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Long Live the Arab Worker:

A Transnational History of Labor and Empire in the Yemeni Diaspora

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Interdisciplinary Humanities

by

Neama Alamri

Committee in charge:
Professor Mario Sifuentez, Chair
Professor Nigel Hatton
Professor Sholeh Quinn
Professor Ma Vang

2020

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Chair

University of California, Merced

2020

DEDICATION

For my family throughout the diaspora and in Yemen.

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This dissertation has truly been a family affair. The stories throughout are inspired and informed by the experiences of my family. My father's father as well as my mother's father and grandfather were all sailors who left Yemen for work and traveled the world throughout the 1950s and 1960s. My mother and her family came to the U.S. in 1965 and found a new home in Brooklyn, New York. As a young man, my father immigrated to the United States in 1975 for work. In many ways, this research has been a retracing of my own family's diasporic experiences formations, and connections. In writing about his preoccupation on the diasporic experience and narratives of displacement, Stuart Hall once wrote that all discourse is "placed" and that "the heart has its reasons."[1] My reasons have always been to honor my family's history, their labor, and the sacrifices they made so that their children, and their children's children can live a better life. I would like to especially thank my father for instilling in me a love for knowledge and history. The stories I heard growing up about his time as a farm worker in the Central Valley during the farm worker movement were the genesis of this project. He is one of the hardest-working people I know, and I am so honored that he has been a part of this dissertation.

This dissertation would not have been possible without the support of my colleagues and mentors. First, I would like to thank my dissertation advisor, Mario Sifuentez, for his mentorship and guidance throughout my graduate study. From day one, Mario has believed in this project, and I am eternally grateful for his support. To the members of my dissertation committee Ma Vang, Nigel Hatton, and Sholeh Quinn thank you for your dedication, advice, constructive criticisms, and of course the many letters of recommendations. Ma's academic contributions have been an inspiration to me that I hope to emulate one day. Nigel, with whom I was lucky enough to take multiple seminars with during my coursework, impacted the intellectual trajectory of my dissertation. Sholeh's expertise in the history of the Middle East helped me to consider the broader context of this project. She also assisted me in translating several documents in Arabic. Sholeh's kindness has sustained my faith in the academy especially during the moments when I doubted whether I even belonged. I would also like to thank professors who have helped me along the way: David Torres-Rouff, Kit Myers, Kevin Dawson, Susan Amussen, Sean Malloy, and Anne Zanzucchi.

I am very grateful for the financial support from UC Merced's Graduate Division and several external funding opportunities which made this research feasible. The Eugene Cota-Robles Fellowship allowed me to focus on my coursework and research the first two crucial years of graduate school. During the summers, I was able to continue research through the support of the Interdisciplinary Humanities Summer Support awards. The President's Dissertation 2019-2020 Year Fellowship supported my final year of writing and allowed me to work from home following the birth of my first child. I have also been fortunate enough to receive external support which helped fund my research and make my travels to California, Michigan, and England possible. These awards include: the Dr. Philip M. Kayal Fund for Arab American Research (Center for Arab American

[1] Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," *Identity, Community, Culture, Difference,* (London: Lawrecne & Wishart: 1990), 223).

Philanthropy) and the Sam Fishman Travel Grant Award which supported my archival research in Michigan at the Arab American National Museum in Dearborn and Walter P. Reuther Library in Detroit. The archivists at the Arab American National Museum, particularly Kirsten Terry-Murphy and Nathan Santoscoy, helped me find sources which I used in chapter three. The archivists at the Walter P. Reuther Library assisted me in my research into the United Farm Workers (UFW) and United Auto Workers (UAW) collections. I am especially thankful for the help of Kathy Schmeling who located some unprocessed UFW materials which I used in chapter two. The American Institute for Yemeni Studies fellowship as well as the UC Merced Center for the Humanities Graduate Summer Fellowship financially supported my travels to England where I was able to conduct research in Newcastle, Sheffield, and London. I am also thankful for awards from the Western History Association and the UCHRI Graduate Student Dissertation Award which both aided me in the completion of this research. I am thankful to those who have generously donated their time, knowledge, and resources in support of this research. Among these individuals are Miriam Pawel, Bruce Neuburger, Rick Tejada-Flores, Laurie Coyle, and Laura Tabili. Both Laura and Laurie personally mailed me packets of archival material that I used in chapters one and two respectively.

My friends and colleagues at UC Merced have been a source of support and strength. I am incredibly grateful to have established friendships with, Michelle Yeung, Jamin Shih, Laura Gomez, Shiloh Green, and Ivan Soto. I am especially thankful to Shiloh who read several chapter drafts and has always been a source of positivity and kindness. Amrit Deol has been by my side since our very first day of graduate school. You have inspired me, and at the best of times, challenged me to be a better scholar and person. I am so thankful that we embarked on this journey together.

My family's experiences have not only been an inspiration but a source of knowledge and wisdom. I am incredibly blessed to have had the opportunity to have conversations with relatives about their labor migration, especially my grandfather. Their stories have guided me throughout this process. Alongside family, I would like to thank others who dedicated their time either through informal conversations or oral histories. This dissertation would not have been possible without these people who have lifted me and built this project. In particular, I am thankful to Ali Baleed Almaklani and his family who graciously opened their home to me in Dearborn, Michigan while I conducted research. I would also like to thank my family and friends in England who helped me navigate my research trip. Dr. Abdul Galil Shaif's assistance and oral history in Sheffield, was especially helpful.

To my husband, who has been my rock and biggest supporter through all of this. Thank you for always supporting me and believing in me, even when I didn't believe in myself. I love you beyond words. Finally, to our baby Amir, whose love has sustained me in my last year of graduate school. Becoming a mother has been by far the most rewarding part of this journey. Ya galbi, I hope you grow up in a world where you see yourself in the history books. This is for you.

VITA

2013	BA, English & Women's Studies, Minor in Middle East Studies, California State University, Fresno
2013-2015	Eugene Cota-Robles Fellowship, University of California, Merced
2015-2017	Teaching Assistant, Department of History & Critical Race and Ethnic Studies, University of California, Merced
2017-2019	Instructor, Department of History & Critical Race and Ethnic Studies, University of California, Merced
Fall 2019	Master in Interdisciplinary Humanities, University of California, Merced
2019-2020	President's Dissertation Year Fellowship, University of California, Merced

PUBLICATIONS

"Yemeni Farm Workers and the Politics of Arab Nationalism in the UFW, *Boom California,* February 18, 2020.

FIELDS OF STUDY

Arab American Studies; American Studies; History; Middle East Studies, Ethnic Studies, labor history; diaspora studies

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

"Long Live the Arab Worker: A Transnational History of Labor and Empire in the Yemeni Diaspora"

Neama Alamri, Interdisciplinary Humanities, University of California Merced, 2020

"Long Live the Arab Worker: A Transnational History of Labor and Activism in the Yemeni Diaspora," examines how Yemeni workers and activists in their struggle to live and make a living highlighted the connections between local challenges in the diaspora with global politics of empire. By foregrounding experiences of Yemeni diasporic communities throughout the 20th century, this project interrogates the intersections of labor and empire while also highlighting the complicated, multifaceted, and often messy realities within histories of activism and community organizing. It analyzes how labor and labor activism in the diaspora became an ideological arena in which politics of empire were obscured, accommodated, exposed, and challenged.

In 1839, the establishment of the British Protectorate in Aden and the presence of the British East India Company in Yemen consolidated the colonial, political, and economic connections that would draw Yemeni labor and immigrants to Britain and later the United States. The ceaseless desire for cheap labor in both countries would lead to continued labor migration from Yemen throughout the 20th century. Classified as British subjects, some of the first Yemeni migrant workers were recruited from the ports of Aden to work on British ships. While some remained in the shipping industry as sailors, many eventually settled in cities in England and found work in the steel industry. By the 1960s and 1970s, more significant numbers of Yemenis immigrated to the United States and toiled in California's fields as farm workers as well as auto workers in Detroit's booming auto industry. Both British and U.S. imperialism in Yemen and the Middle East not only enforced labor migration, but continuously shaped the experiences of Yemeni workers and families in the diaspora.

Through an exploration of archival sources and original oral histories, this project tells the stories of these workers who provided labor throughout the "diaspora of empire." Kobena Mercer theorized the "diaspora of empire" as a "reminder and a remainder of the nation's historical past." I borrow from Nadine Naber's development of diaspora of empire which emphasizes how because of contemporary U.S. neocolonial and imperial formations, Arab diasporas cannot be understood simply within a postcolonial timeline in which people reside in the countries that formerly colonized them. Rather, diaspora of empire refers to the "moment in which empire and its subjects exist in a transnational and contemporaneous frame." In other words, diaspora of empire points to the *ongoing* impacts of both formal and informal empire. This research explores how Yemeni workers and activists through their labor and activism experienced and resisted politics of empire in the diaspora throughout the 20th century. By unpacking these stories, we can come closer to understanding the current precarities facing Yemeni diasporic communities today.

INTRODUCTION:

Decolonizing the Sojourner/Settler Paradigm: Re-Imagining Histories of the Yemeni Diaspora

Apart from the dark skin of the Arabs, it is well known that they are a part of the Mohammedan world and that a wide gulf separates their culture from that of the predominantly Christian peoples of Europe. It cannot be expected that as a class they would readily intermarry with our population and be assimilated into our civilization.
---Judge Tuttle, Eastern District Court in Michigan, 1942

On December 15, 1942 Ahmed Hassan, an immigrant from Yemen, presented his case for naturalization to the Eastern District Court in Michigan. The issue at hand, like many citizenship cases at the time, was whether or not Hassan could be considered a "white person" as understood in the law which granted citizenship only to "free white persons," or those of "African nativity or descent." Hassan was amongst a group of immigrants from the Arabian Peninsula who, throughout the 1940s, submitted applications for naturalization.[1] While Arabs had been petitioning U.S. courts for naturalization on the basis of whiteness since the late 19th century, and some with success, the racial classification of Arabs remained ambiguous.[2] For the case of Ahmed Hassan, however, the court's decision was straightforward: he was not white. In his decision, Judge Tuttle reported that Hassan, "being a native of Yemen...was before the court and his skin was undisputedly dark brown in color." Tuttle goes on to state that: "Apart from the dark skin of the Arabs, it is well known that they are a part of the Mohammedan world and that a wide gulf separates their culture from that of the predominantly Christian peoples of Europe. It cannot be expected that as a class they would readily intermarry with our population and be *assimilated into our civilization* [emphasis added]."[3]

I open my dissertation with Ahmed Hassan's case for several reasons, mainly of which are questions. How did he end up in the U.S.? Why Michigan? What was his occupation? Finally, and perhaps most important, how do we come to understand the court's assumption that Hassan, and other Yemenis, could not be "assimilated" into U.S.

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[1] Salah Hassan, "Arabs, Race and the Post-September 11 National Security State," *Middle East Report* 224 (Fall 2002)

[2] In December 1909, Costa George Najour, an immigrant from Syria, petitioned for citizenship claiming that Syrians were Caucasian. The presiding judge supported those claims and Najour became the first applicant for citizenship (amongst all ethnic groups) to successfully claim status as a white person in a U.S. federal court. See Sarah Gualtieri, *Between Arab and White: Race and Ethnicity in the Early Syrian American Diaspora,* (University of California Press, 2009), 1.

[3] *In re Ahmed Hassan* 48 F.Supp. 941 [E.D.Mich. 1942].

society or "civilization?" While little is known of Hassan beyond what is recorded in the court documents, my knowledge of Yemeni immigration, both personally and academically, helps me to try and fill in the gaps. My maternal great grandfather migrated to the U.S. sometime in the early-1950s, nearly a decade after Hassan's case, by way of a British ship, in which he was employed, that landed in New York. Throughout the first half of the 20th century, thousands of Yemenis traveled the world's major cities as sailors and merchant marines and many were employed by British ships, a direct result of British colonization in the port of Aden located in south Yemen. Perhaps Hassan was also a sailor who jumped ship while sailing Michigan's Great Lakes and found work in the industrial cities of Michigan, such as Detroit, where a booming auto industry was employing immigrants from around the globe. While we do not know for sure the circumstances of Hassan's immigration or employment, it is clear by his denied petition for U.S. citizenship that Yemenis were not only viewed as unassimilable, but antithetical to western "civilization."

This dissertation examines the stories of those like Hassan and my great grandfather who migrated from Yemen in search of opportunity and faced systems of power that they were challenged by and at times challenged themselves. In 1839, the establishment of the British Protectorate in Aden and the presence of the British East India Company in Yemen consolidated the colonial, political, and economic connections that would draw Yemeni labor and immigrants to Britain and later the United States for decades. The ceaseless desire for cheap labor in both countries would lead to continued labor migration from Yemen throughout the 20th century. Classified as British subjects, some of the first Yemeni migrant workers were recruited from the ports of Aden to work on British ships. While some remained in the shipping industry as sailors, many eventually settled in cities in England and found work in the shipping and steel industries. By the 1960s and 1970s, more significant number of Yemenis immigrated to the United States and toiled in California's fields as farm workers as well as auto workers in Detroit's auto industry. Both British and U.S. imperialism in Yemen and the Middle East not only enforced labor migration, but continuously shaped the experiences of Yemeni workers and families in the diaspora.

Situated within Arab American Studies, Ethnic Studies, and labor history, this dissertation examines how Yemeni workers and activists experienced and resisted politics of empire in the diaspora throughout the 20th century. Through a historical exploration of the Yemeni diaspora in the U.S. and England, I argue that labor and labor activism became an ideological arena in which politics of empire were obscured, accommodated, exposed, and challenged. I trace the formation of a Yemeni transnational laboring class in north-east England and the U.S., including California and Michigan from the period of formal British empire during the early 20th century to the postwar period up until the end of the 1970s. I argue that the history of these diasporic spaces demonstrate how Yemeni workers were thrown at the forefront of political battles that grabbled with questions of empire, imperialism, and race. Exemplified by Judge Tuttle's ruling in the case of Ahmed Hassan, because of their ethnicity, religion, and class, Yemeni workers were racialized as unassimilable, non-white minorities. Yet, Yemeni workers utilized their identities as Arabs, Muslims, and laborers to make space in places not intended for them and challenge social injustices on both local and global scales.

