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Arab Americans in a Nation's Imagined Community: How News Constructed Arab American Reactions to the Gulf War

An analysis of news stories about Arab American reactions to the Gulf War shows how the news media represented and reinforced a hegemonic construction of America as a unified, inclusive imagined community through ethnic differences. The stories accomplished this through sympathetic portrayals of the heartfelt struggles faced by Arab Americans as they feared the loss of Arab lives and the threat of racism during this time while simultaneously reiterating their steadfast loyalty to America. Paradoxically, Arab Americans' ethnic position and wartime struggles became a powerful representation of what it means to be an exemplary, patriotic American.

The rally-round-the-flag phenomenon presented by the news media during wartime is the nation as an "imagined community"[1] par excellence. The American news media, during the Persian Gulf War, for example, repeatedly showed images of yellow ribbons tied around trees in neighborhoods across America, symbolizing how citizens were members of a "unified whole" and "patriotic community" (Kellner 1995, 217). In constructing this patriotic community, it is important to notice that the news media did not ignore potentially conflicting views about the war from a group that was perceived to be particularly affected, Arab Americans.[2] Indeed, Arab Americans' perspectives were highlighted and their experiences poignantly represented in the news. It is interesting then to consider how the news media represented and incorporated these alternative views in the process of constructing the nation as an imagined community.

This study investigated how news stories represented Arab American reactions to the war. The assumption of these news stories (or what made them newsworthy) is that people of Arab descent had different and unique concerns related to the war because of their ethnic identity. This article was guided by the following research question: how did the news media construct Arab American concerns during the Gulf War, and how was this ethnic group's rela-

tionship to the broader nation as an imagined community represented and negotiated? A critical textual analysis of national newspaper stories featuring Arab American reactions to the Gulf War was used to investigate this question.

This article's main theoretical assumption is that the nation as an imagined community can be analyzed as a hegemonic construction, involving varying moments of discursive struggles to define the nation through socially constructed group differences, such as race and ethnicity, in the context of unequal social relations of power. The ideological and cultural power of the news media to construct and represent discursive struggles about the nation is implicated in this hegemonic process of nation building.

The central point of this article is that stories about Arab Americans during the war were constructed in ways that ultimately maintained and reinforced the hegemonic construction of America as a unified imagined community through the inclusion of Arab American ethnic differences, not in spite of or through the exclusion of these differences. The stories accomplished this through sympathetic portrayals of the heartfelt struggles faced by Arab Americans during the war as they remained steadfast and loyal to America. Their story of hardship was articulated as the classic immigrant saga of struggle to fit into the national community. Thus, their story paradoxically became a powerful representation of what it means to be truly American.

The broader purpose and significance of this article is to show how the nation as an imagined community is constructed and negotiated through specific and changing social relations between groups within the nation at different moments in time. The construction of the Arab as Other is evident in many popular cultural discourses, for example, in many of the action adventure war films of the late 1980s. Showing how the Arab as Other is constructed primarily through negative stereotypical representations is valuable, but it is also important to see how discourses about minority groups are constructed in complex ways through shifting and changing representations of identity that may articulate inclusivity as well, albeit in ways that are also problematic. By examining representations in the context of specific historical moments, we can see how the nation is variously articulated as a homogeneous, unified imagined community.

Theoretical Context

Nations as Imagined Communities or Hegemonic Constructions

In the late eighteenth century, the world became socially and geographically meaningful through a new form of community identified as the nation-state. The transformations leading to the ability to "think" or "imagine" the nation,

according to Anderson's (1991) seminal work on the origin of nations, was primarily the development of print capitalism (newspapers and novels) in conjunction with mass education, literacy, and industrialization. Such social forces engendered imaginings of a culturally, linguistically, economically, and politically homogeneous community.

Specifically, the development of the newspaper represented the nation as a homogeneous imagined community through its new conceptual linkages between time, space, and communication. The newspaper rationally measures time as moving forward on a daily basis while chronicling the commercial activity, events of the day, and lives of a people all associated within a specific bounded territory. Thus, the newspaper creates an anthropomorphic sense of the nation as "a sociological organism moving calendrically through homogeneous, empty time" (Anderson 1991, 26). Through the newspaper, the nation is able to be, according to Anderson (1991),

> imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members. . . . Yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion . . . imagined as a *community*, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as deep, horizontal comradeship. (Pp. 4, 7)

Anderson's (1991) thesis makes clear that nation-states came into being as socially constructed imagined communities. However, what is not elaborated is the issue of how—through unequal and social relations of power—a sense of a homogeneous, unified imagined community or deep, horizontal comradeship is created and maintained. Taking off from Anderson's work, I want to consider how a deep, horizontal comradeship is constructed not regardless of inequality and exploitation, as Anderson suggested, but rather through such inequality. As Hall (1977b) suggested, "most societies with complex social structures achieve their 'unity' via the relations of domination/subordination between culturally different and class differential strata" (p. 158). Unity is defined through differences, that is, through inclusions and exclusions. Thus, we need to look "for that which secures the unity, cohesion and stability of this social order in and through (not despite) its 'differences,' " stated Hall (1977b, 158).

