied vis-à-vis the relationship of the West to the East, the Arab and Muslim worlds.
In accepting and internalising the binarism of non-white inferiority and white superiority, the consequence for the Arab American community in Dearborn is a colonised self that is obliged to view its reality through the eyes of the dominating other, thus, “[i]n order to achieve morality, it is essential that the black, the dark, the Negro vanish from consciousness. Hence a Negro is forever in combat with his own image” (Fanon, 1967: 194). That is, the non-white person is ever made to engage in defending himself before a white audience, in the same manner as the Arab Americans have been made to justify their presence and rights within mainstream American society. The non-white is forever having to defend (or attempt to reassert) his humanity which is constantly being challenged.

Indeed, DuBois’ concept of “double-consciousness” and Fanon’s understanding and application of it are highly relevant to this discussion on Arab Americans in Dearborn. As ethnics and as immigrants (or as persons perceived to be immigrants, not yet ethnofied—that is exoticised, into locally tolerated group), as a people of colour, and as a group that is predominantly Muslim, Arab Americans, no doubt, are always on the defensive. Also, they face the danger of their own “double-consciousness” that impacts their world in Dearborn. In writing on Muslims in America, Sherman Jackson suggests that the national Muslim community, of which the Arab American Dearborn community is a part, is engaged in battle against “double-consciousness” and “a contradiction of double aims”:

“…‘double-consciousness,’ i.e., the seemingly inescapable tendency to look at oneself through the eyes of some other, to ‘measure one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt...’” DuBois saw this phenomenon as contributing to the ineffectiveness (largely perceived as weakness) among blacks, because it foisted upon them a ‘contradiction of double aims.’ The black craftsman, for example, had to struggle, on the one hand, to escape white
contempt for being a mere draftsman, while, on the other hand, striving to turn his skills to the needs of his people. This, DuBois observed, could only result in making him a poor draftsman, because ‘he had but half a heart in either cause.’ This double-consciousness and contradiction of double aims are an even greater threat to the Muslim, black, white or immigrant. For the simultaneous struggle against being a Muslim along with the struggle to be a Muslim necessarily reduces the amount of energy devoted to the latter. As such, the threat of double-consciousness has a direct bearing on the matter of salvation …” (Jackson, n.d.).

Jackson’s application of DuBois’ thinking is timely, legitimate and appropriate in the sense that Muslims as a group are negotiating the American socio-cultural landscape in order to develop their own identity in the midst of an increasingly hostile culture, especially after the Tragedy of September 11, 2001. Invoking Antonio Gramsci’s theory relative to Muslims, Jackson further suggests that the

“…attitudes and assumptions, the stereotypes and habits of deferential or contemptuous treatment, which form the basis of how people see themselves and interact with others in society are far more the product of how effectively ideas are manipulated through cultural and educational institutions then they are the product of pure politics or economics” (Ibid).

In other words, the impact of socio-cultural factors as mediated through institutions of learning and socialisation can be more effective in shaping people than politics and economics, accordingly, placing the schoolhouse at the forefront of identity formation and the fulcrum of culture-making and social change.

7.3.3 The Politics of Language and Education

South African anti-Apartheid political activist and martyr Steven Bantu Biko once suggested an oft-quoted judgment that, “[t]he most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed” (May 1976, quoted in Uvision, October 29, 1996). Consequently, the arithmetic of racism and the power dynamics of dominant and dominated groups situate the schoolhouse at centre stage of any process and project of social control, and positions minority students as the objects of public indoctrination
through education. In other words, the schoolhouse not only is the repository of the status quo, but the offing ground for its maintenance, through implementation of a system of education that reinforces the dominant forms of oppression in society, predicated on the idea of “difference.”

In Dearborn, Arab immigrants and ethnics have always been practically placed outside the pale of the white colour line (even though technically they are considered white), thus, relegating them to an oppositional status where they are the anti-self. The natural result of the “politics of fear” or the “politics of difference” is a dynamic of power at play in the relations between Arabs and non-Arabs in Dearborn. Contemporary American history is replete with examples of linguistically and culturally different (i.e. from diverse backgrounds) that have always been vulnerable to the whims of society (Gollnick and Chinn, 2002; Campbell, 2000). Education and its institutions are therefore key loci for the “politics of difference” and subordination, where children of immigrants and ethnics are confronted in the school with the concentrated power of a society pre-disposed to a homogenising project, language being the most evident aspect of it.

Clyne (in Pride, 1985) holds that “[l]anguage is the deepest manifestation of culture” (Lecture Notes, Kupczyk-Romanczuk: n.d.). Therefore, culture and soul are embedded in language:

“Languages are more to us than systems of thought transference. They are invisible garments that drape themselves about our spirit and give a predetermined form to all its symbolic expression” (Sapir, 1921: 221, as quoted in Garner, 1984: ii).