The history of the Yemeni diaspora is significant in the context of a larger Arab and Arab American history for several reasons. Numerous scholarly books and articles have provided much needed histories on Arabs in the U.S. and have explored topics of race, activism, gender and cultural politics. These works have focused primarily on Syrian, Lebanese, Jordanian and Palestinian communities.[4] My research is inspired by and draws from this important scholarship. However, my dissertation seeks to center the experiences of Yemenis, who have been marginalized from Arab and Arab American history, which predominantly focuses on middle-class Arab American communities or U.S.-Middle Eastern relations and not on working class histories. By centering the Yemeni diaspora, this project brings together Arab and Arab American Studies with labor history, because the history of the Yemeni diaspora, its formation and conditions, is a history of labor. In not considering Arab working-class communities, or "histories from below," Arab American history has prioritized narratives that have substantial archival written records. This includes those of political organizations or individuals with social status and papers that have been donated to archives. The history of Yemeni diasporic communities, on the other hand, are not so easily visible in the archive. Their histories are often scattered, sometimes discretely, throughout labor documents, court cases, or newspapers. Without a definite historical record, Yemeni communities in the diaspora have been categorized as sojourners, that is a people with no investment in the diasporic spaces they labor.

The limited scholarship on Yemenis in the United States, England, and elsewhere in the diaspora, has mainly situated the experiences of Yemeni immigrants in the sojourner/settler framework, which focuses only on assimilation. By foregrounding the Yemeni diasporic experience, my research also seeks to go beyond the "sojourner" versus "settler" discourse. My research disrupts this binary by exploring lived experiences that are complicated and contradictory, demonstrating how Yemeni immigrants and workers were both sojourner and settler and sometimes neither. In moving beyond the "sojourner/settler framework, my research locates Yemeni immigrants within a "diaspora of empire." Kobena Mercer theorized the "diaspora of empire" as a "reminder and a remainder of the nation's historical past."[5] I borrow from Nadine Naber's development of diaspora of empire which emphasizes how because of contemporary U.S. neocolonial and imperial formations, Arab diasporas cannot be understood simply within a postcolonial timeline in which people reside in countries that formerly colonized them. Rather, diaspora of empire refers to the "moment in which empire and its subjects exist in a transnational and contemporaneous frame."[6] In other words, diaspora of empire points to the *ongoing* impacts of both formal and informal empire. By unpacking these stories, we

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[4] See, Sarah Gualtieri, *Between Arab and White: Race and Ethnicity in the Early Syrian-American Diaspora,* (University of California Press, 2009; Nadine Naber, *Arab America: Gender, Cultural Politics, and Activism*, (New York: NYU Press, 2012); Pamela Pennock, *The rise of the Arab American left: activists, allies, and their fight against imperialism and racism, 1960s-1980s*, (University of North Carolina Press, 2017),

[5] Kobena Mercer. *Welcome to the jungle: new positions in Black cultural studies*, (New York: Routledge, 1994).

[6] Nadine Naber, "Diaspora of Empire: Arab Americans and the Reverberations of War," *At the Limits of Justice: Women of Colour on Terror,* (University of Toronto, 2014), 193.

can come closer to understanding the current precarities facing Yemeni diasporic communities today.

My goals in this introduction are: 1) Expand my critique of the "sojourner/settler" framework and argue for the use of a critical diasporic approach; 2) Contextualize the history of Yemeni labor migration and the significance of the time period this dissertation covers; 3) Discuss my methods and methodologies and the challenges of conducting research within subjugated histories.

Beyond Sojourner vs. Settler, Toward a Diasporic Approach

My dissertation seeks to challenge the sojourner/settler framework that has dominated the scholarship on Yemeni immigrant communities and move towards a critical diasporic approach. Rather than attempt to answer whether Yemenis were sojourners or settlers, this dissertation interrogates the historical conditions that created and defined a Yemeni diaspora in the first place. Employers in Britain's shipping industry, California's agribusiness, and Detroit's auto industry viewed Yemenis as compliant laborers who were there temporarily to work and therefore would not cause any "trouble." While it may be true that many saw their diasporic lives in England or the U.S. as temporary and ultimately planned to return to Yemen, Yemeni workers still created homes in the diaspora and engaged in activism that connected local labor politics with global politics circulating Yemen and parts of the Arab world. This dissertation demonstrates that the categorization of Yemenis as unassimilable sojourners is a racial process. In critiquing the sojourner/settler framework, this section will situate the sojourner trope within earlier studies in Sociology, Anthropology, and Arab American Studies that focused on immigrant assimilation. Next, drawing from Diaspora Studies, I will expand on my use of a critical diasporic approach.

In *Sojourners and Settlers: The Yemeni Immigrant Experience* (1988), an anthology on the lives of Yemeni immigrants in the U.S., the trope of the "sojourner" versus the "settler" served as a guiding framework that informed the trajectory of the case studies, the types of research questions that were asked, and the scholarly claims that were made. One of the only books that have focused on Yemenis in the U.S., this anthology, edited by Ron Kelley and Jonathon Friedlander, includes a collection by essays by different scholars on Yemeni immigrants in the U.S. as well as the political consequences migration has had in Yemen.[7] This is an important text with lots of anthropological and sociological contributions, as well as series photographs of Yemeni immigrants in the U.S. and has been of extreme usefulness for my project.[8] However, my

[7] Jonathan Friedlander, *Sojourners and Settlers: The Yemeni Immigrant Experience,* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1988).; the other publication that focuses on Yemenis in the U.S. is: Loukia K. Sarroub, *All American Yemeni Girls: Being Muslim in a Public School,* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005).

[8] The anthology was also turned into photo exhibit titled after the book, "Sojourners and Settlers: The Yemeni Immigrant Experience," and held the same year of its publication. The exhibit was held at UCLA's Museum of Cultural History and was organized by Jonathon Friedlander.[8] The spectacle of the exhibit and book, which included photographs of many Yemeni men, women, and children who were not aware that

research is in many ways a response to this anthology and a call to move beyond the "sojourner/settler" binary that very much abides by the constraining ideologies of the immigrant assimilation paradigm.

Grounded in early sociological and anthropological publications, the immigrant and ethnicity paradigm, focused exclusively on stages of assimilation for "minority" groups and did not include critiques of race. Scholars such as Yen Le Espiritu have explored how unlike those in ethnic studies, sociologists struggled with the inclusion of race in their work beyond a simple additive approach.[9] According to Espiritu, sociology from its origins has explored various social issues with founders such as Marx, Weber and Durkheim foregrounding the rise of industrial capitalism as the main challenge facing societies. While by the 1950s, works such as Wright Mill's *The Sociological Imagination* helped to push sociologists to engage in an "activist critique and reconstruction of society," Espiritu also points to how the "growth of the research university and of funding sources for the social sciences 'scientized' sociology" at this time as well.[10] As a result, sociological scholarship became grounded in positivist approaches and did not allow for the engagement with other disciplines such as ethnic studies. Publications by sociologists such as Robert Ezra Park, Oliver Cox, and Myron Milton Gordon, focused more on the immigrant and ethnicity paradigm and the stages of assimilation as opposed to looking at how race is deeply engrained in social structures.[11] Traditional anthropological work also focused more on the inabilities of racialized communities to assimilate into whiteness defining those inabilities as pathologies.[12] For these early publications, whiteness was conflated with progress and modernity, and anything outside of whiteness was perceived to be backwards, traditional, and inferior.

Like early sociological and anthropological studies on immigrants in the U.S., some of the first publications in Arab American Studies also focused on assimilation. The emergence of Arab American studies was a political movement to represent the marginalized and underrepresented lives of Arab Americans. The field emerged in the United States in the late 1960s and 1970s particularly backed by Arab American organizations' desire to politicize Arab American communities in the wake of the 1967 Arab-Israeli war. The early phase of Arab American Studies saw books such as *The Arab Americans* (1969) by Elaine Hagopian and Ann Paden, *Arabic-Speaking Communities in American Cities* (1974) by Barbara Aswad, and *Arabs in America: Myths and Realities*

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they would be featured in a traveling exhibition, points to the problematic and limiting knowledge about Yemenis in the United States.

[9] Yen Le Espiritu, "Disciplines Unbound: Notes on Sociology and Ethnic Studies," *Contemporary Sociology* 28 (1999): 511.

[10] Espiritu, 510

[11] Oliver C. Cox, "The Racial Theories of Robert E. Park and Ruth Benedict," *The Journal of Negro Education* 13 (1944); Gordon Milton, "The Nature of Assimilation," in *Assimilation in American Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964); Robert Ezra Park, "Our Racial Frontier in the Pacific," in *Race and Culture* (Glencoe, Ill: Free Press, 1950)

[12] Oscar Lewis, *La Vida; a Puerto Rican Family in the Culture of Poverty-San Juan and New York*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1968); Daniel Patrick Moynihan, "The Negro Family: The Case for National Action," in *The Negro Family, the Case for National Action.* (Washington: United States. Dept. of Labor, 1965),

(1975)*,* edited by Baha Abu-Laban and Faith Zeadey. These initial publications came out of the social sciences and were predominantly grounded in quantitative data. These studies focused on the problems or successes of Arab Americans in their "assimilation" into American society and left unexamined the context of U.S. colonialism, imperialism, empire, and racism both within the U.S. and the Arab world. Earlier Arab American Studies scholars demonstrated a knowledge of the social statuses of Arab Americans within the U.S.; however, their interpretations sought to integrate Arabs into American society as opposed to critiquing structural inequalities and histories of labor, racial discrimination, and empire.

Situated in this immigrant assimilation literature, the sojourner trope often used to describe the experiences of Yemeni diasporic communities, conflates American-ness with whiteness. Under the sojourner/settler binary, is the categorization of two types of Yemeni immigrants: those who come to the U.S. temporarily with plans of eventually returning to Yemen and those who permanently settle in the U.S. and successfully assimilate to "American" culture and lifestyle. In one of the studies in *Sojourners and Settlers*, two scholars articulated Yemeni immigrants in the U.S. as sojourners because they "cling to the cultural heritage of his own ethnic group and tend to live in isolation, hindering his assimilation to the society in which he resides, often for many years."[13] By categorizing Yemeni immigrants as sojourners because they "cling to cultural heritage" assumes that a Yemeni cultural identity and Islamic religious identity negate the possibility of being "American." Furthermore, the masculinization of the Yemeni immigrant by assuming a "he," erases the presence of Yemeni immigrant women. Implicit in this generalizing categorization, however, is the erasure of complex and lived experiences within Yemeni communities. While sojourner/settler categorization preempted the possibility of complicated, non-binary narratives, it does accurately point to the ways in which Yemeni immigrant experiences were (and continue to be) portrayed in the academic scholarship. This is partly due to the fact that Yemeni immigrant communities have been overwhelmingly Muslim and working class. As a result, Yemeni communities have historically been racialized as non-white through both religion and class and are often described as being isolationist, non-assimilative, and traditional.

This racialization of Yemenis sets them apart from other Arab immigrants who have historically been racially ambiguous. For example, Syrian immigrants, although occupying a liminal space between "Asian" and "black" racial schemes, were able to gain citizenship on the basis of whiteness more often than other Arabs. In *Between Arab and White: Race and Ethnicity in the Early Syrian-American Diaspora,* Sarah Gualtieri argues that during the earlier half of the twentieth century, questions regarding race were a central component to the construction of a Syrian ethnicity in the United States. American politics, culture, and the law constituted racial formations of Syrian immigrants, and consequently they began to "view themselves in racial terms and

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[13] George Sabagh and Mehdi Bozorgmeher, "The Settlement of Yemeni Immigrants in the United States," from *Sojourners and Settlers,*(Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1988), 145

position themselves within racial hierarchies."[14] Gualtieri's work demonstrated how Syrians, the first Arabic-speaking immigrant group to arrive in North America in the late 19th and early 20th century, often emphasized their property ownership "as proof of their ability to perform whiteness." They also underscored their Christian identities in order to "make religious and civilizational arguments in favor of their whiteness." These two components often made the cases of Syrian immigrants' difficult for the courts to decipher. As a result, Syrians were often able to successfully lobby and claim their whiteness through evidence of their economic success, as well as, through their Christian religious identity.[15] Although not readily perceived as "white," Syrians, on the other hand, were also not immediately perceived as "non-white."

Arab Muslim immigrants like Yemenis, however, were unable to gain citizenship through whiteness, demonstrating the ways in which a Muslim identity has historically racialized certain bodies. This is exemplified in Ahmed Hassan's 1942 petition for naturalization. Hassan was described as a native of Yemen whose skin was "undisputedly dark brown in color." In defense of this, affidavits filed by Hassan stated that the "extremely dark complexion of petitioner's skin is typical of a majority of Arabians from the region from which he comes, which fact is attributed to the intense heat and the blazing sun of that area."[16] Hassan claimed that based on studies by ethnologists, Arabs are "remote descendants" of the Caucasian race and should therefore be eligible for citizenship. However, drawing from the Supreme Court decision in United States v. Bhagat Singh Thind (1923), the judge claimed that the actual color of the petitioner's skin is not "decisive" and that members of the Caucasian race are based on what is "popularly understood.[17] For the case of Hassan, the question on whether he was white or not was as "undisputable" as the color of skin. Yet, it was not just his skin color that determined the outcome of the case. The decision also stated that Arabs, and specifically Yemenis, were "a part of the Mohammedan world and that a wide gulf separates their culture from that of the predominantly Christian peoples of Europe." The decision goes on to stat that "it cannot be expected that as a class they would readily intermarry with our population and be assimilated into our civilization." Here, it is evident that Islam racialized Hassan as an unassimilable racial other. Unlike Syrian Christian immigrants

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[14] Sarah Gualtieri, *Between Arab and White: Race and Ethnicity in the Early Syrian-American Diaspora,* (University of California Press, 2009), 2

[15] Gualtieri demonstrates that in the case of Syrians, the desire to "become white" was not always intertwined with "becoming American," as historians David Roediger and James Barrett have argued. Rather, the fight for whiteness and citizenship, led to closer connections to their homeland and to a "wider Syrian diaspora."

[16] *In re Ahmed Hassan* 48 F.Supp. 941 [E.D.Mich. 1942].

[17] Legal scholars have demonstrated how the racial pre-requisite cases of the time reveal the legal system's protection of whiteness. This is made clear in Ozawa v. United States (1922) and Thind v. United States (1923). Japanese American, Takao Ozawa claimed whiteness through his skin color and assimilation into American culture. The courts decided that while his skin may be light, he is not Caucasian in the scientific sense. In 1923, Bhagat Singh Thind, claimed that he is Caucasian based on scientific studies at the time that stated that India is part of the Caucasian race. The court denied these claims stating the original 1790 law for naturalization grants it to "white persons" and the term white persons is not scientific and does not refer to Caucasians but refers to the "everyday" white person's definition of who is white. See, Ian Haney Lopez, *White by Law: The Legal Construction of Race* (New York University Press, 2006).

whose Christianity warranted them access to whiteness and "American-ness," Yemeni Muslims were racialized as non-white as a result of their religious identity. My emphasis on the case of Ahmad Hassan in this introduction demonstrates one of the goals of this dissertation which is to underscore the importance of Yemeni diasporic history in our understandings of Arab American racial formation.