To better understand how an imagined community is constructed through differences, then, we need to more closely consider social relations of power. Gramsci's (1971) key concept of hegemony is helpful in explaining the relationship between socially constructed representations and social relations of power. Hegemony is attained through struggle between subordinate and more dominant ideologies and interests in which leading groups must, in varying degrees and formations, "articulate" subordinate interests to retain legitimate authority and maintain the status quo, while representing their ideologies as a

taken for granted, naturalized view of the world (Gramsci 1971). In understanding the multiethnic nation-state, with its diverse and unequal groups and interests, the concept of hegemony is central. The notion of hegemony suggests that power is not about simple domination or oppression but involves a more complex process of ongoing struggle and negotiation between cultural meanings and power, a process of striving to win hegemony.

A nation as an imagined community is thus defined by a continuously negotiated struggle of competing ideologies and identity differences between groups. In addition to seeing identities as relationally constructed and negotiated between differently empowered groups, we also need to understand the importance of historicizing these struggles. Nations as imagined communities are continuously negotiated nation-building projects, and the construction of nations needs to be studied as a dynamic historical process. As Schlesinger (1991) pointed out, the nation is not static and should be studied as a "process of continual reconstruction" (p. 165).

Drawing on these ideas, I want to conclude that nation-states as imagined communities are hegemonic constructions. Since no nation-state is inherently culturally homogeneous, there is an ongoing struggle to define the nation and its cultural and political values. It is a process that involves a struggle to produce a sense of loyalty to certain nation-state values or interests that are made to seem fixed, natural, and universal, even as they do not represent everyone's interest. This results in a unified and homogeneous sense of imagined community, cultural collective, or "deep, horizontal comradeship," as Anderson (1991) stated. Because there are shifting social relations of power, this process needs to be examined as a historically contingent and everchanging one. First, I will look at concrete historical examples of this process, and then I will turn to the central role of the media in the hegemonic construction of the nation.

The Hegemonic Process of American Nation Building

As discussed, it is important to look at struggles to define the nation as an imagined community in a particular historical moment. It is also important to see that the continual struggle for hegemony between different groups means that there is never a complete victory, or "total incorporation of one set of forces into another" (Hall 1986, 422). To better understand this dynamic, hegemonic nation-building process, one can look at the ongoing relations of struggle to define American national identity.

Summarizing the theses of American historians (Mann 1998; Katkin, Landsman, and Tyree 1998; Gleason 1998), America as an imagined community predominately (1) reflects the values of the white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant culture and (2) embodies the political ideals of freedom, democracy, equality, liberal-pluralism, and capitalism. And as Dinnerstein and Reimers (1999)

noted, "every succeeding immigrant group that came to the English colonies and later to the United States had to absorb these aspects of the dominant culture to be accepted as Americans" (p. 5).

The theme of the United States as a nation of immigrants striving for the American Dream and assimilating to the dominant culture has evolved as the dominant national historiography (Gabaccia 1999). This historiography, evident in media representations of the nation as an imagined community, represents a simplistic process of assimilation and a seemingly progressive notion of the nation as an imagined community striving for equality between all races and ethnic groups. This historical paradigm, as Gabaccia (1999) suggested, and the political and cultural values of equality, freedom, and opportunity for all belie the historic pattern of outright violent oppression in relation to Native Americans, African Americans, and other minority groups. Furthermore, this ignores the dynamic nation-building process through which minority groups influence the national culture and empower themselves through their own institutions.

In fact, racial and ethnic identities are inseparable from the construction of national identity. Several scholars have shown how national identity is made meaningful only in relation to race, ethnicity, and class, a perspective that highlights the inseparability of these intersecting identities and discourses (Omi and Winant 1994; Jacobson 1998). Omi and Winant (1994) showed, through their concept of racial formation, how national identity is constructed and defined through changing meanings of race and the racial order over time. These changing and historically contingent struggles move back and forth in variously progressive and regressive ways as minority group interests are co-opted, ignored, or articulated in relation to the dominant culture in the hegemonic process of nation building.

Jacobson (1998) also showed how national and ethnic identities are socially constructed relationally over time by focusing on the changing conception of whiteness over time. He describes how diverse ethnic groups from Europe, who were socially constructed as distinct races became homogenized over time under the racial label of "white" as they became accepted and tolerated as fit to be true Americans. The homogenization of distinct groups is part of the hegemonic process of nation building as diverse groups are often stereotypically aggregated for purposes of assimilation and control. This process also works for groups who themselves aggregate into larger social formations for political purposes at various times.

Looking at the particular case of Arab Americans in the United States, one can see that like other minority cultural groups, their struggle to belong to the nation has centered on racist meanings. Arab American history in the United States reflects a recurring racial theme of "not quite white" as immigration officials early on struggled over how to classify this group (Samhan 1999,

210). The identity of people of Arab descent has been constructed in relation to the dominant notions of whiteness as a privileged racial/ethnic identification of the national culture. The following provides some historical context for understanding Arab American identity in the United States.