Therefore, language, whether fully commanded or symbolically acquired and maintained, is not only an emblem of a group, but also one of the elemental points of identity formation. At the school level, Gollnick and Chinn suggest that,
“[L]anguage is much more than just a means of communication. It is used to socialize children into their linguistic and cultural communities, developing patterns that distinguish one community from another” (2001: 243).

Moreover, Campbell suggests that the American system of education is dominated by European American ideological bias, or Eurocentrism, that “…maintains inappropriate privileges for European American children” (2000: 88). Wiley suggests,

“Language and Literacy policies have been used coercively by dominant groups to suppress oppositional uses of literacy; to bar or restrict public speech. However, they have also been used—often under the guise of educational remedy—to promote and to impose the behavioural norms and values of dominant groups” (1993: 422).

Naturally, this privilege of whiteness is set at the expense of other ideologies and ethnic groups. Thus, if the curricular emphasis of school socialisation is to bring ethnics and students of colour into the English language speech community with its white-dominated culture, as a result, education becomes a form of white imperialism and a tool of oppression.

D. Bob Gowin (1981) advances the thesis in his tome Educating that teaching is a process of sharing meaning, which is to say the development of a shared “operating programme” (that is a culture) by which all involved members will be animated in society. In his work, the End of Education, Neil Postman (1995) suggests that American public education does not serve the public, rather it forms it – thus strengthening American democracy9. Although the intent of the writer is to highlight the pro-active nature of American education in service of democratic ideals, nonetheless, it is important to recognise that the same mechanisms of public formation, which are lauded, have worked

9 The significance of this idea does not only obtain from the fact that a major theoretician of American education is involved in uttering it while offering an exegesis of other American “fathers” of education, namely, Jefferson, Mann and Dewey, but also it is pregnant with significance due to the fact that the same idea has been quoted in a speech offered by United States Secretary of Education Richard Riley in 1997 as position of the Department of Education.
in the past to thwart enfranchising minority groups (e.g. African Americans and Native Americans) and serve the cause of oppression.

Even when they intend to use it as a force for good, the idea that education is a coercive tool is not lost on professional educators. For example, in support of international education, the National Education Association (one of the most powerful and liberal force in the world of American education), offered this view in the mid 20th century: “Education for international understanding involves the use of education as a force for conditioning the will of the people” (National Education Association, 1948: 33). Albeit international understanding is a worthy goal, however, the fact that conditioning of the public will in an apparent Skinnerian way is in order to achieve the goal is highly alarming. Nonetheless, the attitude betrays a sense—even among the liberal in American education—in resorting to coercive means, if not favouring them outright. Another example from the mid 20th century is the call for the institution of the concept of leadership in the school instead of managerial approaches to school administration, suggesting, “Teachers and administrators should come to see themselves as social engineers. They must equip themselves as change agents” (Journal of Progressive Education, May, 1949) This view of change, which involves engineering people and culture, is equally Skinnerian and authoritarian, betraying a need for hold on power. Increasingly, however, in the hands of liberals and conservatives alike, the recognition is that the conditioning of the will of the people is a mainstay of education in America, (but not necessarily for understanding and for achieving fundamental change), rather for maintaining the status quo to benefit of those who are in socio-cultural and political power.
Therefore, in the light of the foregoing discussions, calls for inter-group understanding and for the utilisation of education in service of change are inherently problematic. Education has socio-cultural and political contexts that impact its constituency, i.e., students, parents and community. It is not enough to believe that education is inherently freedom-supporting to make it so. In his foreword to Paulo Freire’s seminal work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), theologian Richard Shaull suggests a firm connexion between the political and cultural realities, on one hand, and the nature of education, on the other. He eloquently notes:

“There is no such thing as a neutral educational process. Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate the integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it, or it becomes the ‘practice of freedom,’ the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with their reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world” (1970: 16).

Lisa Delpit suggests,

“Many liberal educators hold that the primary goal for education is for children to become autonomous, to develop fully who they are in the classroom setting without having arbitrary, outside standards forced upon them. This is a very reasonable goal for people whose children are already participants in the culture of power and who have already internalized its codes” (1995: 28).

However, this is the biased understanding of a processual approach to education espoused by American liberals and conservatives in service of the status quo. This line of thinking is clearly not applicable to disenfranchised groups such as the Arab Americans. Moreover, at the macro level of society, Freire (1970) believes that ideological thinking, especially that which culminates in fanaticism (blind dogmatism of any kind), will lead to mythologised sectarianism in society regardless of points of origin on the political spectrum, thereby creating the conditions for alienating others. Each faction’s spin on history (and the realities of everyday), accordingly, negates the other’s truths, thus,
leaving no room for collective doubt (Ibid.). In other words, in the event of monopoly on the “truth”, education becomes an act of oppression whereby approved ideas (with no room for doubt) are presented as “truth”, that is, the ways things should be or ought to be are the way they are, allowing no public space for fundamental social change, which is an act of violence that must be met with resistance at all levels.