The history of Yemeni workers in the diaspora is significant in the larger history of Arab immigration because it complicates the narrative that all Arab immigrants held liminal racial statuses or that, prior to 9/11, they were model minorities. It also challenges the idea that Yemeni workers were sojourners with no personal investment in the diasporic communities they labored. The chapters that follow demonstrate that contrary to popular belief, Yemenis made impacts in the spaces they worked. In moving beyond the sojourner/settler binary which focuses on assimilation, this dissertation applies a critical diasporic approach in order to foreground race, class, and gender. Drawing from the scholarship on diasporas, this dissertation posits the history of the Yemeni diaspora alongside other diasporic formations.

The term "diaspora" has changed throughout academic scholarship, initially only describing specific communities such as the Jewish diaspora then shifting to the looser term "diasporic" to define communities who although not in a diaspora, have "diasporic dimensions to their practices and cultures of displacement. In James Clifford's 1994 essay, "Diasporas," he defines diasporas as presupposing "longer distances and a separation more like an exile: a constitutive taboo on return, or its postponement to a remote future." He goes on to say that "diasporas also connect multiple communities of a dispersed population."[18] In William Safran's 1991 essay, "Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return," he defines diaspora as "expatriate minority communities" with the following six characteristics: 1) they are dispersed from an original land to at least two other places; 2) they sustain "memory, vision, or myth about their original homeland"; 3) they "believe they are not--and perhaps cannot be--fully accepted by their host country"; 4) given the right time, they intend to eventually return to their ancestral home; 5) they are dedicated to the "restoration" of their homeland; and 6) the group's consciousness and solidarity are "importantly defined" by this relationship to the homeland." In following Safran's characteristic of diaspora, it is evident then that the experiences of Yemenis in England and the U.S. are one with diasporic dimensions. Beyond the technical justification of a Yemeni diaspora, a diasporic approach allows for the possibility of multidimensional histories that are not simply concerned with immigrant groups achieving assimilation.

In her work on decolonial imaginaries, Emma Perez pointed to the limitations of the "immigrant," a concept with historical origins for European immigrants who were "mostly of white, assimilable ethnicities." A diasporic approach, according to Perez, "would open a space where people of color...could negotiate a raced culture within many kinds of identities without racial erasure through assimilation, accommodation, adaptation, acculturation, or even resistance." Rather than expecting to assimilate to the

[18] James Clifford, "Diasporas," *Cultural Anthropology* (Vol. 9, No. 3, Aug. 1994), pp. 302-338.

dominant culture, diasporas "intervene" and "construct newness."[19] Following Perez's call toward a diasporic approach, this dissertation explores the ways in which Yemeni workers "intervened" in the spaces they worked. The literary works by Yemeni writers that emerged in the context of labor migration and dealt with the themes of migration imagined new ways of defining the diaspora.

I am interested in exploring the historical, political, and economic conditions that influenced Yemeni immigrants and workers in the diasporic spaces of the U.S. and England and how labor activism functioned as a space to articulate and politicize their identities. I use Nadine Naber's theorizing of "articulations of Arabness," as a way to locate "the historical and political conditions that give rise to concepts of Arabness," which includes affiliating with the Arab region and Arab diaspora as a way to "make claims to, negotiate, live, reject or transform these concepts."[20] Theorizing a transnational Arab American history through "articulations of Arabness," therefore, allows for both multiplicity and historical contingency as opposed to a fixed and ahistorical definition of "Arab." Furthermore, for Naber, the increasing U.S. military intervention in the Middle East in the 1960s and 1970s, "transformed Arab Americans into a diaspora of empire."[21] Therefore, I implement a Yemeni "diaspora of empire," in order to foreground the processes of British colonialism and U.S. imperialism.

Contextualizing 20th Century Yemeni Labor Migration

In order to contextualize the chapters that follow this introduction, I will provide a brief overview of Yemeni political history in connection to migration. While large scale migration occurred in the 20th century during the time European forces began to colonize the region, archeological records have found that Yemenis have been migrating for centuries, even millenia.[22] This early migration was primarily to places in the Horn of Africa such as Djibouti and Ethiopia and consisted mainly of Hadramis from the region of Hadramawt located in South Yemen.[23] Labor migration to countries in the West including the United States and Britain occurred mainly as a result of British colonization and imperialism in Yemen. While the creation of the British Protectorate in Aden in 1839 marked the beginning of an institutional British presence in Yemen, the British empire had long been interested in Yemen. From the 16th to the 19th century, the British

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[19] Emma Pérez, *The Decolonial Imaginary: Writing Chicanas into History*, (Bloomington, Ind: Indiana University Press, 1999), 78

[20] Naber, 17

[21] Naber, 27

[22] Samson A. Bezabeh, *Subjects of Empire Citizens of State: Yemenis in Djibouti and Ethiopia,* (American University in Cairo Press, 2016).

[23] There is a large literature in Indian Ocean studies that focuses on the formation of a Yemeni diaspora in the Indian Ocean. However as Samson A Bezabeh's book argues, this scholarship has mainly portrayed Yemenis and Yemeni migration as ahistorical and have sought to make overarching connections between Yemeni diasporic communities in the Indian Ocean today with those from a century ago. Bezabeh also calls for the need to foreground the role of states and empires in this history which has largely been ignored. See *Subjects of Empire Citizens of State: Yemenis in Djibouti and Ethiopia,* (American University in Cairo Press, 2016), 8.

East India Company propelled the expansion of the British empire into Africa and Asia. Located in between East Africa and South Asia, Yemen and specifically the port city of Aden, was a strategic location for British voyagers on their imperial journeys to the company's base in India. While only initially interested in the convenient location of Aden's port, the British empire quickly saw the benefit of employing local Adenis to help unload and load the ships at the docks. With the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, more ships were stopping in Aden whose docks became an important refueling station. By 1878, the majority of African trade between the Arab peninsula and Asia was financed, supplied, and controlled from Aden. In 1889, the British government created the Aden Port Trust which allowed the mercantile community in Aden to drastically rearrange and reconstruct the docklands in a way that allowed ships to stay at the port for longer periods of time. This was also around the same time that Yemeni sailors began arriving in ports throughout the United Kingdom.[24] As colonized subjects, Yemenis were granted entrance into the UK if they stated that they were born in Aden which allowed them to be considered "British subjects." In reality, the vast majority of Yemeni sailors were born outside of Aden, but were able to gain British subjecthood in the late 19thand early 20th century because of relaxed laws and regulations that were implemented at the time in order to allow ship owners to exploit an endless supply of cheap labor. In 1937, Aden officially became a Crown Colony under the British empire and was ruled independently of India.[25] By this time, the colonial and economic connections between Yemen and Britain that enabled large scale migration had already been solidified. Almost two decades later, decolonization in Aden and political changes in North Yemen would also impact migration.

Although Yemenis had been migrating for work beginning in the late 19th and early 20th century, the 1960s and 1970s saw large scale labor migration of Yemenis to other parts of the world, including the United States. The 1960s and 1970s was a time of tumultuous political changes in former North and South Yemen. With the spread of Arab nationalism led by Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser and anti-colonial movements throughout the world, like many other countries in the Middle East, North and South Yemeni citizens were inspired to challenge systems of power. In 1963 in South Yemen, the National Liberation Front was established in order to push forth a campaign against decades of British imperial presence in the British Protectorate of Aden. They were also against the South Arabian Federation, which was formed under British guidance and intended to diffuse the spread of Arab nationalist demands for an end to colonial rule and help ensure the continuance of the vital British military base in Aden that was still under construction. [26] In North Yemen, political factions were being formed to overthrow the ruling monarchy and establish a republic. In 1967 South Yemen successfully decolonized Aden, ending over a hundred years of British imperial presence in the region, and became

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[24] See Richard Lawless, *From Taiz to Tyneside: An Arab Community in the North-East of England During the Early 20th Century* (Exeter, Devon, UK: University of Exeter Press, 1995),18. There was an increased employment of Arabs, Somalis, West Indians, West Africans, Indians, and Chinese.

[25] See Mohammed Seddon, *The last of the Lascars: Yemeni Muslims in Britain, 1836-2012* (Leicestershire, England: Kube Publishing, 2014). In Chapter One, I discuss in more detail the history of the British empire in Aden and the presence of Yemeni sailors in England.

[26] Robert Stookey, *South Yemen: A Marxist Republic in Arabia,* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1982).

a Marxist regime known as the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen. A year later in 1968, North Yemen overthrew the monarchy. The 1965 Immigration Act, which ended restrictive immigration policies increased Yemeni immigration to the United States. By the 1970s, many of the Yemenis arriving in the United States worked in automobile factories in Detroit, steel plants in Buffalo, and agricultural farms across California.

This dissertation focuses on the period from the early 1900s to the 1970s for several reasons. As outlined above, one of the earliest formations of a Yemeni diasporic community to the West was in England because of the British Empire's economic interest in Aden as well as Yemeni labor in the shipping industry, marking the beginning of large-scale labor migration from Yemen, accelerated by British colonial presence in the early 20th century. By the late 1960s, as labor migration increased following the end of British colonization in Aden and the deterioration of Yemen's economy, Yemen's largest economic export became its labor force. The solidification of the diaspora fundamentally changed both Yemen's economy and family dynamics. As a result, this large-scale migration transformed Yemeni households into transnational families as wives were separated from their husbands and children were separated from their fathers. The formation of Yemenis as a transnational laboring class forced migrants and their families to articulate various definitions of what it meant to live in the diaspora and the impact it had on their intimate lives.

The early 20th century up until the 1970s also marks a period of important shifts in global powers as the world witnessed formal British colonization in the earlier half of the century and then decolonization post-WWII. Scholars have made the distinction between earlier forms of colonization and imperialism with modern globalization. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri famously lay out their framework of empire positing that empire, goes beyond the nation-state, that it is borderless, decentered, and without boundaries.[27] These global shifts in the 20th century contextualize the history of the Yemeni diaspora and the stories this dissertation tells. In tracing the history of the Yemeni diaspora, this dissertation demonstrates how Yemeni workers grappled with shifting politics of empire from formal British colonization to U.S. imperial interests in the Middle East. Scholars have also shown the importance of the 1970s, in particular, on Arab American communities. The decline of European power, the rise in U.S. military and economic

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[27] Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000, xii. My dissertation covers the history of the Yemeni diaspora up until the late 1970s. Hardt and Negri are, of course, writing following the fall of the Soviet Union and the consolidation of the United States as a global leader in capitalism. However, these shifts in global powers begin following decolonization of formerly colonized countries including Yemen. As history saw the end to colonial regimes and the decreasing influence of the Soviet Union throughout the 1970s, the capitalist world market no longer faced the political barriers preventing its rise to power and from that we've witnessed the globalization of economic and cultural exchanges. The preface of *Empire,* defines empire as the "political subject that effectively regulates these global exchanges, the sovereign power that governs the world." In other words, empire is the new form of sovereignty. Yet Hardt and Negri assert that the decline of the nation-state does not mean that sovereignty, the supreme controlling influence has declined. Rather, it has taken on a new face: empire, the new global system. The United States exercises the major authority of globalization. If modernity was Europe then post modernity is the US. While the US has characteristics of an imperialist project, it can not be the center of such a project since as the authors are arguing, imperialism is over. In other words, no nation will be world leader in the way modern European nations were. However, according to Hardt and Negri the U.S. does most definitely occupy an extremely privileged position in empire.

presence in the Middle East, and the role of the U.S. to Arab-Israeli diplomacy all impacted the Arab world's view of the U.S. as well as the identities of Arab Americans.[28] As Salim Yaqub writes in his work on U.S.-Middle East relations in the 1970s, that decade marked a time in which "Americans and Arabs came to know each other as never before.[29] This dissertation follows the impact that British colonization had on Yemeni labor migration and diasporic formation in Britain, and then the experiences of Yemeni workers in the U.S. in the 1970s as they wrestled with the impact that U.S. empire and imperial interest in the Middle East had on local labor politics.

Sources, Methodologies, & Chapter Outline

I analyze archival documents including newspapers, government records, and union documents as well as oral histories in which I have conducted during my research. In chapter four, I also analyze literary texts by Yemeni authors exploring the themes of labor, migration, and diaspora. These literary texts offer a look into the Yemeni diasporic imaginary which is otherwise lost in the official historical record. While my project will rely on traditional historical methods such as archival research and oral histories, the fact that Yemenis are marginalized within history, necessitates a critique of the nature of history as well, and specifically an interrogation of the ways in which the archive, a space designated to preserve history simultaneously serves as a space where histories are compromised. Here, I draw from Robin Kelley's methodology of writing "history from below," in which he turns to James Scott's work on "infrapolitics," as a way to valorize the often-overlooked politics of the everyday.[30] Therefore, my project utilizes methodologies within postcolonial theory and critical race and ethnic studies in order to critically explore the roles Yemeni workers have had in history while avoiding the additive model. In the last two decades, scholars have called for the need to re-create new ways of writing untold histories, a type of "decolonial imaginary," that allows for a reconceptualization of history that overcomes the limitations of colonial discourse, but at the same time does not romanticize histories of resistance.[31] Through an interdisciplinary approach, my project will draw from critical theoretical frameworks that will enable me to utilize historical methods such as archival research and oral histories while at the same time remaining critical of the ways in which those methods have reproduced problematic epistemologies. Part of this reconceptualization of history includes identifying new "archives" that are not considered legitimate because they do not exist within institutional "modern" structures. Transnational feminist scholar M. Jacqui Alexander uses the notion of the Sacred and the Spirit as a way to rethink the archive.[32] For Alexander, the sacred is productive of alternative forms of knowledge, belonging, and memory.

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[28] Salim Yaqub, *Imperfect Strangers: Americans, Arabs, and U.S. Middle East Relations in the 1970s,* (Cornell University Press, 2016), 7

[29] Ibid, 7

[30] Robin Kelley, *Race Rebels,* (New York: Free Press, 1996).

[31] Emma Pérez, *The Decolonial Imaginary: Writing Chicanas into History*, (Bloomington, Ind: Indiana University Press, 1999).

[32] M. Jacqui Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory, and the Sacred,* (Duke University Press, 2005)

A common phrase I heard growing up was *kullu shay maktub*: everything is written. Linguistically, the Arabic word *maktub* is in the past tense, denoting that something has already been written. However, popular use of the term refers not to the past, but to the present and future. Many within Arabic speaking and Muslim communities say *kullu shay maktub* to refer to life being pre-determined by God or fate. As a Muslim, *kullu shay maktub* helps me ascribe meaning to present experiences as well as lessen anxieties about the future; what will happen is meant to happen. As a historian however, the idea that everything is written takes on a different meaning, especially when dealing with the past. For the work of historians, the problem remains that while everything may be written, not everything is recorded.