Since World War II, Arab Americans have come from all parts of the world, but most have come from Palestine, Lebanon, Syria, Egypt, Iraq, and Yemen. Postwar Arab Americans were largely Muslims, with Muslim Sunnis as the majority (Suleiman 1999, 1). After World War II, Arab immigrants who came were highly educated professionals or college students who stayed (Suleiman 1999, 9). They came for economic reasons and to escape regional conflicts. Many Iraqi Americans also fled Iraq because of their opposition to Saddam Hussein's oppressive dictatorship. They settled in many places, but the Detroit area has been known for having one of the largest concentrations of people of Arab descent, about two hundred thousand (Abraham and Shryock 2000, 18). By the late 1960s, a growing pan–Arab American identity was developing because of the growing need for political solidarity, despite the many national, political, religious, and cultural differences within this group. Shain (1999) attributed this move toward panethnic Arab solidarity as one that sought to counter the strong Israeli lobby in the United States as well as one influenced by the "ethnopolitical awakening" that resulted from the Civil Rights Movement in the late 1960s (pp. 96-97).

As we can see, national and ethnic identities are relationally constructed and change over time. I now want to explore the means by which this hegemonic process of nation building takes place. I thus turn to the role of communication and the media in the construction, representation, and transformation of identities.

Media and the Representation of National and Ethnic Identities

Anderson's (1991) work shows us clearly how communication, through the cultural form of the newspaper, constructs the nation as an imagined community. Today, newspapers, along with the proliferation of other forms of media, are powerful signifiers of the nation-state. The media in modern societies are an important site of meaning-making struggles (Hall 1982), the site through which the nation as an imagined community is constructed, represented, and negotiated through social differences of identities and values. The media construct meaning not as "a functional reproduction of the world in language, but of a social struggle—a struggle for mastery in discourse—over which kind of social accenting is to prevail, and to win credibility" (Hall 1982, 77).

There is a continual discursive struggle for hegemony as social groups attempt to articulate their particular vision of the nation as the general, taken for granted, natural, and universalized reality for all through the media. How-

ever, what is often represented as the universal national identity needs to be understood through who is included and excluded. This is because, according to Hall (1996), identity is discursively constructed through difference—"it operates across difference, it entails discursive work and the binding and marking of symbolic boundaries, the production of 'frontier effects' " (p. 2). When analyzing identities, then, it is important to understand whose culture, race, or ethnicity is being included or excluded.

However, this is not often a simple process of identifying racist portrayals in the media involving negative stereotypes or the exclusion of certain groups. We need to avoid, according to Hall (1989), assessing racist representations as constructions of a unified, almost conspiratorial model of racism promoted by a unified ruling bloc. Indeed, an assessment of representations in purely stereotypical terms leads to currently debunked essentialist notions of identity as one attempts to see how close or far a representation comes to a true depiction of a group.

An analysis of the discourses about identities instead requires tracing various discursive struggles—it requires looking at "different discursive currents" and "the relations of power between them" at particular moments in time (Hall 1986, 434). We can analyze media texts for their complex discursive formations involving contradictory, fragmented, and contestable notions of national identity. It is through the media that the hegemonic process of nation building through differences and negotiated discursive struggles of meaning making is represented.

The news media, in particular, have the cultural and ideological power to construct, represent, reinforce, and legitimate varying social relations of power through identity politics. Drawing on Hall's (1977a, 1982) work, we see that ideology operates through news in democratic capitalist societies by reinforcing the legitimacy of those in power by providing the means for them to speak symbolically on behalf of the majority. This is a process in which "particular interests become generalized, and, having secured the consent of the 'the nation,' carry the stamp of legitimacy" (Hall 1982, 87). In other words, the media are not simply institutions that reflect consensus but also institutions that produce consensus and "manufacture consent" (Hall 1982, 86). Importantly, the news media accomplish this because of their own ideology of impartiality and objectivity, which gives the news its cultural basis of credibility.

Representations of Arab Americans in the Media

The influential work of Said (1979) shows how Arabs were represented in relation to the West. Said concluded that the Western world has created Arabs as a racial other, portrayed as dangerous, emotionally volatile, and backwards. Stereotypical images of Arab Americans as terrorists, hijackers, and religious

fundamentalists have been prevalent and have been documented in a number of books (see Suleiman 1988; Ghareeb 1983; Terry 1985).

As is the nature of media representations, as discussed earlier, it is important not to make generalizations about identity discourses without considering changing contexts and circumstances. Kellner (1995) provided such context in his discussion of American popular culture portrayals of Arab Americans. He described how Hollywood films began to construct Arabs as the latest "evil Foreign Other" in a way that uncannily anticipated U.S. foreign policy in the late 1980s after the thaw in U.S.-Soviet relations (p. 83). Kellner noted that as Reagan and Bush turned to Arab villains in their foreign policy, Hollywood did as well through such films as *Iron Eagle I* (1985), *Iron Eagle II* (1988), *The Delta Force* (1986), and *Steal the Sky* (1988) among others (pp. 83-87). Such films portrayed Arabs as the new villainous enemy, dehumanizing them in contrast to America as the embodiment of good. These are the kinds of representations about Arabs found in popular culture leading up to the Persian Gulf War that were often protested by Arab American groups. This study now takes a look at the representation of Arab Americans in the news media during the war.