Freire suggests,

“…almost always, during the initial stage of the struggle (for freedom), the oppressed, instead of striving for liberation, tend themselves to become oppressors…. The very structure of their thought has been conditioned by the contradictions of the concrete, existential situation by which they were shaped. Their ideal is to be men; but for them, to be men is to be oppressors. This is their model of humanity” (1970: 27).

Freire adds,

“…the oppressed, who have adapted to the structure of domination… have become resigned to it, are inhibited from waging the struggle for freedom so long as they feel incapable of running the risks it requires. Moreover, their struggle for freedom threatens not only the oppressor, but also their own oppressed comrades who are fearful of still greater repression” (Ibid: 29).

In agreement with Freire, Giroux, in his Pedagogy of the Depressed (2000) asserts that extant political ideologies in America, whether conservatives or liberals,

“…share a willingness either to depoliticize pedagogy or to render its critical attributes a reinscription of particular forms of oppression [that are present in society]…Many liberal and left-wing educators emulate their conservative counterparts by either refusing to engage pedagogy as an immanently political and ethical practice or by simply dismissing critical pedagogy as an authoritarian, if not oppressive, practice” (Ibid.).

Freire’s offers a system that responds in an alternative way to the depoliticizing educational models of today in America:

“The pedagogy of the oppressed, as a humanist and libertarian pedagogy, has two distinct stages. In the first, the oppressed unveil the world of oppression and through praxis commit themselves to its transformation. In the second stage, in which the reality of oppression has already been transformed, this pedagogy
ceases to belong to the oppressed and becomes a pedagogy of all people in the process of permanent liberation. In both stages, it is always through action in depth that the culture of domination is culturally confronted. In the first stage of this confrontation occurs through the change in the way the oppressed perceive the world of oppression; in the second stage, through the expulsion of the myths created and developed in the old order...” (1970: 36-7).

Freire’s emancipatory pedagogy is inherently culturally and educationally critical of the socio-cultural and political environment in which it deals with and in which it exits.

Freire further holds that, “[f]or the oppressors, however, it is always the oppressed... who are disaffected, who are ‘violent,’ ‘barbaric,’ ‘wicked,’ or ‘ferocious’ when they react to the violence of the oppressors” (1970: 38). When applied to the Arab American community in Dearborn, this is reminiscent of Fanon’s characterisation of the non-white in a white context. Arab American become the anti-self in the city, who, being the opposite of white, are the wicked ingrates who are not happy with the gracious accommodations of the city’s public and its institutions.

Freire’s observations that,

“As the oppressors dehumanize others and violate their rights, they themselves also become dehumanised... For the oppressors, ‘human beings’ refers only to themselves; other people are ‘things.’ For the oppressors, there exists only one right: their right...” (Ibid: 38-9).

In the context of Dearborn, Freire’s observation about dehumanisation of the white majority is applicable in that by reducing the Arab American community to certain types (essentialist and homogenised), they have reduced themselves into oppressors, whose humanity is challenged, and who are equally homogenised and essentialised as one-dimensional cartoon characters. In other words, they become the essence of the Portrait of Dorian Grey.
Freire understands that,

“Oppression... in itself constitutes violence, even when sweetened by false generosity, because it interferes with the individual’s ontological and historical vocation to be more fully human. With the establishment of a relationship of oppression, violence has already begun”, adding, “Violence is initiated by those who oppress, who exploit, who fail to recognize others as persons...” (1970: 37).

When applied to the Arab American community in Dearborn, one is apt to recognise that the school district’s offer of Arabic as a foreign language programme and other services to limited English language speakers is the Dearborn public’s “false generosity” as implemented by the school system. Also, one is apt to comprehend that an oppressive relationship exists between a White Dearborn public that holds socio-cultural and political power in the city and an Arab American community that is being conditioned to submit to the will of the majority through the socialising influence of the school curriculum and the socio-cultural context of Dearborn. This process of assimilation is being mediated not only through the mechanisms of society in Dearborn but also through the filter of the community’s double-consciousness (and its attendant double aims). All this leads to a sense of identity formation and culture making that is entwined with ideas of superiority and inferiority, hopes for cultural maintenance and survival, and needs for political inclusion and enfranchisement.

In this light, it can be observed then how language, a manifestation of home culture, becomes the emblem of a form of resistance against oppression, and a symbol of an agenda for identity politics that aims at achieving social justice and equity in society. Arabic in Dearborn is thus located in between two groups; Arab Americans who use it as a chip in their gamble for gaining political power (and more legitimacy as Americans)
and non-Arab Americans, who observe—through the prism of the politics of difference and fear—a threat to their socio-cultural and political power in the city.

The schoolhouse becomes the arena for this struggle. The figurative loss of the school signifies to the majority the erosion of its power, while impacting the curriculum and the system signify for the minority its elevating status towards integration, if not inclusion. Thus, the school represents the barometer of this struggle, whereas Arabic is the mercury rising and falling in relation to the ebb and flow of socio-cultural and political fortunes, locally and globally.
Post-script Reflections and Way Forward

Given the limitations of this study, an alternative approach to a similar study of this kind is to include other schools in the Dearborn community (e.g. religious schools and afternoon programmes), as well as students from Dearborn High School, (given a change in leadership there). Comparing attitudes of students across the spectrum of Arabic pedagogy may prove very interesting, especially if there are differences in the way students of each sub-population regards its connexion to Arabic and the community.