Historians are trained to prioritize the written record including sources such as diaries, letters, institutional documents, and newspaper articles left behind by people from the past and preserved in an archive. The archive is perceived as a neutral depository for these documents, and much of what gets written into historical scholarship is a compilation of these records. The dangers of this, however, is that the archive is not an objective site because it is an institution created and maintained by people. As a result, the very structure of an archive, its collections and categorizations, is based on the archivist's notions of language, time, place, and identity. This is made particularly clear when studying histories of immigrant and racialized communities in the West and was evident during my research on twentieth century Yemeni labor and activism in the United States and England. What happens to the sources and stories that are not part of the "written record?"

Limitations to the written record demonstrate the ways in which the archive, a space designated to preserve history, simultaneously serves as a space where histories are compromised. Therefore, I read the archive as a product of modernity that continues to reproduce certain bodies as historical subjects, while denying the historical agency of others through the lack of structural components such as tags, descriptions, or translations. While researching the role of Yemeni farm workers in California's farm worker movement during the 1970s, I had spent hours going through dozens of copies of union newsletters, when I came across an article that caught my eye. The article, published in 1970 by the United Farm Worker's (UFW) newsletter, *El Malcriado*, was now archived on the Farm Worker Documentation Project's website. The article profiled the work of UFW organizer Saeed Mohammed. Above the article's headline, "UFWOC: A Strong Union for the Arab Farm Worker," was handwritten in Arabic *'āshū al-'amāl al-'arab,* long live the Arab worker. As a historian piecing together sources in order to make historical claims, I was trained to analyze how the article and phrase, "long live the Arab worker," demonstrates the ways in which an Arab national identity influenced Yemeni farm workers during the 1970s and helped to define their involvement in the UFW and the farm worker movement. However, the source also pointed to more important questions about the nature of the archive. The article lacked the infrastructure necessary to document and historicize the presence of Arabic amongst a newsletter published only in Spanish and English. This is also the case for a series of documents in the same collection simply labeled, "Arabic UFW fliers," rendering them ahistorical.

عاشو العمال العرب UFWOC: A Strong Union for the Arab Farm Worker

UFWOC's new organizer -- Saeed Muhammed Al-Alas.

There are over 1,000 Arab immigrants working in the vineyards and fields of Kern and Tulare counties. Saeed Mohammed Al-Alas believes that he and his fellow Arab farm workers will derive many benefits under the new contracts as members of the United Far, Workers Organizing Committee.

Saeed, a native of Crater Aden in South Yemen, now lives with his Mexican wife and two children in the Visalia-Farmersville area in Tulare County.

The 28-year-old immigrant became a full-time organizer for UFWOC in August of this year. Saeed speaks fluent English, and is frequently sought out by his countrymen for a variety of services.

"We had a big meeting with 500 Arab workers at the Elmco Camp," Saeed told EL MALCRIADO with an enthusiastic smile. (Elmco is one of the large grape growers near Porterville). "Richard Chavez spoke in English and I spoke to the men in Arabic," he added. "The men wanted to know about the new contracts and the Robert F. Kennedy medical plan. We assured them that this union was really for them. They were surprised at first and didn't understand what we were trying to do. But now I think that they are going to be some of our best union members.'

Saeed told how he had helped the cooks at the camps. "They were only getting paid when the men worked," he said. "I went to the bosses and said that the cooks in the camps had to get paid all the time. The cooks are now grateful to me and the union for helping them."

Saeed Al-Alas came to the United States in 1964. He had spent some time in England where he learned English. His home town is located near the Suez Canal, and it suffered very much from the Arab-Israeli War of 1967. Like the rest of his countrymen, Saeed mourned the loss of Gamal Abdel Nasser of the United Arab Republic. Arab farm workers conducted a funeral march and prayer service in honor of Nasser in Porterville on October 2. (See photo.)

"Nasser has been a father to us," Saeed said. "He was the only great leader we have had. He brought all the Arabs together, began many economic programs, and threw the British out of Egypt. He was really interested in the people."

Saeed worked for a short time as a machinist in L.A., but plans to stay in the valley because he likes the climate better. "Besides," he adds, "where else could I do as much for my countrymen?"

Porterville farm workers march in memory of U.A.R.'s Nasser.

Image 1: "UFWOC: A Strong Union for the Arab Farm Worker"

Despite the structural issues of the archive, evidence of these "other" historical subjects are there, meaning the documents and the items are physically in the archive (as hidden as they may be). The very phrase "long live the Arab worker," although hidden in the archive, demonstrates the immortality of the stories left behind by actual people. In other words, despite not being structurally recognized by the archive, their stories still exist. *Kullu shay maktub* is a reminder that the work I do as a historian of the Yemeni diaspora is not writing the histories of Yemeni communities into existence but uncovering the stories that have already been written.

This dissertation has four chapters that vary in time and space, from the early 1900s in north-east England to the 1970s in California's Central Valley as well as Detroit and Dearborn, Michigan. Separately, these chapters could arguably stand alone as individual projects. However, my dissertation demonstrates that together, they tell a story about diaspora. The archival sources and oral histories conducted for this project were a constant reminder that the history of the Yemeni diasporic communities each chapter explores are not separate from another. Throughout the 1970s, Yemeni farmworkers in California built solidarities with auto workers in Michigan, and both of those histories are not separate from the experiences of earlier Yemeni migrants in England who faced similar issues in regard to labor exploitation, racial discrimination, and empire.

In chapter one, "From Aden to England: Creating the Diaspora of Empire," I trace the formation of one of the earliest Yemeni diasporic communities in South Shields, a port city in north-east England from the early 1900s to the 1930s. This chapter demonstrates that the history of Yemeni workers in Britain offer us a unique look at the diaspora of empire not only because they were amongst one of the first establishments of a Yemeni diaspora in the West, but because the role of empire is so evident. Under the British Empire, local Yemeni men were sought after to work on ships as stokers, firemen, and trimmers because they were cheap, accessible labor. Yet, when Yemeni sailors arrived in England, they encountered racial discrimination from the companies they worked for, their unions, and white workers who accused them of taking away their jobs. This ultimately led up to several ruptures in South Shields which came to be known as the "race riots" of 1919 and 1930. While relaxed immigration laws brought workers, upon arrival, Yemenis in the shipping industry were actively targeted by the government who threatened imprisonment and deportation. By the 1960s, many of the early Yemeni sailors who arrived in the 1930s moved to industrial cities like Manchester, Birmingham, and Sheffield to work in the steel industry and in 1970 formed the Yemeni Workers Union, a platform used to address labor issues as well as global politics in the Middle East. This chapter argues that while the creation of the Yemeni diaspora in England is rooted in politics of empire that sought to exploit workers, Yemenis still created their own diasporic communities that connected local and global politics which is most evident in the creation of the Yemeni Workers Union.

The 1960s and 1970s also marked the largest arrival of Yemeni immigrants to the U.S., as a result of new immigration policies and the need for cheap labor, particularly in the agricultural and auto industry. Chapters two and three follow the history of Yemeni farm workers in California's Central Valley and auto workers in Detroit, Michigan and their experiences in the United Farm Workers (UFW) and United Auto Workers (UAW) throughout the 1970s. Much like their predecessors in England, Yemeni workers in the

U.S. were thrown at the forefront of politics battles that exposed, sometimes unintentionally, the workings of empire. In chapter two, “Carrying Nasser’s Portrait: Yemeni Farmworkers and the Politics of Empire in the United Farm Workers Union,” I argue that Yemeni farm workers turned to anti-colonial Arab nationalism to define their experiences as agricultural laborers in the Central Valley. Yet, because of their Arab and Muslim identities as well as invocation of anticolonial Arab nationalism, Yemenis had a complicated relationship with the UFW that disrupts the narrative of a multicultural movement. I argue that the presence of Yemenis, and in particular the question of Palestine, disrupted the type of social justice platform and rhetoric advocated by the UFW. Similarly, in chapter three, “Yemeni Auto Workers and the Fight Against U.S. Imperialism and Anti-Arab Racism,” explores how Yemeni support for the Palestinian cause, exposed anti-Arab racism within the UAW.

Finally, chapter four, “Strange Imaginaries: Yemeni Cultural Productions within the Diaspora,” provides an analysis of Yemeni literature and an exploration of the ways in which Yemeni writers have imagined the diaspora. The formation of Yemenis as a transnational laboring class forced migrants and their families to articulate various definitions of what it meant to live in the diaspora and the impact it had on their intimate lives. With a larger diasporic population, Yemeni cultural productions such as literature and music began to grapple with the theme of leaving home. While the first three chapters of this dissertation provide archival and other historical evidence that not only demonstrates the presence of Yemenis within these histories but highlights the intersections of labor and empire, chapter four focuses on the literary, in order to explore the ways in which Yemenis have imagined the diaspora. In doing so, I argue that these works of literature resist the politics of empire, which have historically worked to dehumanize migrant laborers, by telling stories from the perspective of Yemenis themselves.

CHAPTER ONE:

From Aden to Britain: Creating the Diaspora of Empire

On Saturday August 2, 1930 in South Shields, a port city in north-east England, a crowd of nearly 150 Arab seamen, the majority immigrants from Yemen, gathered outside the National Union of Seamen and Board of Trade Offices. They were protesting a registration scheme, known as the "rota system," that had gone into effect the previous day and required all "colored seamen" to register their names in order to gain employment on the ships. The rota system was one of many initiatives enacted during the interwar period to surveil local Arab seamen whom authorities believed to be "aliens" living and working in the United Kingdom illegally. During the protest, violence erupted by white seamen who were angry at these foreign brown men who they believed not only were in the UK illegally, but were taking away their jobs. Afterwards, police arrested dozens of Yemenis who were charged for "disturbing the peace" and causing a "great riot and disturbance to the terror and alarm of His Majesty's Subjects."[33] Described later as a "race riot," the Yemenis arrested that day were either punished or deported.

The so called "race riot" made explicit the colonial relationship between Britain and Yemen that brought Yemeni seamen to South Shields in the first place. Following the colonization of Aden in 1839, the British government granted British subject hood to Yemenis born in Aden. Because of relaxed immigration laws put in place to secure cheap labor before and during WWI, thousands of Yemeni sailors were able to become British subjects, despite the fact that the vast majority of them were not from Aden but surrounding villages throughout north and south Yemen. Following WWI and the rise of unemployment amongst white workers returning from the war, the government was forced to face the consequences of these relaxed immigration practices that had been driven by the desire for endless labor. This chapter argues that the discriminatory laws and immigration restrictions passed at this time demonstrate what has always been empire's most pertinent paradox: wanting foreign land, resources, and cheap labor just not the people.

While many are familiar with Britain's large Muslim and mostly South Asian population, few are aware of the history and experiences of the Yemeni immigrant community. The Yemeni communities in Britain offer us a unique look at the diaspora of empire not only because they were amongst one of the first establishments of a Yemeni diaspora in the West, but because the role of empire is so blatant. Under the British Empire, local men were listed to work on ships as stokers, firemen, and trimmers. When Yemeni sailors first arrived at British ports, they encountered racial discrimination from the companies they worked for, their unions, and white workers who resented them for taking away their jobs. As racial tensions escalated, a riot took place in 1919 and later

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[33] "Rex vs. Ali Said and Others," T95/152, Tyne and Wear Archives Discovery Museum, Newcastle Upon Tyne, England

again in 1930 in South Shields between Arab, mostly Yemeni, and white seamen. These riots came to be known as "Britain's first race riots." However, many scholars and community members were quick to resist this label and argue that the riots were about class not race. The "riots" were of course about both race and class but this chapter demonstrates how they were also about empire. This chapter begins with the story of Yemeni sailors who settled in British port cities in north east England in the late 19th and early 20th century, and it ends with a look at the growth of a Yemeni community in the industrial city of Sheffield.

The riots in South Shields highlight the historical legacy that empire and race has had in the Yemeni diasporic experience as well as the intersections between labor and the politics of empire. This chapter argues, however, that Yemenis were not just passive victims of a racist workplace rooted in colonialism. Rather, through an exploration of their lived experiences in the local boarding houses and participation in organizing, it is clear that Yemeni sailors actively made space in places not intended for them. By the 1950s and 1960s many of these sailors in South Shields moved inland to England's industrial cities like Sheffield and found work as steel workers in a prosperous steel industry.

The British Protectorate of Aden

In order to contextualize the historical experiences of the Yemeni immigrant community in the UK, it is necessary to provide an overview of British colonization in Yemen. From the 16th to the 19th century, the British East India Company propelled the expansion of the British empire into Africa and Asia. Located in between East Africa and South Asia, Yemen and specifically the port city of Aden, was a strategic location for British voyagers on their imperial journeys to the company's base in India. While only initially interested in the convenient location of Aden's port, the British empire quickly saw the benefit of employing local Adenis to help unload and load the ships at the docks. Eventually, ship-owners employed Yemenis, the majority from outside of Aden, to work on the ships and sail to various parts of the world including back to England.

The first recorded Englishman to travel to Yemen was John Jourdain, a representative of the British East India Company. In 1609, Jourdain landed his ship *The Ascension* in Aden. Jourdain and his crew traveled throughout Aden and eventually made their way North to the city of Sanaa. This expedition was perhaps the first encounter the East India Company had with Yemen. However, it was not until 1829, that the company considered using Aden as a fueling station. By this time, the growth of steam-powered merchant vessels traveling between British and Indian ports led to the need for a coaling station to refuel. The ports on the Gulf of Aden by the city of Aden, provided a strategic location for the British East India Company to stop and refuel on their voyage to India. However, Aden and the surrounding villages, offered more than just location for the company. In 1835, Captain Haines of the British East India Company stated:

> Aden…might be the grand emporium for the export of coffee, gums, etc., as well as a channel through which the produce of India and England might be thrown into rich provinces of Yemen and the Hadhramaut…the trade would also be open

> to the African coast, the distance being so trifling; from thence, gums, coffee, hides, frankincense, myrrh, would be thrown into the Aden market and the trader thereby be enabled not only to return with the produce of Yemen, but what of might return him [*sic*] a good profit from the African coast.[34]

As demonstrated by Haines, not only was the British East India Company interested in the location of Aden, but also in the commodities they could extract from Yemen including coffee, frankincense and myrrh. When Haines reported back to the Bombay government, where all British East India Company matters were regulated, he described Aden as a "must-have." He also concluded that the Abdali Sultanate of Lahji, who was ruling Aden at the time, was weak and unable to properly manage the region. Nearly 5 years later on January 19, 1839, the port and city of Aden was attacked by British naval forces and several hundred British and Indian troops. Following the attack, Aden became the first colonial territory established during the reign of Queen Victoria. When the British arrived and occupied Aden in 1839, the city had a population of less than two thousand, making it a region vulnerable to the advances of the British empire.[35]

While the port of Aden had been secured, the surrounding land which included trade routes to the port had not been officially occupied by the British. Instead, the British established contracts, which usually included stipends and gifts, with tribal rulers who controlled the multiple trade routes in the area including chiefs of the 'Abdali, Fadhli, Haushabi and Amiri tribes. These tribes came to be known by the British government as "the nine tribes" which included the 'Abdali, Fadhali, 'Aulaqi, Yafa'I, Haushaibi, Amiri, 'Alawi, 'Aqrabi and Subeihi. These agreements consolidated British influence and they successfully were able to extract resources from throughout Yemen including coffee south of Taizz (Hujariya distrct), grain from Qataba, and saffron, madder and beesewax from the central highlands south of Sanaa. This brought tribal populations closer to the British controlled port of Aden. This worked until the Ottoman Empire gained control over Yemen. In 1872, Ottoman troops declared Yemen a province of the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Government General of Yemen urged tribal leaders of Aden and the surrounding region to accept Ottoman authority. The British government requested that the Turks not disturb "the nine tribes" and treat them independently. While the Ottoman Empire considered all of the Arabian Peninsula as part of the Sultan's territory, they showed little interest in the territories controlled by the nine tribes. By the 1880s, more threats from French and German influences in the region propelled the British to establish Protectorate Treaties in the regions outside the port of Aden. While the British consistently claimed to be uninvolved with the tribal politics, the truth of the matter was that they became very involved.