Method

As indicated earlier, my main research question is, How did the news media construct Arab American concerns during the Gulf War, and how was this ethnic group's relationship to the broader nation as an imagined community represented and negotiated? To address this research question, I conducted a critical textual analysis of newspaper feature stories that focused on Arab American community concerns about the Gulf War. I chose news stories that were published during the period of the Gulf War, which began on 17 January 1991 and ended on 27 February.[3]

To assess how an Arab American community was constructed more concretely, I decided to examine stories tied to a geographical sense of Arab American community. Thus, I chose news features that had a Detroit or Dearborn, Michigan (an area just outside of Detroit), dateline. The Detroit/Dearborn area was chosen because that area has the largest concentration of Arab Americans in the United States. If journalists were eager to get Arab Americans' side of the story, then they would likely seek stories from that region.

I also chose to analyze stories from what would be considered national newspapers. Although the United States does not have a tradition of national newspapers per se, there are local newspapers known for having a national reputation and readership concerning national politics. Such papers include the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times*. The other newspaper that strives for a national audience that I chose was *USA Today*, although it is relatively newer

and less elite oriented. Because of their national orientation, these three news-papers are more likely to do in-depth stories that originate from various parts of the United States other than Washington D.C. or New York City, with less of a need to tailor stories in terms of their local angles or relevance. I presumed these newspapers would—and indeed they did—write individual stories focusing solely on the large Arab American community in the Detroit/Dear-born area.

Furthermore, because I wanted to examine how an Arab American commu-nity was constructed in feature stories in national newspapers, I excluded news stories about the Gulf War in general that may have included Arab American reactions as a subtopic, local-angle stories about Arab Americans in various local newspapers around the country, and brief news items about Arab Americans.

By doing a Nexis search using the keyword terms "Arab-Americans" and "Detroit or Dearborn," as well as the dates of the Gulf War, I found five feature stories that fit my criteria: two from the *New York Times*, two from *USA Today*, and one from the *Washington Post*. Although the *New York Times* and *USA Today* did two stories each, I chose at random one exemplar from each national paper since, on analysis, the themes were so similar in these additional stories and were, in fact, written by the same journalists. Following are the three sto-ries selected for analysis:

- Hall, Mimi. 1991. "Arab-Americans Feel Torn, Threatened." *USA Today*, 25 January, 8A.
- Applebome, Peter. 1991. "War in the Gulf: The Home Front; Arab-Americans Fear a Land War's Backlash." *New York Times*, 20 February, 1A.
- Hendrickson, Paul. 1991. "Caught in the Middle: Detroit's Arab Americans: Fighting Stereotypes, Torn by Conflicting Loyalties." *Washington Post*, 15 February, D1.

I analyzed these newspaper feature stories using a critical textual analysis approach. The first step involved multiple readings of the text to gain a general understanding of the stories, taking descriptive notes about the content as I read (by text here I mean the three national stories as a whole). Then, I read my notes and the text in a more detailed manner, recognizing certain recurring themes or topic categories. I named and labeled the text with these themes. To better work with the thematic categories and the related textual examples, I used a word processor to input each of the textual examples under their respec-tive thematic categories. The next phase called for a deeper interpretation of the themes I identified, looking for how they were related. I looked for finer distinctions within them and/or broader connections between them. All the while, I was interpreting the text, keeping my research question in mind and considering how my findings could be interpreted in relation to the theoretical assumptions of this article.

Analysis

The picture of Arab Americans arising from this textual interpretation is one in which Arab Americans were represented as torn between their positions as Arabs and Americans during wartime. Arab Americans were represented as passionately fearing for the lives of friends and family in Iraq. They were also represented as fearing threats and racism because of their Arab ethnicity. All the while, throughout these hardships and struggles, they were depicted as steadfast and loyal Americans. It was these difficulties, then, during this time of war, that paradoxically juxtaposed Arab Americans as an ethnic group that was different in relation to the rest of America and at the same time as an ethnic group whose differences served to represent them as prototypical patriotic Americans. Their story was presented as one of a classic American immigrant saga of struggle and hardship. Ultimately, their poignant stories about the conflict between their different positions as both Arabs and Americans during this particular historical moment of wartime served, paradoxically, as a powerful representation of what it means to be loyal Americans.

Importantly, Arab Americans were positioned as part of the nation through discourses about their feelings concerning the war. The emphasis on emotionally centered personal stories of Arab American suffering served to depoliticize this community. These stories were about emotional reactions and struggles unconnected to and excluding political opinions, except those reaffirming their loyalty to the United States. Arab Americans were, for the most part, constructed as apolitical actors in this drama. They were positioned as a group who was affected by the war because they were personally and emotionally affected due to their ethnic status. This positioning served not only to depoliticize Arab Americans but also to depoliticize all other Americans. Non–Arab Americans, by implication, were not suffering angst about the war and were unconcerned about the death and destruction that the war might cause; that is, other Americans are unproblematically constructed as united behind the war effort in relation to Arab Americans, who must struggle through wartime. It must be noted that these were feature stories and that such dramatic narratives are often characteristic of feature stories. However, it is precisely the reporting of Arab American reactions to the war as feature stories that reaffirms the apolitical nature and positioning of Arab Americans in the news media.