Also, another potentially fruitful avenue is partnering with a researcher from the Euro-Anglo community to conduct research. Someone from this socio-ethnic background is likely not to be perceived as threatening (as an Arab American might be); therefore, she/he would be socially acceptable to research respondent, thereby, become privy to thoughts and ideas not usually shared with an Arab American.

Using the same approach this research effort utilised, a follow-up study that similarly focuses on the views and attitudes of Dearborn Public Schools AFL students is appropriate for future research in order to create data that can be compared with the results generated by this study. Additionally, it is recommended to seek surveying all AFL students in the Dearborn high schools, extending the data pool to include a constituency that had been disallowed from participating in this research effort.

Each study has its challenges, but a future study will put distance between itself and the events of September 11, 2001, perhaps permitting a climate of openness that is more conducive to sharing personal information and attitudes in personal interview
venues and focus group situations. The issues that were highlighted by this research process (e.g., issues pertaining to integration of the community in the greater Dearborn society and the Americanisation process) ought to be pursued further in order to discover impact on the survivability of Arabic in this ethnic enclave of Dearborn.

While the focus of this study was primarily trained on Arab Americans with little focus on non-Arabs (for reasons that were explored above), nonetheless, a future study investigating views of non-Arab stakeholders in the community (e.g., teachers, other school personnel, parents and community leaders) can assist in shedding light on the background of animosity towards Arab background ethnics and Arabic, testing the suppositions offered in this study and providing a ground for further inter-ethnic work that may have beneficial applications in conciliation and peace in the community.

Particularly of importance in the view of this writer is gauging the attitudes of “mainstream” teachers concerning their beliefs about Arabic as a foreign language and bilingual education in a post-September 11, 2001 environment, and how this may or may not impact Arab ethnics and immigrants in the city.

Future studies, quantitative and qualitative, can investigate the future of AFL in Dearborn Public Schools in light of issues of community assimilation/integration with a view towards testing the postulations of this study. Also, factors pertaining to Arabic teacher licensing, curricular changes and student retention are issues of important consideration. These are themes that have been originated by stakeholders and issues that were visited in this study peripherally and, therefore, bear further investigation.

In pedagogical terms, equally important, is the potential investigation in the area of curriculum, especially the exploration of a secondary-based AFL syllabus that works
for heritage students who complained about the dry nature of their programme. Also, such an investigation can research differences between the university AFL syllabus (the extant model at in Dearborn schools) and a potential secondary education AFL syllabus that can be developed with an eye to age-appropriate, youth-culture-appropriate materials for students.

Also, the area of corollary instructional and learning materials can benefit from additional focus to develop innovative applications of instructional media that work in the classroom, especially in the area of culture learning. In terms of teachers and teaching methods, AFL teacher qualities and roles can be researched (with an eye to AFL teacher-training and career growth), and ways to help students acquire the target language based on investigation of language-specific, appropriate methodologies can be investigated, benefiting from the experience gleaned in classroom teaching. Therefore, this is a call for action research, as well.

In terms of action research, classroom-based research in AFL can gain from insights and solutions to problems brought forth by the teachers themselves. Such work can include experimentation in teaching methods, instructional materials and assessment. Also, such research, in the area of testing and evaluation, can focus on issues pertaining to quality assurance in AFL. Innovations in formative and summative evaluation can be explored along with matters pertaining to communicative competence and language testing on a larger scale, comparing results with university-based programmes. Therefore, guidelines for developing a standard secondary education AFL syllabus can be developed in conjunction with and cooperation of university AFL and with education professoriate.
To date, the secondary AFL world has been largely disconnected from the university environment, and any change in the direction of co-operation is a welcomed development.
APPENDIX A
Student Questionnaire: Dearborn Schools TAFL
Program: 2001

1. Teacher’s name: _______________________________________________________
2. Class Hour: ___________________________________________________________
3. Ethnic Background: ____________________________________________________
4. Your Age: ____________________________________________________________
5. I was born in (country) ______________________________________________
6. Religion: _____________________________________________________________
7. How I would rate my Arabic ability?
   (5= highest; 1=lowest; circle the applicable number)
   Reading  5  4  3  2  1
   Writing   5  4  3  2  1
   Listening 5  4  3  2  1
   Speaking  5  4  3  2  1
   Culture  5  4  3  2  1

8. This is my (number)____semester of Arabic at school. (Circle one)
   
   1st  2nd  3rd  4th  5th  6th  7th  8th

9. I studied Arabic in another school: (circle one): Yes  No

10. If you circled yes, where: (circle letter)
    a. United States school
    b. Arab country school

11. Who told you to learn Arabic at school? (Circle one)
    a. Parents/family
    b. Friends
    c. Counselor
    d. Principal
    e. Teacher
    f. Other:_________