With the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, more ships were stopping in Aden which became an important refueling station. By 1878, the majority of African trade between the Arab peninsula and Asia was financed, supplied, and controlled from Aden.

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[34] Mohammed Seddon, *The last of the Lascars: Yemeni Muslims in Britain, 1836-2012* (Leicestershire, England: Kube Publishing, 2014), 51-52.

[35] Richard Lawless, *From Taiz to Tyneside: An Arab Community in the North-East of England During the Early 20th Century* (Exeter, Devon, UK: University of Exeter Press, 1995)

When these steamships would arrive in Aden at the dockside, they required labor to handle all the cargoes. As a result, a system referred to as the "muqaddam," middle man, began which essentially included a foreman or leader of a small group of freelance workers who would employ local Yemeni men according to the needs of the British port employers and negotiate contracts that usually benefited the shipping companies themselves. The "muqaddam," or middle man, would charge an individual a small amount that would buy his way into his group. This payment process was referred to as "al-haqq al-qahwah" (the coffee right) and was successful precisely because it monopolized off of the cheap labor of working-class Yemenis desperate to find paying jobs. Because of this effective employment process, Aden quickly gained a reputation of being one of the most competitive and efficient coal bunkering stations and colonial ports. While the majority of the workforce of migrant port workers in the muqaddam's group consisted of Yemeni men from surrounding villages outside of Aden both in the North and South, some workers came as far as Egypt and Iran.[36]

Yemenis in the United Kingdom

In 1889, the British government created the Aden Port Trust which allowed the mercantile community in Aden to drastically rearrange and reconstruct the docklands in a way that allowed ships to stay at the port for longer periods of time. This was also around the same time that Yemeni sailors began arriving in ports throughout the United Kingdom.[37] The reconstruction of Aden's ports ended the muqaddam system as not as many port workers were needed. Consequently, more Yemeni "lascar" crews, the name given to Arab sailors derived from the Arabic word *al-askari,* who worked on the ships were then discharged in Europe and did not return to Aden. Nonetheless, the port of Aden continued to function as a gateway that accelerated labor migration to different parts of the world including England. While London was a major port that attracted many immigrants, the majority of Yemeni sailors arrived in Cardiff, Liverpool, South Shields, and Hull.[38]

As colonized subjects, Yemenis were granted entrance into the UK if they stated that they were born in Aden which allowed them to be considered "British subjects." In reality, the vast majority of Yemeni sailors were born outside of Aden, but were able to gain British subject hood in the late 19th and early 20th century because of relaxed laws and regulations that were implemented at the time in order to allow ship owners to exploit an endless supply of cheap labor. In 1820, legislation had attempted to limit the number of migrant sailors on British ships, but the constant need for cheap labor continued to grow. During the second half of the 19th century, the expanding industry of merchant shipping was in constant need of labor. By 1849, an Act of Parliament revised any existing restrictions and quotas by identifying all "Oriental lascars," which included

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[36] Seddon, 55-56

[37] Lawless, 18 (There was an increased employment of Arabs, Somalis, West Indians, West Africans, Indians, and Chinese)

[38] Fred Halliday, *Britain's first Muslims: portrait of an Arab community* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010),
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Asians, Arabs, Africans, and Malays, as "British" in order to facilitate shipping and provide ship owners with easy access to cheap labor.

The categorization of "Oriental lascars" written into the 1849 Parliament Act built on the racialized term "lascar," which effectively conflated a diverse group of ethnic and national identities. To further obscure the institutional visibility of Yemenis, the British colony of Aden operated under the Bombay presidency until 1932 when its control was then transferred to the central Indian colonial government. It was not until 1937 that Aden was officially deemed a Crown Colony and existed separate from the administration of colonial India. Consequently, prior to 1937, the ethnic distinctiveness of Yemenis were defined in terms of the more general and racialized category of colonial lascar which conflated the identities of Arabs, Asians, South Asians, and Africans. The word "lascar" is derived from the Arabic word, "*al-askari"* which refers to someone employed in military service. The anglicized version of "lascar" was used by the British to refer to an "oriental merchant sailor" connected to the British East India Company. For many Yemeni sailors, however, the Arabic word "*bahri,"* was more commonly used than lascar.[39] This demonstrates that the anglicized word "lascar" became a racial category constructed by the British empire. "Lascars" were racialized as foreign and exotic and also submissive.

Arriving in South Shields

Ship owners had many motivations to hire "lascars." First, they were cheaper than European sailors. The price of three "lascars" was the same as the price of two European sailors.[40] Secondly, "lascars" had a reputation for their sobriety and were seen as more manageable compared to European sailors. Lastly, racial stereotypes led shipowners to view "lascars," particularly Yemenis, as loyal but docile and weak. Many Yemeni sailors did not belong to unions and were seen as less likely to cause any trouble. Racial stereotypes also led ship owners to believe that because of their tropical origins, lascars were better equipped to tolerate the heat of the engine rooms better than white European sailors. As a result, Yemenis and other lascars were given the worst jobs on the ship as engine stokers and firemen, the lowest paid occupations on the ships. Former Welsh seaman and poet, Captain Jac Alun Jones wrote, "When Welsh coal exporting was in its glory, and every ship was burning coal to drive the engines, most of the firemen were Arabs, as they were famous as men who were able to withstand the great heat of the stokehold."[41] Racial ideologies that defined "lascars" normalized and ensured that Yemenis and other sailors of color would remain on the bottom of the shipping industry with the lowest paid jobs.

The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, the increased number of faster steam-powered ships, and the rearrangement of the ports of Aden in 1889, all led to the more permanent presence of Yemeni sailors in England following their discharging from the

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[39] Seddon, 4

[40] Seddon, 63

[41] Seddon, 63

ships.[42] While London was a major port that attracted many immigrants, the majority of Yemeni sailors arrived in ports throughout the UK including Cardiff, Liverpool, South Shields, and Hull.[43] By the 1880s, Cardiff, the capital and largest city of Wales became home to many foreign sailors including West Indians, West Africans, Chinese, and Yemenis. In particular, the district of Butetown in Cardiff which had been mostly inhabited by ship captains and middle-class families, became home to a growing community of diverse immigrant communities. This neighborhood was commonly referred to by locals at the time as "Tiger Bay," in reference to the city's "exotic" and foreign inhabitants.[44] Many of the Arab seamen in Cardiff would leave to find jobs in South Shields, a port city located in North-East England at the opening of the River Tyne and few miles from Newcastle Upon Tyne. South Shields emerged as an important coal and export port and was a location where many men were signed onto ships. South Shields was viewed as the center of supply for Arab seamen not just in the north-east district but all over the country and described as "the clearing house for Arab and Somali seamen over the whole of North of England."[45]

Arab Boarding Houses

Upon arriving in South Shields, sailors sought residence at one of the boarding houses that surrounded the docks. Yemeni and other sailors of color, however, were not allowed to live in the boarding houses owned and occupied by white sailors. As a result, several "Arab boarding houses" were opened in South Shields to accommodate the growing number of Arab sailors arriving at the docks. Alongside boarding houses, cafes and small restaurants designated for Arabs were opened as well. Segregated boarding houses and cafes symbolize one of the many paradoxes of empire: Yemeni sailors came to South Shields and other port cities in England precisely because of the British empire's desire for cheap labor, and yet they were not allowed to be fully integrated into British life. At the same time, however, the Arab boarding houses demonstrate how the presence of Yemenis disrupted empire. While the Arab boarding houses were a result of racial segregation, they were also sites of resistance because they created a sense of community and home. With the establishment of boarding houses, Yemeni sailors created roots and disrupted space in South Shields which led to a sense of community and belonging.

The Arab boarding houses were typically managed by Yemenis who had formerly worked as sailors. One of the most well-documented boarding house owners was a seaman by the name of Ali Said, who was among one of the first Yemenis to arrive in South Shields. Said first came to South Shields as a sailor, and in 1894 permanently settled in the town. By 1909 Said was running the first licensed Arab boarding house for Arab sailors on Nile Street Holborn, a neighborhood strategically located near the Shipping Federation Offices on Mill Dam, where sailors were employed, dispatched, and

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[42] Seddon, 64

[43] Halliday, 17

[44] Seddon 68

[45] Lawless, 47

discharged. Holborn was the largest neighborhood of Yemenis and Arabs and came to be known as "Little Arabia." In 1913, Ali Hassan opened a second Arab boarding house at 93 and 95 East Holborn, and in 1916 Muhammad Muckble (Muqbil) opened the third house at 5 East Holborn as well as Abdul Rahman Zaid at 63 Thrift Street.[46]

Referred to locally as the "Arab colony," the neighborhood of Holborn where many Arabs resided was a site of fear for the white British community with many writing into the local newspaper to express their concerns. In April 1913, one resident wrote about the "Arab colony" in Holborn and the need for "the authorities to say how far this development may go on without detriment to ourselves as a community."[47] The South Shields authorities heavily surveilled and criminalized Arab sailors who were often arrested for minor offenses. The boarding house owners were scrutinized as well. In September 1911, Ali Said was fined for having too many occupants in a boarding house only licensed to hold 15 seamen, which was an offense to the Seamen's Lodging House Bylaws.[48]

Alongside regulating homes for seamen, Arab boarding house owners were also in charge of securing employment for Yemeni seamen. The majority of Arab crews hired by ships were recruited through Arab boarding house masters.[49] Arab boarding house masters worked directly with shipping companies to ensure the employment of their tenants. The relationship between Arab boarding house masters and the shipping companies was heavily criticized by the seamen union officials who viewed it as a corrupt practice that took away jobs from white seamen.[50] In actuality, Arab boarding house masters, in an act of subversion, helped to ensure fair employment of Arabs workers who were desired by shipping companies in want of cheap labor, but still faced discrimination. The tension caused by Arab employment would later become one of the leading causes to the 1919 and then 1930 "race riots." By 1920, the Immigration Office in Newcastle reported to the Home Office in London that there were at least 8 Arab boarding houses in South Shields, which was also accompanied by Arab run cafes and shops.[51] The growth of Arab boarding houses and cafes demonstrates not only the growth of an Arab community in north-east England but the ways in which the formation of that community was deeply intertwined with the shipping industry as ship-owners depended on the presence of easily accessible Arab crews.

Despite the fact that tenants of the boarding houses were in a constant state of fluctuation, as sailors were either shipping out or landing on the docks, these spaces allowed Yemenis to build community and sustain their cultural and religious identities in a system built to criminalize them and monopolize off of their labor. While a widespread Islamic presence, in terms of mosques and organizations, didn't exist at the time, there are records of the Islamic Society's presence in England. In fact, the Islamic Society was

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[46] Lawless, 10-11

[47] Lawless, 11

[48] Durham Assizes Rex V. Ali Said, T95/152, Tyne and Wear Archives Discovery Museum, Newcastle Upon Tyne, England. Also see Richard Lawless, *From Taiz to Tyneside,* 10

[49] Lawless, 54

[50] Lawless, 56

[51] Lawless, 15

the first organization to make its way into the Arab seafarer community in England. The Society emerged from an earlier British organization, the Pan-Islamic Movement which was headed by Abdulla Sohrivardi and operated in the early 1900s. By 1915, the movement's work was documented in the Islamic Review and Muslim India.[52] Whether or not the Islamic Society operated within the social circles of Yemenis in South Shields, the boarding houses certainly accommodated and preserved religious community. For example, many of the boarding houses included a space for the men to pray.[53] The ground floor rooms served as congregation spaces where seamen would have their meals, meet friends, recite poetry, and play dominoes.[54] Large community events such as celebrations, weddings, and funerals, demonstrate how despite being marginalized, Yemenis were not passive victims of the system but present and active participants in their own communities.[55]

One example of the Muslim community during this time took place in January 1916, when the Yemeni community in Holborn held a Muslim funeral for fireman Faram Abdoo at Harton Cemetery. According to the local paper the funeral "attracted a considerable amount of public attention and was largely attended." At the funeral, there was a "hearse and a score of carriages." While walking through the town, the marchers did not ride the carriages, but marched in procession in front of the hearse with an Imam, who happened to be visiting from Aden at the time, leading the group. The local newspaper reported that "The cost of the funeral was equally borne by members of the Arab Colony in South Shields," which is a Yemeni tradition.[56] The funeral demonstrates how, despite facing systemic issues such as being underpaid, Yemenis in South Shields invested in creating community, both literally and figuratively speaking. Furthermore, despite being racial minorities, Yemenis continued to uphold cultural traditions as a way to make home in South Shields.