In the end, the hardships and struggles of war and racism faced by Arab Americans were resolved or explained away in nonpolitical terms through the classic immigrant saga of hardships and struggles. In-depth descriptions of Arab Americans, their history, and their search for economic opportunity in coming to America tapped into popular immigration narratives used to construct the nation as an imagined community. The discourse articulated these tragic times of hardship and struggle for Arab Americans as similar to the

experiences of previous generations of immigrants in the United States struggling to fit in and make it. Their struggles were symbolic of classic immigrant struggles to find a place and position within the nation, as other ethnic groups before them have done. Thus, the war and racism were not represented as problems to be debated or politically resolved but rather as problems to be endured. What follows is a detailed discussion of these themes with textual examples for each from which these findings are drawn.

Fearing Death and Destruction for Their Fellow Arabs

All three stories were similar in that they began with, and described, the intense emotions Arab Americans felt during this trying time. The most prominent discourse and emotionally evocative images in the news coverage showed Arab Americans suffering anguish and despair at the thought of their relatives, friends, or fellow Arabs dying because of U.S. bombing. The most poignantly conveyed Arab American profile symbolizing this anguish was reported in the *Washington Post*, which produced the longest feature story of the three. The *Washington Post* went deep into the personal story of Intissar Ann Alkafaji, a criminal lawyer living in a Detroit suburb, describing her incredible distress about the war:

> her name is Intissar Ann Alkafaji, and the night the bombing started, she never went to sleep, barely let her eyes go off the TV screen. That was her birthplace by the Tigris lighting up like a pinball machine. Her 64-year-old mother, seven of her brothers and sisters, her cousins, her nephews and nieces, old teachers, childhood friends—they were all there in Baghdad, and she was here, 6,200 miles away, safe in her rich suburban Michigan home, and were any of them breathing now? She pictured them trying to get out from under burning rubble. (Hendrickson 1991)

USA Today also conveyed a sense of despair in the following passage: "Arkan Naman's days are consumed by desperate—and so far futile—calls to Baghdad to see if his brothers and sisters have survived the relentless allied bombing of Iraq" (Hall 1991).

The text elaborated on this sense of despair and described how Arab Americans were feeling torn between concern for their people who might be hurt in the war and a continuing sense of loyalty to the United States. The logic of these recurring sentiments can be generally summarized as follows: continually reaffirming loyalty to the United States while simultaneously feeling distressed about the war and its consequences for their fellow Arabs. For example, *USA Today* reported on the reaction of Abdallah Elachi, a Lebanese-born Arab fruit market owner, as follows: "I'm a U.S. citizen as much as you are and I probably love this country more than anyone. . . . But you're torn because you

have relatives over there" (Hall 1991). Similarly, the *Washington Post*'s in-depth personal story of Intissar Alkafaji (Hendrickson 1991) included an account of a past visit to Iraq and her recollection of a discussion with her Iraqi nephew in which she affirmed her love for America: "tomorrow, Haider. I have to leave you. For my beautiful home sweet home America." She concluded by declaring how torn she felt through this provocative statement: "part of my taxes are killing my own people. It's an irony that's so hard to bear."

In another profile, the *Washington Post* focused on Joe Borrajo, a second-generation Arab American. Borrajo "was born here, loves Detroit." He was portrayed as an active and responsible citizen in the community: "he's a member of New Detroit Inc., he's a Dearborn City Beautiful Commissioner, he's the chairman of the Arab-American Voter Registration and Education Committee" (Hendrickson 1991). After establishing his credibility as a productive American, the discussion about his feelings toward the war affirmed his loyalty to the United States—"I served honorably in the armed forces"—while at the same time highlighting his opposition to all wars because of their death and destruction, especially in relation to his people. He was quoted as stating,

> Even if it wasn't a Middle Eastern war involving my heritage, I'd still be against it. War is an outdated means of trying to solve a problem. It's primitive. This line of reasoning, "If you attack policy, you're not supporting our boys over there," that's junk. I will not allow my loyalty to be questioned. I served honorably in the armed forces of this country. I am an American. . . . This country was founded on the idea of honest dissent. I see the armies of the United States killing my people, I want to scream, "My God, stop it!" (Hendrickson 1991)

Following is another textual example that showed this theme: "says Naman, an Iraqi Christian who moved here 10 years ago and works in an Arabic meat market: 'I like both countries. We don't want war. It's sad. We think about it all day' " (Hall 1991). What was represented was a continual reaffirmation of loyalty and love for the United States that was made more poignant in light of the sadness and concern for the safety of friends and relatives in Iraq.