12. If you are planning to go to college, will you continue Arabic at that level?
    Yes  No
13. Why/why not: _____________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________

14. Do you know of any future careers that involve knowing Arabic? For example: ______
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________

15. My reasons for taking Arabic are in this order (1 for most important, 2 for less
important, 3 for even less important, etc.)
   _____ to read Arabic books
   _____ to know Arab culture better
   _____ to talk in Arabic better than I do now
   _____ to find out things by reading about them in the original form, (like reading
   the Qur’an or other religious books)
   _____ to have friends who speak Arabic
   _____ to have fun
   _____ to get an easy grade
   _____ to learn more about my heritage and way of life
   _____ to speak with my family members
   _____ to learn about how the Arabs and their way of life

16. The following skills in Arabic are most important to me (1 is most important and 5 is
least important)
   ____ reading    ____ writing    ____ speaking    ____ listening    ____ culture

17. I like learning the form of Arabic I am being taught in class (Circle one)
   Yes          No

18. The dialect of Arabic I would like to learn, if any, is: (circle one)
   a. Yemeni
   b. Syrian
   c. Lebanese
   d. Palestinian
   e. Iraqi
   f. Egyptian
   g. Gulf Arabic
   h. Maghreb Arabic
   i. Other: ________

19. I believe learning a dialect is more important than learning Modern Standard (Book)
Arabic: (circle your choice)        Yes          No
Because: ________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

20. My parents, (if they are of Arab background), encourage the use of Arabic at home:
(circle one)    True    False

21. How do you see yourself? (Circle one, please)
   Arabic
   Arab
   Muslim
   Christian
   Lebanese
   Iraqi
   Palestinian
   Syrian
   Yemeni
   Other________

22. My parents discouraged the use of Arabic because they want me to learn English:
(circle one)    True    False

23. Most of my friends at school are: (circle one)
   a. Arab immigrants
   b. Arab-Americans (those who were born or raised here from when they were young)
   c. Euro-Americans (those whose background is from Europe, also known as white)
   d. Other: (like)________________________________________________________

24. Do you like the books and other Arabic materials being used in class? If yes, why? If no, why not?
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________

25. What do you like best about Arabic class?
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________

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26. What do you like least about Arabic class?
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________

27. In your opinion, is Arabic as a language appreciated in school?
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________

28. How do you feel when someone tells you, “You can’t speak Arabic in school”?
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________

29. Is Arabic as a foreign language looked at or treated the same way like Spanish or French in school?
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________

30. What do you think about bilingual English and other subject matter classes? (What is your opinion of them)?
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________

31. Do think Arabic as a language is well respected in school and in Dearborn society in general?
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________

32. Is it “OK” to have Arabic signs on stores and other places like they do on Warren Ave? Why or why not?
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________

33. What does it mean to you to have signs in Arabic in Dearborn? How do you feel about it?
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
34. Do other teachers ask you why you are learning Arabic?
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________

35. Do you feel supported by the school in learning Arabic? (That is, do you feel the school administration, counselors and teachers are backing you up in learning Arabic?)
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________

36. Do you think others look down on Arabic as a school subject? Who does that?
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________

37. Do you think that your school encourages students to maintain their cultural and ethnic traditions?
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________

38. Do you think that students should be allowed to use their native language in addition to English?
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________

39. If multicultural education means knowledge of and about other people and culture, do you then think that multicultural education approach would help benefit students at your school?
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________

40. Do you feel there is noticeable discrimination against Arabs or Arab Americans in your environment?
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________

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41. Do you feel that Arab culture and Arab Americans are accepted in your school and the greater community? (Please, give examples).

_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________

42. As a student, do you feel that Arab cultural values are more important to your family than American mainstream values, or are they equally important?

_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________

43. Teaching Arabic in the schools is important because:

_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________

44. I think school should help student become more American (e.g., learn English and live like Americans).

_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________

45. Arab parents and Arab community members contribute to the Arabic language program and other school programs. (If yes, how. If no, why not)?

_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________

46. The goal of teaching Arabic in the school is to help students maintain their heritage and be apart from other Americans. Is this statement true or false? What is your opinion of the statement?

_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________

47. Learning Arabic and about Arab culture helps me appreciate other cultures at school, and the nature of pluralistic American society. Is this statement true or false? What is your opinion of the statement?

_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
48. I think students should be taught classes about racism and the contributions of minorities to American society. What is your opinion of the statement?