WWI and the 1919 Mill Dam "Riot"

Designed to exclude and segregate Arabs from British society, the Arab boarding houses only strengthened the formation of a Yemeni community. Furthermore, with the onset of WWI, white British sailors left their jobs and joined the Royal Navy, which contributed to the increasing numbers of Yemenis landing in South Shields, as shipping companies continued to yearn for cheap and accessible labor. In order to quickly facilitate immigration from Yemen, British immigration laws were relaxed as to alleviate the needs of the shipping companies. Yemenis shipping out from the colony of Aden were able to easily claim Adeni birth rights and thus become British colonial subjects, with little to no

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[52] Richard I. Lawless, "Religion & Politics Among Arab Seafarers in Britain in the Early 20th Century," *Islam and Christian Relations* 5:1 (1994).
[53] Lawless, 48
[54] Lawless, 49
[55] Mario Sifuentez, *Of Forests and Fields*
[56] "Mahommedan Funeral in Shields. Peculiar Rites Attract Large Crowd," *Shields Daily Gazette,* January 29, 1916. *The British Newspaper Archive*

paperwork required by the immigration offices. However, by the end of WWI, Yemenis were viewed with even more hostility by the white sailors who returned from war and faced unemployment. These tensions ultimately escalated into the 1919 race "riots." Both the relaxed immigration laws during WWI and the 1919 "riot," highlight the paradoxes of empire. During the war, Yemeni labor was desired in order to accommodate the shipping industry, yet following the war the Yemeni community was characterized as a social menace. The presence of Yemenis and their transition from "colonial subjects to undesirable aliens" exposed the ways in which empire accommodates itself.[57]

By 1914, when WWI began, employment opportunities at the British port docks became more available for the Arab community for two reasons. First, British seamen now serving in the Royal Navy and armed forces were leaving their jobs behind. Secondly, many Northern European seamen, primarily Scandinavians and Hermans, became classified as enemy aliens and were forced to leave their jobs, which allowed more positions for Arab firemen. During this time, British authorities, in need of Arab labor, eased up on immigration regulations, which made travel from the colony of Aden to Britain easier. According to law, Yemeni seamen could only gain entry into Britain if they were born in Aden and therefore British colonial subjects. The Board of Trade urged the Home Office in Aden to treat Yemeni sailors outside of Aden as "British Protected Persons" in order to facilitate their departure from Yemen and arrival in Britain. As a result, the majority of Yemeni sailors arriving in Britain were from regions outside British rule of Aden despite the fact that law required all immigrants to be British subjects. As the war escalated and labor in Britain became scarce, the Board of Trade continued to urge the Home Office not to challenge claims made by Arab seamen to British nationality.[58]

By 1918 when the war came to an end, white workers who served in the war returned to find their jobs occupied by Yemeni and other workers of color. This coincided with the overall threat of unemployment in the shipping industry as the rise of modern oil-powered ships replaced steam vessels that had formerly employed coal stokers and firemen. Hostility quickly grew between Arab and white British sailors. During the month of January 1919 several instances of violence by whites towards Arab seamen took place. In January 1919, a large crowd of white men which included ex-soldiers and sailors, attacked an Arab shop in South Shields, smashing all of the windows and causing damage to the building. The following day, a white mob assaulted a group of Arab seamen. Upon arrival of the police, the crowd which was reported to have been about 200 white men shouted in anger with one shouting, "We are white people; stay where you are."[59] These incidents following the war ultimately culminated into a more dramatic event which took place the following month.

On February 4, 1919, a group of 9 Arab firemen arrived at the Shipping Office on the Mill Dam to sign on a crew. First the group had stopped at the offices of the Seamen's Union and paid 18 pounds in order to update their books before presenting

[57] Mae Ngai, "From Colonial Subject to Undesirable Alien: Filipino Migration in the Invisible Empire," *Impossible Subjects* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004) 96-126.
[58] Lawless, 26
[59] Lawless, 79-80

them to the Shipping Office. A union official by the name of J. Gilroy told the chief engineer not to sign on the Arabs and that it would be best to sign on a white crew. A crowd of white sailors began to leave the Shipping office when another union official, John B. Fye started to address the crowd and is reported to have shouted to not let any Arabs sign on the ship.[60] Fye, a union delegate of the Cooks' and Stewards Union, was accused of assaulting an Arab during the "riot" and for using language that caused a "breach of the peace." Fye shouted, "Don't let these Arabs sign on the ship. Come out you black -----. You are not going to join the ship."[61] One of the Arabs asked Fye why they could not join the ship when they had rightfully paid their union dues. Fye replied back with a racial slur and in response the Arab sailor struck Fye with his hand. This triggered the altercation and everyone in the crowd began to attack one another.

Following the event, authorities claimed that a "riot" took place and that the Arabs were responsible for inciting violence and chaos. The following day, the local newspaper reported:

> Tumultuous scenes the like of which have never before been seen in South Shields…The disturbance apparently originated amongst a number of Arab seamen who were seeking employment at the South Shields Shipping Office, and in an incredibly short space of time hundreds of people became involved in a fierce conflict which assumed alarming proportions, and necessitated the calling out of naval and military detachments. Numerous gangs of Arabs, armed with revolvers, knives, sticks and bottles, attacked the crowd indiscriminately and as far as can be ascertained more than a dozen persons sustained injuries, though fortunately the revolver shots all went astray. Had it not been for the fact that in their state of frenzied excitement the Arabs discharged their weapons wildly and at random, very serious consequences would have resulted.[62]

The article utilizes orientalist language of fear describing a "gang of Arabs' in a "frenzied excitement." The article and the community at large drew from already constructed racial stereotypes about Arabs as violent, foreign, and threatening in order to justify and explain the incident. They are also described as irrational and had it not been for their irrationality "very serious consequences would have resulted." The media's portrayal of the Arab sailors involved in the incident was consistent with the court's treatment of those that were charged.

While the reports varied, somewhere between 13-15 Arabs were charged for disturbing the peace.[63] The Arabs charged included: Mahmomed Ali (26), fireman;

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[60] "Arab Riot: Revolvers Fired on the Shields Crowd," *South Shields Gazette*, February 5, 1919, *The British Newspaper Archive*

[61] "The Mill Dam Fracas. Union Official in Court. Charged with Assaulting an Arab." *Shields Daily News,* February 11, 1919, *The British Newspaper Archive*

[62] "Arab Riot: Revolvers Fired on the Shields Crowd," *South Shields Gazette*, February 5, 1919, *The British Newspaper Archive*

[63] Feb. 12, 1919 (#1237) "Mill Dam Riot The Charges Against 15 Arabs," *South Shields Daily Gazzette and Shipping Telegraph,* Feburary 12, 1919, Local Studies Collection at The Word, National Centre for the

Mahomed Salli (25), fireman; Tali Saran (30), fireman; Ali Mohamed (35), donkeyman; Abdul Said (32) fireman; Mahomed Hassen (32), donkeyman; Ahmed Mohamed (29), firemen; Allie Salek (33), firemen; Hassen Metara (28), firemen; Taleh Abdul Gadel (25), firemen; Ahmed Ali (32), refreshment house keeper; Ali Hassan (32) refreshment house keeper; and Abone Said (27), fireman.[64] Based on the names and the fact that they were all from the Holborn neighborhood in South Shields where the incident took place, most it not all of those prosecuted were young Yemeni men. On the afternoon of Feburary 5, 1919, the Arabs charged were brought before the South Shields magistrates to face charges that "they together with divers other evil disposed persons to the number of ten or more, unlawfully, riotously, and routously did assemble and gather together to disturb the public peace, and there unlawfully riotously, routously, and tumulrously did make a great noise, riot, tumult, and disturbance, to the great terror and disturbance of His Majesty's subjects there being and residing, passing and repassing, against the peace, and contrary to the statute therein made and provided." The court proceedings "aroused great public interest" and the court was packed with both white and Arab community members. Like the local newspaper reports, the dramatic language of the charges in phrases such as "evil disposed persons," "great noise," and "great terror," demonstrate the court's racialization of Arabs as evil and threatening. The charges also imply that the incident was premeditated by these young men by stating that they assembled and gathered together at the Shipping Federation Office, where the "riot" took place. In reality, it was extremely common for sailors to be gathered near the Shipping Office where they gained employment and were charged and discharged from various ships. The spectacle that the local newspapers and courts created, deployed racist stereotypes in an attempt to paint a situation of an "Arab problem." In other words, the riot was not portrayed as an isolated incident involving a few people, but rather by listing the nearly dozen Arabic names which were published in the newspaper, the portrayal of the event was intended to arouse fear within the community. In the end, three Arab seamen were found not guilty and were discharged and the rest were sentenced to prison for one to three months.[65]

In comparison to the Arabs charged, there was little to no attention on the white sailors and union officials involved in the riot. While Fye, the union official who yelled out racial slurs, was charged with assault and inciting riots, he wasn't punished as severely as the Arabs that were charged. According to Smith's prosecution, Fye's language "used to a crowd anxious to get employment, and used by a known official, was likely to incite the crowd. It was actually the dropping of the match into the keg of gunpowder." Smith later stated, "…I am going to suggest, and suggest very forcibly, that if it had not been for the action of this union official in making use of these remarks to a crowd composed largely of alien seamen, nothing would have happened." During Smith's prosecution, several Arabs gave evidence in support of the statements against Fye, and Fye's defense team claimed that he never used any bad language. According to

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Written Word, South Shields, Tyne & Wear, UK; "Charged with Riot, 13 Arabs Brought Before the Magistrates," *Shields Daily News,* Feburary 5, 1919, *The British Newspaper Arcihve*

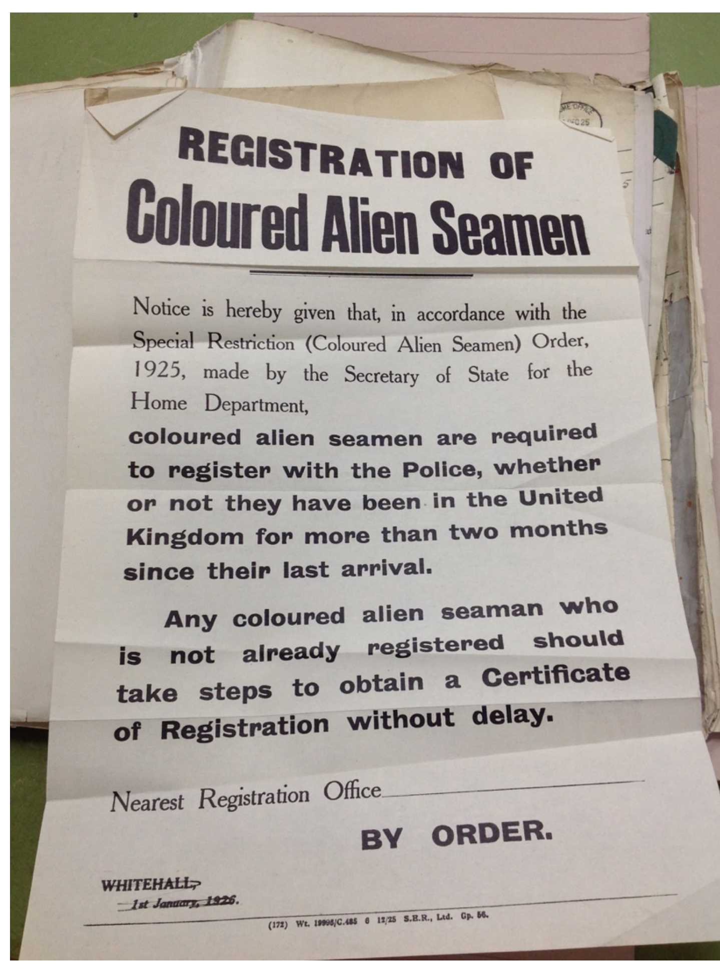
[64] Charged with Riot, 13 Arabs Brought Before the Magistrates," *Shields Daily News,* Feburary 5, 1919, *The British Newspaper Archive*

[65] Lawless, 83

the defense, “when Arabs spoke to him [Fye] about signing on he told them he had nothing to do with it,” but was “struck in the face with what felt like a knuckle-duster” and beaten by several Arabs. Ultimately, Fye’s charges of assault were dismissed. In regard to the second charge of using language to incite the riot, Fye’s case “was bound over to keep the peace,” and transferred to another court as to not cause any further tension within the South Shields community.[66]

Inter-war period & the 1930 “Riot”

The 1919 riot characterized the post-WWI shift in attitude toward Yemeni workers. While before the war, relaxed immigration policies were practiced because of the need for cheap labor, strict union requirements and anti-immigrant legislation post-WWI exposed the disposability of Yemeni sailors. During the interwar period, Yemenis in South Shields faced continued surveillance and marginalization by the unions, shipping industry, and local police authorities.



REGISTRATION OF
Coloured Alien Seamen

Notice is hereby given that, in accordance with the Special Restriction (Coloured Alien Seamen) Order, 1925, made by the Secretary of State for the Home Department,

coloured alien seamen are required to register with the Police, whether or not they have been in the United Kingdom for more than two months since their last arrival.

Any coloured alien seaman who is not already registered should take steps to obtain a Certificate of Registration without delay.

Nearest Registration Office__________

BY ORDER.

WHITEHALL,
1st January, 1926.

Image 2: “Registration of Coloured Alien Seamen”

[66] “The Mill Dam Fracas. Union Official in Court. Charged with Assaulting an Arab.” *Shields Daily News,* February 11, 1919, *The British Newspaper Archive*

Near the end of 1929, the National Union of Seamen (NUS) launched an anti-Arab campaign which radicalized many Yemeni workers who found solidarity in communist organizations such as the Seamen's Minority Movement (SMM). In the summer of 1930, when the NUS put forth a registration system targeting Arabs, racial tensions led to the August 1930 "riot." Like the 1919 riot, the 1930 riot, exposed the contradictions within shipping industry who wanted Arab labor when convenient, but quickly disposed of Arabs when white sailors faced unemployment.

The 1919 riot alongside continued anger over the loss of jobs for white sailors led to the Board of Trade and the National Sailors and Firemen's Union (NSFU) to start a campaign calling for restrictions of Arab seamen unless they could prove that they were born in Aden and in fact were British subjects. The Board of Trade and the NFSU urged the Home Office to implement a policy that would restrict entry of Arab seamen who could not prove that they were British subjects. Eventually, the Aliens Order of 1920 was passed, which empowered immigration officers to refuse admission to Arab seamen (and other immigrants of color) to enter Britain unless they could prove they were British subjects by presenting an official birth certificate or other document.[67] By 1925 the Home Secretary office added a Special Restriction Order under Article 11 of the Aliens Order of 1920, which imposed an obligation for all "colored seamen" found in the UK to register with the police, a policy that criminalized Yemeni and other immigrants and ensured that local police were properly surveilling immigrant communities of color.[68]

On December 9, 1929, the National Union of Seamen (NUS) sent a deputation to the Board of Trade demanding stricter regulation and control over Arabs to protect the jobs of white seamen. At the deputation, several members of parliament were present and the report was introduced by Commander Kenworthy, MP for Central Hull. According to the deputation, 57 percent of all firemen shipped from the north-east ports were Arab or "colored seamen." The NUS argued that with the new oil burning and motor vessels, the needs for firemen were being reduced already and that hiring Arabs was making unemployment even more precarious for white seamen. The deputation also accused Arab boarding-house masters of illegally smuggling Arabs into the country with the assistance of ship-owners who wanted to hire more Arab crews.[69]

The deputation called for stricter regulation and policing of Arab seamen which included a re-registration process, requiring Arabs to register again with the police in accordance with the 1920/1925 Aliens Order Act. The NUS also wanted Arab boarding houses and cafes to be under more police supervision. Lastly, the deputation called for a formation of a committee including members of the NUS and the Board of Trade and the Home Office to investigate the "problem" of Arab seamen. A report published by the NUS newspaper, *The Seamen* stated:

> It must be understood that we have no kick with the Arab as such, but charity begins at home, and with the elimination of these men who would be better off in

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[67] Lawless, 98

[68] Lawless, 106

[69] Lawless, 113

> the countries of their birth, employment would not only be found for our own at present redundant firemen but room could be found for ex-minders and ex-naval ratings, of which so many will be available especially of the latter, for if the disarmament programmes are carried out these men will add their quota to the already difficult problem of unemployment.[70]

By claiming to protect white British workers "at home," the NUS was able to maintain a pro-labor platform while simultaneously pushing forth anti-Arab policy. This demonstrates how labor politics was deeply intertwined with politics of empire. Implicit in this article published in the union newsletter, is the idea that UK is not a home for Arab seamen, despite the fact that strong community roots were being built for Yemeni sailors living and working in South Shields and other parts of England.