Interestingly, there was not one Arab American represented who mentioned a most common opinion about the war expressed in most media: that the war was being fought for oil interests and that their fellow Arabs might have to die for oil. The articulated angst about Arab lives is interesting in the context of what is disarticulated. The emphasis on purely emotional reactions shows how Arab Americans were depoliticized.

It is not surprising that in news coverage during wartime, there were only two Arab Americans quoted who expressed explicit frustration concerning U.S. policy and who showed support for the Arab world in Middle East affairs. One comment was by an Arab American business owner, who came to the United States in 1973 from Bint Jbail, a town in southern Lebanon that is now

occupied by Israel. "But the lack of respect is due to the U.S. historically aligning itself with a country that calls itself Israel that has committed so many atrocities against the Palestinian people, and the Arab people in general" (Applebome 1991). Another person quoted was a thirty-four-year-old graduate student whose family emigrated from Lebanon about forty years ago. She suggested that "the Jordanian leader 'said it best when he said that the attack on Iraq is an attack on all Arab people' " (Applebome 1991).

In contrast to these mild pro-Arab statements, some Arab Americans were represented with over-the-top declarations of loyalty to the United States without ambivalent emotions about the war. The news coverage portrayed three Arab Americans as unequivocally pro–United States and anti-Iraq or anti-Arab, reaffirming their American identity and not caring for the lives of their fellow Arabs. For example, Fred Motney, a sixty-five-year-old car salesman and second-generation Syrian, was quoted as stating that he does not even like Arab people. He stated,

> I'm totally 100 percent American. . . . I love this country, though like anybody else, at times I don't always agree with what we do. If there's a misperception of Arabs, I think it's our fault. It's not the WASP's fault. I think it's the Arab-Americans of today who, some of them, can be awfully obnoxious. I don't even like them, and they're my people. (Applebome 1991)

Another man, an Egyptian doctor, was even more blunt about his anti-Iraq feelings:

> "you have to flatten them . . . that's all," he says. He means Iraqis. "This is the greatest country on Earth. . . . Something will have to be sacrificed for something else. It's always the way. This man, Hussein, he is a madman. There are many fundamentalists over there. He may stampede them into some kind of panic. I think you have to go in and finish it quickly. It's sad but necessary. The problem, you see, is the American armies are being too kind. (Hendrickson 1991)

It should be considered that because some Arabs oppose Hussein and because the United States allied itself with some Arab nations during the war, the pro-U.S. attitude articulated among Arab Americans may not have been unusual. However, what is interesting is that these complexities and political rationales for Arab American support of U.S. foreign policy were not articulated. Rather, this support was presented through simple patriotic expressions of loyalty.

To summarize, the dominant pattern of the discourse involved ambivalent feelings of sadness or anger about the war based on the fear of death and destruction that it would bring to their fellow Arabs. These feelings were represented along with strong affirmations of loyalty and support for the United States. The sadness or frustrations about the war are depoliticized, however, and turned into passive laments. War, any war, is bad or immoral. As Arab

Americans reaffirmed their loyalty to the United States in the midst of emotional struggles and hardships, they became articulated as part of the larger imagined community in ways that were poignant, dramatic, and powerful.

Feeling Threatened and Stereotyped

Another form of emotional trauma incurred by Arab Americans and poignantly represented was related to the racist threats directed toward them because of their ethnic status during wartime. The fear of growing anti-Arab sentiment in the United States during this time was represented as palpable within the Arab American community. The news coverage reported an increase in threats, violence, and intimidation toward Arab Americans. Citing reports from the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, the *New York Times* (Applebome 1991) reported that there were less than five harassment incidents before the war and more than sixty since the war began. *USA Today* (Hall 1991) reported bomb threats in the Detroit community against residents and businesses. The paper also reported that a high school with mostly Arab American students had to post guards at the doors. The *Washington Post* cited the "torching of a Jordanian American party store" (Hendrickson 1991) in Detroit. The *New York Times* (Applebome 1991), quoting Mr. Sitto, an Arab American businessman, published the following: "Already you can hear people say, 'Hey, Arab; hey, camel jockey.'" Another blunt example of Arab American stereotyping was reported in the *Washington Post* (Hendrickson 1991): "these days in Detroit you see a certain poster flapping from telephone poles, from bulletin boards in laundromats. The poster says: 'I'd Fly 10,000 Miles to Smoke a Camel.'"

Arab Americans reacted with fear to these incidences and the potential for further harassment depending on the outcome of the war. In the text, for example, an Arab American professor of archeology was quoted as stating, "If it gets really ugly there, you will see more and more negative consequences for Arab-Americans here. If too many soldiers are killed and you see the body bags, that's what will really create difficulties for Arab-Americans" (Applebome 1991). Others expressed fear of going outside of their homes, especially if they are conspicuously Muslim. One young woman stated that her aunts and mother, who are scarved, that is, who wear traditional Muslim head coverings, are "scared to go out of the house."