_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
APPENDIX B
Arabic as a Foreign Language
Parent/Community Views and Attitudinal Survey

Age ______ Nationality___________ Female_______ Male_____

1. To me, Arabic is: (Please circle the appropriate answer)
   a) Very Important  b) Important  c) Neither Important Nor Unimportant
d) Unimportant  e) Very Unimportant

2. Teaching Arabic to my children is: (Please circle the appropriate answer)
   a) Very Important  b) Important  c) Neither Important Nor Unimportant
d) Unimportant  e) Very Unimportant

3. To me, Arabic represents: (Choose as many as applies to you)
   a) Ethnic heritage   b) Religion   c) Culture   d) Home life
e) Family   f) Best form of communication   g) All of the above   h) None of the above

4. My children at home speak:
   a) Arabic only   b) English only   c) Speak both equally
d) More Arabic than English   e) More English than Arabic
   f) I have no children

5. I see myself as:
   a) A citizen of my country of origin (Example “Lebanese”)   b) Arab
c) Arab American   d) American   f) Other: ____________________

6. To me, learning English is more important than learning Arabic:
   a) True (Yes, it is)   b) Neutral (I don’t know)   c) Not true (No, it is not)

7. To me, the teaching of Arabic in the public schools is: (Please circle the appropriate answer)
   a) Very Important  b) Important  c) Neither Important Nor Unimportant
d) Unimportant  e) Very Unimportant
8. As I see it, the community (through organizations and leaders) is doing enough about the teaching and learning of Arabic to Arab American students: (Please circle the appropriate answer)
   a) Very True  b) True  c) Neither True Nor Untrue
d) Untrue  e) Very Untrue

9. My level of education is:
   a) Basic Education  b) High School  c) College  d) Graduate  e) Post-Graduate  f) Profession
APPENDIX C
General Interview Questions for Stakeholders

1. What is the importance of Arabic to you personally, to the community and the host society?

2. Do you feel that Arabic is welcomed in the greater community? Why, why not?

3. How do you feel about Arabic being taught in the schools?

4. What is the best way to teach Arabic in the schools?

5. Do you think students of Arab heritage really want to learn Arabic in the public school setting?

6. Who are the beneficiaries of a program teaching Arabic? (Students, parents, educators, community?)

7. Why does the Arab American community in Dearborn insist on maintaining Arabic in the schools? (Or does it?)

8. Do you think Arabic as an academic program is being supported well professionally in the school system?

9. Do you think the teachers are well equipped to do the job as their colleagues who teach French or German or Spanish?

10. What is the purpose of learning Arabic if the greater purpose is to assimilate into American society?
APPENDIX D
General Questions for Teachers and Other School Personnel

1. Do you feel that Arabic is being supported as well as other disciplines in the school?
2. Do you feel that you are adequately prepared to teach this discipline?
3. Is Arabic as a foreign language a "token" program or is it a real discipline in school?
4. What kind of support do you receive from the school administration, the school system, the community and the greater community? Are you satisfied with their support?
5. Why is the teaching/learning of Arabic an important goal in your professional work? (What does it mean to you?)
6. Is the Arab American community living up to its part in making sure high standards in learning Arabic are applied?
7. Do you feel supported by your colleagues in the school building?
8. Do you feel that Arab American teachers feel differently about what you are trying to do in Arabic classes?
9. Do you feel/know if counselors in the school are promoting or discouraging the learning of Arabic?
10. What is your wish list for the Arabic program?
11. Is Arabic looked at the same way as other foreign languages in the FL program?
12. Do students feel enthused about learning Arabic or are they forced to take it, in your estimation?
13. What should the community do to support your work in the school and classroom?
14. Do you feel that Arabic as a language is valued in the school system as a whole?
15. Who is the beneficiary of learning Arabic? Is it the students, the community, or the greater community as a whole?
APPENDIX E
Student Questions

1. Why are you taking Arabic in school?

2. Is Arabic an important language for you? Why, why not?

3. Do you feel supported in learning Arabic at school, at home, in the community, in the larger community?

4. What is the purpose of learning Arabic if you are supposed to be Americans?

5. Why learn Arabic instead of Spanish or French or German?

6. When outside of Arabic class, do you feel pressured to speak in English only or do you feel you can speak Arabic as well in the school setting?

7. Do you feel supported by your parents, the Arab American community in Dearborn and the greater community in your efforts to learn Arabic?

8. Do you feel that school people (teachers, counsellors and administrators) do not care much about your learning Arabic?

9. If you can have it "your way" (whatever that may be), what do you wish in regards to the Arabic program at school?

10. What is the most important thing about Arabic classes or about learning Arabic in your mind?
APPENDIX F
Free and Informed Consent Form

UNIVERSITY OF PORT ELIZABETH

PROJECT: "PROVISION FOR THE DIVERSE INTERESTS AND DIFFERENT NEEDS OF ARAB AMERICANS: A CASE STUDY OF DEARBORN SCHOOLS IN DEARBORN, MICHIGAN"*

INVESTIGATOR: Kenneth K. Ayoub, Faculty of Education, University of Port Elizabeth, D.Ed. Candidate. Telephone: 313- 624-9518 Fax: 313- 624-9518 email: Ayoubyk@yahoo.com

The purpose of the project is to discover the views of students in regards to the teaching and learning of Arab culture and language in the classroom in Dearborn Schools, which may be relevant to the design, or conduct of curricular projects. The research will be undertaken by means of questionnaires given out to students in a classroom setting, focus groups, discussions, observations and other means, including “noticings” in the community. A “pretend name” will be used in all material arising out of the project. The tape or tapes of interviews and discussion, and questionnaires and email correspondence will be by the researcher at the University of Michigan-Dearborn for a possible future use by other scholars.