In fact, it was precisely because Arab sailors were making home in the UK, that stirred fear amongst union officials who sought to only protect the livelihood of white sailors. Alongside, the Arab boarding houses and community spaces discussed earlier, many Yemenis were also marrying and starting families with local white British women. Adding on to the anxieties of white British communities in fear of losing their jobs, Yemenis who settled in Britain and established intimate relationships with white women, threatened the typical family structure. Despite the stereotypes of Arabs as lustful, sexual predators, many of these relationships ended in long lasting marriages. Nevertheless, these relationships incited already existing anti-Arab sentiment throughout the 1920s. The deputation sent by the NUS on December 9, 1929, addressed the issue of Arabs marrying white women. In stating how Arabs were a social menace, the deputation mentioned the increasing relationships established between Arab and white women and the increasing number of "half caste" and illegitimate children at the ports who would grow up unable to find employment and would be a "burden on the state."[71]

While the NUS continued their campaign against Arab seamen, the local chapter of the Seamen's Minority Movement (SMM) in South Shields began to take up the cause of the Arab community. The SMM was formed in 1924 in opposition to the oppressive tactics of the NUS, other sailor unions, and the Shipping Federation. The SMM had strong communist ties, with many of the members and leadership associated with the Communist Party. Around April 1930, the SMM began holding meetings at the Mill Dam in South Shields to discuss growing disapproval with the NUS and shipowners in regards to wage reduction and longer working hours.[72] By the next month, the South Shields branch of the SMM took on the issue of Arab and other sailors of color. The SMM criticized the NUS and the increasing anti-Arab policies being implemented. They advocated for a union that would be founded on "unity and solidarity to all seafarers no matter what their colour, creed, or nationality."[73]

Despite the SMM's attempts to highlight the discrimination within the NUS, the NUS continued their campaign against Arab seamen. In a meeting on July 1, 1930, the

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[70] Lawless, 114
[71] Lawless, 114
[72] Lawless, 123
[73] Ibid, 124

NUS decided to implement a rota system to register Arab seamen in South Shields, Cardiff, and Hull which would go into effect on August 1 for a one-year period. Commander Kenworthy MP and assistant General Secretary of the NUS, George Gunning reported that one of the benefits of the rota system was that the added institutional documentation required for Arabs, would help prioritize employment for British seamen.[74] While the government and the Home Office and the Board of Trade made clear that the rota system was a private policy operated by the union, it was evident that both institutions fully supported the increased surveillance of the local Arab community. The following notice was published on July 22, 1930 in the local paper describing the new system:

> Notice is hereby given that Arab or Somali seamen who wish to be employed in British vessels should make application at once to the Local Joint Supply Office for instructions for registration. Arab seamen desiring employment will have their names entered in a register kept by the Joint Supply Office and will receive a numbered registered card. It will thereafter be presented to ships' officers requiring seamen of these nationalities in order of the numbers which their cards bear. This arrangement will come into force on August 1st.[75]

According to the rules of the rota system, a register was to be kept in the Joint Supply Office to record both Somalis and Arabs three days a week. The proof that was required included a police registration certification or a British passport. Upon proof of legal immigration documentation, the seaman would receive a white card stamped by the NUS and the Shipping Federation and instructed to provide 3 copies of his photograph. When registered, the seaman was required to report back to the office every 14 days. The excessiveness of the rota systems' rules made clear that the main objective was not only to make employment for Arabs and other seamen of color difficult, but to increase surveillance of the Arab community.

The Seamen's Minority Movement (SMM) in South Shields got word of this proposed rota system and having just announced their support for Arab seamen two months prior, decided to take on the issue. The Tyneside District Party Committee of the Communist Party supported the SMM on their stand against the Shipping Federation and National Union of Seamen.[76] Secretary of the SMM, William Harrison publicly denounced the rota system and the SMM held a meeting in which they passed a resolution rejecting the rota system due to the inefficiency of constant re-registration as well as the threat of it increasing hostility between Arab and white seamen.[77] Many Arabs publicly denounced the rota system as well. Boarding house owner, Ali Said sent in a letter to the local newspaper in which he criticized the system and stated: "The Arab does not forget, and is just as intelligent as he is, and is able to see through the whole scheme,

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[74] Lawless, *From Taiz to Tyneside,* 126

[75] "Notice," July 22, 1930, *South Shields Gazette,* The Yemeni Project, http://www.theyemeniproject.org.uk/4/9/the-riots.html

[76] Lawless, *From Taiz to Tyneside,*136

[77] Lawless, *From Taiz to Tyneside,* 128

where coloured seamen are going to be used against white seamen to the disadvantage of both."[78] Said attended meetings for the SMM and played an active role in organizing Yemenis and urging them not to sign the register.[79]

As labor conditions and racial tensions worsened for sailors in England, the rise of Islamic organizations was welcomed by the British government as a method to pacify pro-Communist sentiment within the Yemeni and other immigrant communities. Religion played a huge role in both the spiritual and political spheres of the Yemeni community in South Shields. Historian Richard Lawless documented the establishment of three major Islamic organizations that came into prominence in the early 20th century: the Islamic Society, the Western Islamic Association, and the North African based 'Alawi tariqa.[80]

However, government support of Islamic organizations did not pacify the Yemenis in South Shields. During this time, Ali Said alongside other Arab boarding house masters continued to organize on the issue of Arab unemployment in South Shields and surrounding port cities in the north-east. In a letter dated July 25, 1930 to the High Commissioner for India, where matters of the colony of Aden were dealt with, several Arab boarding house masters in the city of Cardiff requested government assistance to help solve the epidemic of unemployment amongst Arab seamen from Aden. The letter stated:

> Shipping this year has been in such a depressed condition that large numbers of Adenese seamen have been unemployed for many months, with the result that our financial resources have been depleted and we are at present keeping large numbers of men in some cases for months. We can supply your department with names and length of time each man has been ashore. We therefore humbly petition that if any monies are held by the High Commissioner of India for the assistance of Adenese Seamen that same might be devoted to such at the present time.[81]

For days leading up to August 1, Yemenis and members of the Seamen's Minority Movement stood outside the National Union of Seamen and Board of Trade Offices near Mill Dam peacefully picketing the rota system.

However, on August 2, the protesting escalated into what would come to be known as the sequel to the 1919 Mill Dam Riots. While it is difficult to know exactly what took place, since the only documents available on this are official police reports and court records that are highly racialized and biased, it was reported that on Saturday August 2 about 150 Arabs and 100 white men were present outside of Mill Dam. In the brief for the prosecution the Arabs are described as "normally quiet but easily led and readily worked up to a state of excitement." Outside of the offices, members of the

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[78] "Unwanted Preference Over White Men," July 22, 1930, *South Shields Gazette,* The Yemeni Project, http://www.theyemeniproject.org.uk/4/9/the-riots.html

[79] "Rex vs. Ali Said and Others," T95/152, Tyne and Wear Archives Discovery Museum, Newcastle Upon Tyne, England

[80] Richard I. Lawless, "Religion & Politics Among Arab Seafarers in Britain in the Early 20th Century," *Islam and Christian Relations* 5:1 (1994).

[81] "Adenese Seamen General 1930," CO 725/21/8, National Archives of the UK.

Seamen Minority Movement gave speeches and urged other white sailors to join the picket line and support the Arabs. Amongst them was William Harrison who urged other white seamen to stand in solidarity with Arabs. Harrison stated in his speech:

> The Arabs have set a better example than the white men, they are a hundred per cent with us, and if the white men stood their ground the same as the Arabs, the fight would have been won. We have been using passive methods for the past fortnight, but not one ship has been prevented from signing, it has been useless because you have no guts. You call yourselves Britishers, you call yourselves white men, you are not worth the name. the fight started in South Shields and up to the present there are no results. SS must be the storm centre of the movement, all other Ports are looking at us as an example…No man must be allowed to sign with P.C.5.[82]

Alongside Harrison, was SMM Chairman Peter O'Donnel who stated that other port cities are looking to South Shields as the center for the Seamen's Minority Movement. O'Donnell stated, "We have tried passive methods now for the past fortnight but passive methods are no use, we will now have to use force to meet force."[83] Organizers with the SMM urged men not to enter the union offices and sign onto ships, shouting, "Don't go in men, don't let the scabs sign on, stand fast."[84] While Harrison and other SMM leaders gave speeches, Ali Said helped translate for Yemenis. It was reported that Ali Said was moving through the crowd and speaking to men in Arabic. In the police reports, officers described Said and other Yemenis as "very excited" and "shouting in Arabic." Witnesses reported that two white men crossed the picket line and were nearing the doors of the Shipping Office when a "crowd of Arabs" ran towards them with "sticks and other weapons, attacking the white seamen…stones were thrown and sticks freely used by the Arabs."[85]

Clashes between picketers and police took place and in the end 27 people were arrested: 21 Yemenis, including Ali Said, and 6 whites. They were charged with various offences including incitement to riot, riot, and obstructing the police. Yemenis of course endured the harshest punishments. A number of Yemenis were sentenced to harsh labor punishments and eventually deportation.[86] In the witness accounts which were included in the court documents, the South Shields police chief talked about Ali Said and stated:

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[82] Correspondence Constable of County Borough of South Shields Police Force to John Addison, in Folder titled "Statement of Chargers for Director of Public Prosecution," T95/152, Tyne and Wear Archives Discovery Museum, Newcastle Upon Tyne, England

[83] Correspondence Detective Constable in the County Borough of South Shields Police Force to William Pearson," T95/152, Tyne and Wear Archives Discovery Museum, Newcastle Upon Tyne, England

[84] Correspondence Detective Inspector of the County Borough of South Shields Police Force to Alexander Wilson," T95/152, Tyne and Wear Archives Discovery Museum, Newcastle Upon Tyne, England

[85] Correspondence Constable in the County Borough of South Shields Police Force to John Garrod," T95/152, Tyne and Wear Archives Discovery Museum, Newcastle Upon Tyne, England

[86] Fred Halliday, *Arabs in Exile* 47

"He is cute and crafty, in all cases where there has been trouble with the Arab population in South Shields, it has always been found that he took part in fomenting the trouble."[87]

Post WWII- Steel Industry & the Yemeni Workers Union

By the end of WWII, the need for Yemeni sailors declined and many left the port cities in search of other occupations. During this time, many Yemenis living in South Shields, moved inland to work England's industrial cities which included mainly Birmingham, Sheffield, and Manchester. The migration of Yemenis from north-east England as well as the influx of Yemeni immigrants from Yemen, helped form large immigrant communities in these industrial cities. While the shipping industry's need for Yemeni sailors declined, industrial factories were largely interested in employment of immigrants during the postwar period.[88]

A large Yemeni community in Sheffield quickly emerged and became the site for the establishment of political and community organizations. The steel industry became the site for the establishment of the Yemeni Workers Union (YWU) which was founded in 1970. By 1975, when the YWU was at its peak, it had a membership of nearly 2,000.[89] The history of the Yemeni community in Sheffield and the establishing of the YWU and other Yemeni led organizations, demonstrates the creation of a diaspora of empire.

Much like in South Shields during WWI, the need for cheap labor pushed the British government to expedite travel from Yemen. This time the need was not for sailors in the shipping industry, but steel workers in the booming steel industry.The majority of Yemenis came to Sheffield directly from Aden during the 1950s and 1960s as the need for workers increased. Adeni newspapers displayed British advertisements looking to recruit "strong men" in the steelworks.[90] Upon hearing of the recruitment in Aden, Abdul Galil Shaif's father drove to Aden from Shai'b, which at the time could take up to 24 hours. The recruitment and interview process consisted of a British representative who assessed the physical strength of the recruits. Shaif stated, "All they did was feel his muscles at the embassy and gave him a British colonial passport."[91] According to Shaif, because his father, like many Yemenis, was a farmer, he was an ideal candidate for the job: "As a farmer, my father had strong arm and leg muscles and this was deemed sufficient for him to be accepted, despite the fact that he was both illiterate and spoke not a word of English. A form was filled, he was given a British passport and sent on his way. He traveled to India by ship and from there to Britain. He arrived in Cardiff and made his way to Sheffield to his friends in Attercliffe."[92]

Throughout the 1950s there were approximately 100 Yemenis in Sheffield with the majority working the heavy steel industry. During this time, Yemeni steel workers lived in boarding houses mostly in Attercliffe. The houses were usually small 3-bedroom

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[87] "Document signed Chief Constable. His Lordship, the Judge, Assize Court, Durham," T95/152, Tyne and Wear Archives Discovery Museum, Newcastle Upon Tyne, England
[88] Halliday, 59-61
[89] Halliday, 83-84
[90] Abdul Galil Shaif, "The Yemeni Community in Sheffield," unpublished article.
[91] Interview with Abdul Galil Shaif by Neama Alamri, June 22, 2018 in Sheffield, England.
[92] Abdul Galil Shaif interview.

Victorian style homes where they shared rooms and cooked Yemeni food together. Yemeni steel workers often worked 80 hours a week in tough conditions that often resulted in accidents, injuries, or serious cases of deafness. Because of language barriers, many were unable to get proper treatment or compensation from their employers. Shaif recalls his father sharing, "'We did the jobs that the white working-class community refused to do, such as the furnace, the hammer, the melting machine and the crane driver, dirty and dangerous jobs.' He said the only language we spoke was the language of the steel factory." By the 1970s, there were about 10,000 Yemenis living in Sheffield who came from North Yemen (Rada', Juban, Shamir, and San'a) and South Yemen (Yafi, Dhala, Subeiha and a few Adenis). Many in the Yemeni community at this time did not plan to permanently stay in the UK and few brought in their families.