Arab Americans expressed frustration because of such racism. Contradictory feelings of anger or resentment about anti-Arab stereotyping along with a sense of loyalty to the United States were represented. This was embodied in the reaction to the war by the editor of the *Arab American News*, Osama Sibliani. He was reported to be "infuriated" that Arab Americans were made to be intimidated because of U.S. jingoism. But he was "quick to say" that "if Iraq

attacked the United States, Arab-Americans would stand and fight harder than any other Americans" (Hall 1991). However, Sibliani was also critical of FBI questioning of the Arab American community, according to the *Washington Post*. This opened up a discursive space for expressing opposition to U.S. government practices toward the Arab American community. Sibliani said that FBI questioning "comes close to 'harassment' " (Hendrickson 1991). He also expressed how Arab Americans were intimidated into not expressing opposition to U.S. policy. He reported that his paper's toll-free hotline, which was "set up to give the community a place to voice fears and frustrations," received seven hundred calls opposing U.S. involvement in Middle East affairs.

The reported number of calls expressing opposition to U.S. policy received by the Arab American paper contradicted the preponderance of pro-U.S. sentiments found in the news coverage. It is hard to determine whether Arab Americans who were quoted were fearful of speaking out in public and therefore censored their comments in ways to make themselves seem loyal or whether the newspapers selected only the patriotic comments to emphasize. The important point, however, is that for the most part, the newspapers did not report on Arab American opposition to U.S. policies that were not based strictly on sympathy for the plight of their fellow Arabs.

This discourse surrounding Arab American feelings of being threatened and victimized was significant because it created a sympathetic portrait of the Arab American community during wartime. Unlike the stereotypical images of Arab Americans prominent in 1980s films and other popular discourses in which the Arab is portrayed as the evil other, these stories of virulent racism and injustice were represented in ways that evoked sympathy. The point is strongly made through the various cruel anti-Arab incidences and imagery reported on—for example, the poster stating "I'd Fly 10,000 Miles to Smoke a Camel." Arab Americans were represented instead as sympathetic others as they suffered through the racial and prejudicial injustices in the land that they love during this tragic time.

Important too, these racial threats and prejudices were represented only in the context of this war. The long history of anti-Arab racism and stereotyping in American popular culture was not raised. Anti-Arab prejudice during the war was thus represented as a natural, inevitable consequence of war against an Arab land. At the same time, Arab Americans were shown to continue to reaffirm their loyalty to the United States. Through this discourse, the text reinforced a powerful sympathetic narrative of Arab Americans' struggle to belong to the nation and live as loyal Americans in the midst of trying circumstances, including racism. In the end, these poignant discourses emphasizing Arab American emotional reactions to the war—the fear for their fellow Arabs or fear for themselves in the face of discrimination—were articulated into an overarching classic immigrant narrative of hardship and struggle.

Arab Americans and the Classic Immigrant Story of Hardship and Struggle

Ultimately, the text turned to and emphasized the classic immigrant narrative prominent in American popular culture. A key theme in the classic immigrant saga of coming to the United States in search of opportunity involves overcoming the struggles and obstacles standing in the way of eventual assimilation and incorporation into mainstream American society. The specific difficulties faced by Arab Americans during wartime, including racism and fear for the lives of their fellow Arabs, were articulated as part of the classic immigrant story of struggle and hardship to reach the American Dream, to fit in and become a part of American mainstream society. The feelings of despair about the war and the fear of harassment expressed by Arab Americans showed them struggling between their positions as Arabs and as Americans. Paradoxically, the difficulties and emotional struggles endured by Arab Americans were the basis for a powerful American story, one in which Arab American struggles were ultimately resolved and explained through the classic saga of struggle and hardship faced by all immigrants.

The text followed the pattern of popular immigration narratives. The Detroit/Dearborn area, with its largest concentration of Arab Americans in the United States, was represented as the place where many Arab Americans came in search of opportunity. The Detroit/Dearborn area was a symbolic microcosm of America as the land of opportunity.

In particular, the *Washington Post* tapped into popular immigration narratives to construct Arab Americans as part of the nation's imagined community. The story described Arab Americans as striving and hoping for the American Dream—thus symbolically uniting the Arab American community with earlier generations of opportunity-seeking immigrants. For example, the *Washington Post* published the following:

> The Iraqis, like the Palestinians or Yemenis or Syrians, didn't come to Detroit dreaming of taking over convenience stores or gas stations. They came—like Germans and Poles and Italians and Czechoslovaks; like every other nationality who ever arrived at the shores of this 18th-century French fur outpost—dreaming of getting on, getting rich, at Chevy Gear and Axle, at Chrysler Assembly, at the Rouge. That's the history of Detroit in the 20th century. (Hendrickson 1991)

The *Washington Post* (Hendrickson 1991) literally described Dearborn as the "Ellis Island of the Arab world." Arab Americans were drawn to Dearborn because of economic opportunity. Detroit was a destination because of the "phenomenal $5-a-day wage Henry Ford was willing to pay any hard-working man with a back and two arms" (Hendrickson 1991).