Please understand that you are free to withdraw from active participation in this research at any time and to require that all records of your participation be either returned to you or destroyed so as to prevent their use. (Provided that the request for such destruction or return of all records be made within a period not less than four weeks of the completion of the taping and questionnaire nor more than six weeks).

Any complaint regarding the nature or conduct of this research may be addressed to

   Dr. Susan van Rensburg, Professor of Education, Faculty of Education, the University of Port Elizabeth, Port Elizabeth, Republic of South Africa.

I, ________________________________________________ (please print) have read and understood all of the information above, and any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to take part in this project on the understanding that (check one)

- my name may be published in the material [ ]
- neither my name nor any other identifying descriptions may be used in any published material [ ]
• my name or other identifying descriptions may be used with the following restrictions [ ]
• the information (audio, video tapes etc.) which I supply will be stored and may be used in future research [ ]
• the information (audio, video tapes etc.) which I supply may not be used for any subsequent project without my consent [ ]

I reserve the right to withdraw from active participation in this project at any time and to require that all traces of my participation be removed from the project record provided that I exercise this right within a period of the completion of my active participation.

Signature of participant: __________________ Date_______________________

Signature of researcher: __________________ Date ______________________

* Provisional title of study.
APPENDIX G
Curriculum Vitae

KENNETH KAHTAN AYOUUBY

Current Position:

Student Services Liaison/Hearing Official, Special Programs and Student Services.
Dearborn Public Schools-Dearborn, MI.

Adjunct Lecturer in Translation studies (Arabic), Marygrove College, Detroit, Michigan

Visiting (Adjunct) Lecturer in Modern and Classical Language (Arabic)
Humanities Department, The University of Michigan-Dearborn

Visiting (Adjunct) Lecturer in Exploratory Studies (Multicultural Education) The School of Education, The University of Michigan-Dearborn

Education:

Doctoral Qualifications:

    D.Ed. (Doctor Educationis) Candidate, University of Port Elizabeth.

Postgraduate Qualifications:

    Specialist:

    Ed.S. (Education Specialist), Wayne State University 1997-2002
    Curriculum and Instruction (English/Foreign Language Teaching):
    Developed research and completed coursework in language and inter-cultural studies.

Graduate Qualifications:

    Master Degrees:

    M.Prof.St. University of New England 2001-2002
    Intercultural Studies in Education
M.Ed. University of Tasmania 2001-2001
Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages

M.A. Wayne State University 1994-1996
Near Eastern (Arabic) Language and Culture Studies
Thesis Title: "Islamism in Historical and Religious Context"

Undergraduate Qualifications:

Baccalaureate:

B.A. University of the State of New York-Excelsior College 1990-1993
(Western History concentration)

B.A. Wayne State University (Magna Cum Laude) 1985-1990
Near Eastern Studies (Area culture and language)

Associate:

A.A. Henry Ford Community College 1982-1985
Liberal Arts

Secondary:

Fordson High School, Dearborn, Michigan

Teaching Experience:

Marygrove College, Adjunct Lecturer 2004-Present
Detroit, Michigan.

The University of Michigan-Dearborn, Visiting Lecturer 1994-Present

Wayne State University, Teaching Assistant 1992-1995 Detroit, Michigan.


Publications:

2004  “Studying the Exotic Other in the Classroom: The Portrayal of Arab Americans in Educational Source Materials,” With Gary David (Submitted to Multicultural Perspectives: Accepted for Publication).


Presentations/Lectures/Panels:

2004  Invited Speaker: “The ‘Middle East’, ‘Middle Eastern Americans’ and America: Representation, Misrepresentation and the Quest for Self Definition” at the 11th Annual Dealing with Differences Institute organized by the Illinois Cultural Diversity Association, Western Illinois University, (May 10-12).


Association for Bilingual Education Conference in Kalamazoo, Michigan (May 1 and 2).


2002 Invited Speaker: Grosse Pointe High School Multicultural Symposium, addressing issues pertaining to the Arab American community in the wake of the September 11 tragedy.

2001 Invited Lecturer: “Images and Portrayals of Muslims and Arabs in the West”, a lecture delivered at the University of Michigan-Dearborn. A lecture series entitled “When the Dust Settles”, organized by the Arab Student Union.

2001 Invited Speaker: “Mosaic of Middle Eastern Communities in Metropolitan Detroit: Orientation on Arab Americans in Detroit and Dearborn” Dearborn Public Schools New Teachers Orientation Program.

2000 Invited Speaker: “Consequences and Due Process of Student Misbehavior: From School Office Referral to Expulsion,” Middle School Conference organized by Dearborn Schools, Dearborn, Michigan.