The idea of the eventual assimilation of immigrant groups into the American mainstream that is often part of the classic American immigrant saga was also evident in the news coverage. Arab immigrants who had been here longer were portrayed as assimilated. They were represented as being less anxious and fearful of their position as Arab Americans in the United States. They did not struggle as much between their positions as both Arabs and Americans, positioning themselves as more firmly American. For example, the *New York Times* reported that "for those whose families have been here longer, there is substantial support for the war and less anxiety about what the war will mean for Arab-Americans" (Applebome 1991). This is typical of the popular assimilation narrative depicting immigrants as becoming less attached to their countries of origin and more attached to their new homeland. The idea that Arab Americans would eventually assimilate as represented through this narrative also positions them as less threatening to the imagined community as a whole.

Arab American immigrants, in this contemporary setting of Detroit as the Ellis Island of the Arab world, were represented as having to endure racism and economic problems (this was during the economic recession of the early 1990s). The text also represented such struggles as part of the process of becoming American, although this was more subtle. For example, the discriminatory rhetoric used against previous generations of immigrants was echoed in the racist remarks of a "young woman of Mexican descent" in the *Washington Post*, who stated that Arab Americans are "obnoxious, they stink, they're dirty. They own all these gas stations, they come over here and make money off us, take our jobs. I hate them. I hated them before this war" (Hendrickson 1991). Interestingly, the woman making these disparaging remarks is explicitly identified as a young woman of Mexican descent, suggesting interethnic conflict and distancing these racist remarks from the broader American culture.

Thus, the classic immigrant saga of struggle and hardship in conjunction with the depoliticized nature of the discourses focusing on feelings of despair and fear served paradoxically to articulate Arab Americans as part of the nation's imagined community. This was accomplished through the sympathetic portrayals of their struggles and through the continual reaffirmation of their loyalty and commitment to the United States. In the process, the difficulties of racism, war, and economic problems were constructed as inevitable, immutable problems of American life—problems that have to be faced and endured by one generation of immigrant Americans after another (as well as Native American peoples and African Americans) rather than represented as the result of policies and politics that need to be changed. The text portrayed racial problems, economic ups and downs, and wars as a natural, but tragic, part of the American experience. Arab Americans were thus constructed, dur-

ing this particular time of war, as prototypical examples of such classic American experiences.

Discussion

As a minority cultural group with different reactions and experiences during the war, Arab Americans were ultimately represented as part of the nation's imagined community. This representation transformed them from the standpoint of stereotypically portrayed others into patriotic Americans. This leads to a number of theoretical and political implications. First, this case exemplifies the shifting, unfixed, and socially constructed nature of identities through news media discourse. We see how different historical contexts and moments produce changing discourses of identity. Unlike the many egregious stereotypical portrayals of Arabs found in other moments of American popular culture, this representation served the purposes of wartime and the need to construct a unified national community by articulating Arab Americans as part of the imagined community.

Second, we can also see how nations are reinforced as hegemonic constructions through the news media. The nation-state is constructed as a unified community deserving of citizens' sentimental attachments and loyalties. Arab Americans remain loyal to the nation-state through their difficult circumstances. Furthermore, the loyalty of non–Arab Americans to the nationstate was assumed in the stories.

Third, we see how ethnic differences, in this particular case, were depoliticized. Arab American ethnic differences were politically neutralized as their different reactions to the war were represented through discourses about feelings. As discussed, these feelings were depoliticized as they were not constructed in relation to any political rationales or understandings about the war. Thus, their stories serve as emotionally evocative personal human interest dramas that most every American can relate to. The political and economic motives for the war raised by popular opinion or the media were not raised in any of these Arab American stories (e.g., that the war was being fought simply to protect U.S. supplies of oil and not the more lofty goal of liberating Kuwait). Arab American discussions about the reasons for the war, even those that might go along with the dominant explanation offered by the American government, were not evident at all and contributed to the depoliticized nature of the news coverage of the Arab American community during the Gulf War. It could be suggested that the news text silenced Arab American political perspectives while seemingly representing and including them.

To conclude, these news stories constructed the U.S. as a unified imagined community all the more powerfully through the inclusion of "ethnic" differ-

ences. This unified imagined community remains a powerful construct, calling for citizens' sentimental attachments and loyalties even as it is a site through which racism, inequalities, and wars are perpetuated. What unites this imagined community then is the representation of these social inequities as a natural part of the American historical experience. The message, Different racial or ethnic groups, in diverse ways and in different times, must patriotically and passively endure these social problems, rather than change them and hope that they go away.

Notes

1. The notion of "imagined community" comes from Benedict Anderson's (1991) work, and the definition and theoretical implications of this term are discussed in the next section.

2. I chose this term to describe people of Arab descent, recognizing the difficulties implicit in this label. Some Americans of Arab ancestry prefer the term "Arab Americans" because it is a way to gain more political strength by uniting under a broader label. It is also clear, however, that the term lumps together many diverse people in a way that can be oversimplifying and stereotypical.

3. I used the official Bush administration dates to define the beginning and end of the Gulf War, keeping in mind that U.S. bombings on Iraq continued after the official declaration of the end of the war.

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