2000 Invited Speaker: “Mosaic of Middle Eastern Communities in Metropolitan Detroit: Arab Americans in Detroit and Dearborn” Dearborn Public Schools New Teachers Orientation Program.

1999 Conference Paper: Arab-Americans in Detroit: In Between East and West, Home and Exile, Whiteness and Color” (With Gary David), annual Jean Gebser Society Conference, the University of Windsor, Ontario, Canada.

1999 Invited Speaker: “The Middle East in the Middle West: A Portrait of Arab American Youth,” Lecture series organized by Arab Student Union of University of Michigan-Dearborn.

1999 Invited Lecturer: “Intercultural Communications in Schools and Community” Department of Behavioral Sciences, Bentley College, Waltham, MA.
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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Team Lecture: “Self, Society and the Middle East” (with Gary David), Bentley College, Waltham, MA.</td>
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<td>1999</td>
<td>Presentation: “Role and Function of Student Services Liaisons”, presentation to participating aspiring administrators in Dearborn Schools’ Administrative Development Program.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Invited Speaker: “A Social and Cultural Profile of Middle Eastern Communities in Metropolitan Detroit”, a presentation for new teachers conference and orientation, Dearborn Schools.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Guest Speaker: “What Aspiring Teachers Should Know about Discipline Issues”, a presentation offered at Student Teacher Seminar organized by College of Education and Human Services of University of Detroit Mercy, Detroit, Michigan.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>&quot;Socio-Historical and Literary Reading of Naguib Mahfouz's <em>Midaq Alley.</em>&quot; Faculty Conference on world culture across the curriculum, Madonna University, Livonia, Michigan.</td>
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Professional Activities:

2004-Current  Organizer of the Regular Session on “Arabs and Arab Americans” to be held at the American Sociological Association’s 100th Annual Meeting in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, on August 13-16, 2005.

2004-Current  Co-organizer (with Dr. Gary C. David of Bentley College, MA, USA) of the Regular Session on “America, the Arab World and Arab-Americans in a Global Context: Alternative Views and Explanations” to be held at the Midwest Sociological Society’s Annual Meeting in Minneapolis, MN on March 31-April 3, 2005.

2003- Current  Executive Editor, The Dearborn Educator, An Applied Perspective in Education, a publication of Dearborn Public Schools, Michigan, USA.


1998-2000  Editorial Board Member, Arab American Journal, Detroit, MI

1997-1999  Leading Member of “Middle Eastern Study Advisory Committee”, a committee of scholars assisting United Way Community Services of Detroit to produce its “Mosaic of Middle Eastern Communities in Metropolitan Detroit” Report.

Professional Certification:

References


Alosh, M.M., 1989. The Ahlan wa Sahlan Series of Instructional Materials, Elementary Arabic Ahlan wa Sahlan. An Introductory Course for Teaching Modern Standard Arabic to Speakers of Other Languages, Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Foreign Language Publications No.81


Ayouby, K. K., 1999b. A Synopsis of Bilingual Education in Michigan. Presentation. Seminar in Philosophy of Education, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.


California Department of Education, Title VII for English Learners: Background [http://www.cde.ca.gov/el/titlevii.html](http://www.cde.ca.gov/el/titlevii.html) (accessed April 5, 2002).


Dearborn Public Schools. (n.d.). Landmarks. On file with Dearborn Schools Department of Special Programs and Student Services.


Dearborn Public Schools. Grant Proposal: Project Accelerate. 1999. Compensatory and Bilingual Education Department Dearborn, MI.


Dearborn Public Schools. *Dearborn Adult and Community Education Catalogue*, Fall 2001: 2; 6-7; 10.


Freeman, A., 1994. *Intro to Diglossia*


Harp, A., Personal Communication. (Fordson High School Assistant Principal and Founder of the Arabic as a Foreign Language Program in Dearborn Schools). Thursday, September 30, 1999.


Human Rights Watch. 2002. “‘We Are Not The Enemy’ Hate Crimes Against Arabs, Muslims, and Those Perceived to be Arab or Muslim After September 11.” Vol. 14, No. 6 (G)-November 2002.


http://www.arabamericanbusiness.com/issue1/cover_story.htm

Jackson, S. A., “Muslims, Islamic Law and Public Policy in the United States” 


http://www.factmonster.com/spot/muslims1.html


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Kupczyk-Romanczuk, G. N.D. In *EDST 403, Language, Society and Culture in 2002*. [“Language is the deepest manifestation of culture." It was attributed to Clyne (in Pride, 1985)]. The University of New England, Armidale, NSW.


Saad, W., (Director, Special Programs and Student Services, Dearborn Schools). Personal Communication. Thursday, July 19, 2001.

Saad, W., (Director, Special Programs and Student Services, Dearborn Schools). Personal Communication. Friday, April 26, 2002.


Stuef, K., Personal Communication. Thursday, September 27, 2001. (Director, Human Resources. Dearborn Public Schools).


Thomas, K., “Festival in Fall River,” Aramco World Magazine, November-December 1976: 3-4