The Yemeni Workers Union (YWU) was founded in February 1970 by a group of South Yemenis in Birmingham, many of whom worked in steel industry. The union emerged from the Arab Workers Union (AWU) after some divisions led a group of Yemenis to form their own organization. The YWU was a unique union in the sense that it was not primarily concerned with issues of labor and working conditions amongst steel workers. Rather, it operated as a social and political organization focused on both general livelihood for Yemenis in Britain as well as Yemeni politics.[93] According to Shaif, "Many Yemeni workers became politicised soon after their arrival in the UK. Some of those who had come from South Shields had been radicalised by the race riots which took place there in the 1930s. But the majority were not involved or interested in British politics, their politics focused on Yemen. They established the Yemeni Workers' Union which included most people, from both north and south." The YWU was inspired not only by the experiences of working in Britain, but equally as inspiring was the development of nationalist movements in Yemen at the time.[94] A YWU leaders stated, "Our struggle here has been political—not social, or over working conditions. It has been part of the Arab struggles."[95]

In 1971, the YWU purchased a building at 68 Burngreave road which functioned as the main center for the Yemeni community in the UK. At this time, the union was primarily concerned with raising money to send back to Yemen to help build schools and other facilities. While the YWU drew connections with leftist labor and trade unions in Sheffield, organizers were mainly concerned with Yemeni politics and did not organize extensively on issues concerning life as workers in the UK. Instead, some of the initiatives the union participated in included raising money in support of the National Liberation Front and Socialist Party in Yemen. As Shaif stated, "They saw themselves as being on a journey which would eventually take them back home to Yemen."

The founders of the YWU defined their identities as industrial workers in Britain in relation to social and political life in Yemen. They worked in factories in Sheffield, Manchester, and Birmingham because there were no comparable jobs in Yemen and there were no comparable jobs in Yemen partly because of the effects of British colonialism and imperialism in the region. As Fred Halliday explains, "it was not conditions in the

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[93] Halliday, 83

[94] Halliday, 84

[95] Halliday, 86

country of work that determined the growth of their organizations, but the development of the nationalist movement at home that led to a mobilization of the migrant workers abroad."[96] The YWU was one of the most influential organizations among Yemeni immigrants throughout the 1970s. The YWU worked closely with the Arab Workers Union (AWU) and organized literacy classes, published magazines, and mobilized workers for pro-Palestine rallies and demonstrations.[97] In their first issue of the union magazine *Al-Ummal* ("The Workers") published in May 1970 they state:

> The establishment of the YWU in this country is intended in the first place, to forge a link between the workers here and the workers' movement and the revolutionary socialist movement in the homeland, and therefore to transform work within the ranks of the workers and to increase their understanding of our Yemeni homeland and of the affairs of the Arab homeland and of the affairs of the Arab nation…The reason for setting up this union is to serve the interests of the workers, even though this is a task beset with difficulties. We know we have few trained cadres, but we shall strengthen our work and we are serious about serving the interests of the workers. We shall build this union into being a true representative of the workers.[98]

The YWU had five main objectives: 1) to fundraise for development projects in Yemen 2) mobilize support for political campaigns in Britain 3) organize public meetings for the Yemeni community 4) teach literacy classes and 5) publish their magazine.[99] By the end of 1975, the union reached its height an official membership of about 1900 people, but by 1984 the YWU was no longer in operation.[100] As the Yemeni community in Sheffield grew, the type of organizing evolved to accommodate growing community needs.

According to Shaif, the organizational development in Sheffield's Yemeni community occurred in three phases, each with its own ideological shift. The first phase occurred from the 1950s to the mid-1980s. During this time period, the organizing was mostly focused on Yemen and reflected how many were not invested in their lives in Sheffield since they intended on returning to Yemen. The second phase was from 1986-2010 which consisted of organizing from predominantly second-generation Yemenis in Britain. In 1986 the YWU transitioned into the Yemeni Community Association. In this phase, the Yemeni community was less invisible but not fully integrated into British life and politics. From 2010 to the present, the third phase is now being led by third generation British Yemenis who remain interested in Yemeni politics but are equally engaged with British politics as well. The Yemeni Community Association eventually became known as Aspiring Communities Together (ACT). During this phase, the establishment ACT was the first Yemeni led organization that dedicated their work to not just the Yemeni community but other immigrant communities in the area. The organizers

[96] Halliday, 84
[97] Halliday 89
[98] Halliday 91
[99] Halliday, 93
[100] Halliday, 83-84

of ACT deliberately recognize the organization's roots in not just the Yemeni Community Association but the YWU as well.[101]

Conclusion: Remembering the "Race Riots"

By the 21st century, neoliberal multicultural initiatives spurred by the British government in the midst of rising Islamophobia post-9/11, revived a new interest in the history of Yemeni sailors in the UK. Now remembered as the first Muslim community that successfully integrated into British society, the history of the Yemeni community in South Shields offered a narrative in which to support the notion of a multiracial and progressive Britain. In April 2008, an exhibit focusing on the historical experiences of Yemenis sailors in South Shields opened at the Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art in Newcastle Port Tyne. Titled, *Last of the Dictionary Men,* the project was funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund and Arts Council England and produced by Bridge + Tunnel Productions/Voices. The exhibit included large-scale visual arts installations by filmmaker and artist Tina Gharavi as well as portraits of the remaining first-generation Yemeni sailors by Egyptian photographer Youssef Nabil. Alongside the portraits, videos of oral histories of the remaining Yemeni sailors were on display for visitors to listen to. The *Last of the Dictionary Men* is an example of a multicultural and additive approach to histories of immigrants. According to Tina Gharavi, part of the importance of the history of Yemenis in South Shields is that it tells a story of successful integration of Yemenis in Britain "particularly at a time of troubled Arab-British relations."[102] When addressing the "race riots," Gharavi hoped that the exhibit would challenge the notion that the riots were racially charged, stating: "Fortunately, we are now in a position to set the record straight and ensure the British-Yemeni community are remembered for what they have contributed: successful integration and proof that Muslim culture can live successfully in harmony with modern British society."[103] Rather than discussing how the riots highlighted the intersections of race and class (and of course empire), the exhibit was more concerned with painting a history of a multiracial British society. The exhibit also did not dive into the history of British colonization in Yemen, which was how Yemenis ended up in South Shields in the first place. Instead, the *Last of the Dictionary Men* highlighted to the role that social memory has in the continuing legacy of empire, specifically the erasure of empire.

The story of the 1930 riot is of course an example of racial tensions, union politics, and class; however, it is also a story of empire. In conclusion, as scholars have shown, the invisible empire is exposed as a result of its biggest contradiction: wanting foreign land just not the people and this is why colonial subjects are what Mai Ngai would call "impossible subjects." The colony of Aden created new opportunities and

[101] Abdul Galil Shaif interview by Neama Alamri

[102] Youssef Nabil, Tina Gharavi, Peter Hebden, and Mathew Kipling, *Last of the dictionary men: stories from the South Shields Yemeni sailors*, (London: Gilgamesh Publishing, 2013), 11.

[103] Youssef Nabil, *Last of Dictionary Men,* 4

routes for Yemeni workers, but these sites were manifestations of colonial power.[104] Yemeni sailors arriving in South Shields and other parts of the diaspora had to learn how to navigate within a political space constructed by colonialism. The inter-war period riots were literal ruptures that exposed the contradictions of empire and they were also moments in which Yemenis challenged and negotiated British imperial rule and racial meanings.

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[104] Dororthy B. Fujita-Rony, *American workers, colonial power: Philippine Seattle and the Transpacific West, 1919-1941*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 27

CHAPTER TWO:

Carrying Nasser's Portrait: Yemeni Farm Workers and the Politics of Empire in the United Farm Workers Union

On July 29, 1970, the UFW signed what would come to be known as the historic grape contracts, ending the five-year-long grape strike and boycott that began in Delano and marked the first collective bargaining agreement for farm workers in California. The UFW's fight for farm worker justice did not end there of course. In the summer of 1973, as the UFW's three-year grape contracts came up for renewal, strikes took place again after growers signed sweetheart contracts with the Teamsters union without an election. Thousands of strikers were arrested and hundreds suffered injuries at the hands of law enforcement. During that summer, on the evening of August 13, 1973 a group of farm workers and UFW volunteers and organizers stood outside a café in Lamont, California. Deputy Sheriff Gilbert Cooper arrived on the scene to arrest picket captain Frank Quintana on charges of disturbing the peace. Several workers began to protest Quintana's arrest; among them was a 24-year-old farm worker from Yemen, Nagi Daifallah.[105] Upon protest of Quintana's arrest, Sheriff Cooper began harassing Daifallah. As Daifallah attempted to run away, Cooper swung a metal flashlight at his head causing severe injuries to his spinal cord.[106] Daifallah was left to die on the pavement. While harassment by police was a common reality faced by strikers, workers, and UFW organizers, the death of Nagi Daifallah sent shock waves through the union and deeply impacted the trajectory of the farm worker movement.

On August 17, 1973 over 7,000 Yemeni, Mexican, and Filipino mourners gathered at the Forty Acres union field office in Delano, the "cradle" of the farm worker movement to attend Daifallah's funeral march.[107] Yemeni farm workers, UFW volunteers, organizers, and Cesar Chavez himself, marched in silence alongside Daifallah's casket in solidarity against the violence and systemic oppression perpetuated by agribusiness. Yemeni farm workers carried flags representing the United States, Yemen, and the UFW. They also carried a large portrait of the late Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser, a prominent leader of Arab nationalism and the Palestinian cause throughout the 1950s and 1960s.[108] The portrait of Nasser politicized Daifallah's funeral, and symbolized the radicalization of Yemeni workers who sought to challenge social injustice on both local and global scales. Particularly in regard to the question of Palestine, the inclusion of Nasser's portrait also disrupted the type of social justice platform and rhetoric advocated by Cesar Chavez and the UFW.

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[105]15,000 farm workers honor fallen strikers," *El Malcriado,* September 21, 1973, Farm Worker Documentation Project, UC San Diego Library, San Diego, CA.

[106] Nadine Naber, "The Yemeni UFW Martyr," Middle East Research and Information Project, vol. 44 (Winter 2014).

[107] Matt. Garcia. F*rom The Jaws of Victory: The Triumph and Tragedy of Cesar Chavez and the Farm Worker Movement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012)*,* 62.

[108] "15,000 farm workers honor fallen strikers," *El Malcriado,* September 21, 1973, Farm Worker Documentation Project, UC San Diego Library, San Diego, CA.

The history of the United Farm Workers union (UFW) and the farm worker movement led by Cesar Chavez has been well documented and has allowed historians to explore the successes and failures of perhaps the most well-known labor movement in American history. For those familiar with the history of the farm worker movement, the death of Nagi Daifallah looms large. This chapter, however, seeks to foreground the life of Nagi Daifallah and other Yemeni UFW organizers and farm workers in order to demonstrate that the movement served as an arena where politics of nationalism, diaspora, and empire came into contact with one another in both intentional and unintentional ways. While the local politics of labor in California shaped the activism of Yemeni workers in the UFW and their resistance to unfair working conditions, I argue that global politics of Arab nationalism, anti-colonialism, and Marxism circulating the Arab world at the time also profoundly influenced their politics. For Yemeni farm workers, the UFW and the farm worker movement served as powerful forces that challenged them to think about their social status as immigrants in this country, while international ideologies such as Arab nationalism provided a discourse to challenge their oppression in the United States. While Arab nationalism was more pronounced at times, Yemeni farm workers and organizers established a hybrid of Arab nationalist, Marxist, and Islamic ideologies that together defined their involvement in the UFW.

While much has been written on the history of the UFW and the farm worker movement, the role of Yemenis has been largely overlooked and limited to the ethnic identity of Nagi Daifallah. Scholars such as Matt Garcia, Miriam Pawel, and Frank Bardacke have reassessed the history of the UFW and the legacy of the farm worker movement, providing a more critical historical account of the movement's successes and failures, while others such as Dawn Bohulano Mabalon and Ana Raquel Minian have explored the untold stories of Filipina/os in the movement as well as the politics of gender and sexuality within the union.[109] This chapter continues in this trajectory by foregrounding the experiences of Yemeni workers as a way to better understand the complex historical legacy of the UFW and the farm worker movement. By foregrounding the experiences of Yemeni workers, it becomes clear that the farm worker movement was not only a labor movement for agricultural workers in California. Rather, the experiences of Yemeni workers demonstrate that the UFW intersected with global politics of nationalism and empire in ways that complicate the celebratory narrative of the farm worker movement.

The history of Yemeni farm workers and their involvement in the farm worker movement begins not in California, but rather in Yemen. Many of the young men who immigrated to California, found work as farm workers, and became involved in the UFW grew up in Yemen amidst the political context of Arab nationalism, decolonization, and political movements. The involvement of Yemenis in the movement and the UFW was not only motivated by the injustices they faced as agricultural workers and immigrants, but also stems from many of them having already benn experienced activists and union organizers back home. Specifically, South Yemenis who lived through the decolonization movement and supported the establishment of the Marxist inspired People's Democratic

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[109] Frank Bardacke, 2011; Matthew Garcia, 2012; Dawn Bohulano Mabalon, 2013; Ana Raquel Minian 2013; Miriam Pawel, 2014

Republic of Yemen became involved in the UFW. Three key individuals make up the history of Yemenis in the UFW: Saeed Mohammed Al-Alas, Ahmed Shaibi, and Nagi Daifallah. Together these individuals and the archive they left behind offer important insight on how Yemeni workers engaged in activism and on what political platforms. Saeed Mohamed Al-Alas a UFW organizer from Aden, the capital of former South Yemen, organized with the UFW in the early 1970s and was the lead organizer for a funeral march in Porterville honoring the life of Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser.[110] Ahmed Shaibi who was also South Yemeni was hired by the UFW in 1977 and served for the union for several years before opening the first local chapter of the Anti-Arab Discrimination Committee in Delano in 1982. Lastly Nagi Daifallah, whose untimely death profoundly impacted the trajectory of the union, should also be recognized. Beyond the narrative of Daifallah's death, the writings and letters he left behind for his father offer a look into his experiences working in the fields and being involved with the UFW. Daifallah who was originally from North Yemen, became politically involved at a young age. While going to school in Aden (South Yemen) during British occupation, Daifallah publically stood against the British as well as the North Yemeni government, which resulted in his imprisonment for some time. As a young man, Daifallah was arrested for pulling down both the British flag and the North Yemen flag in an act of protest from a college in Aden.[111] All three of these figures helped shape the course of the UFW in California, but they all brought with them experiences from Yemen.

The 1960s and 1970s was a time of tumultuous political changes in former North and South Yemen. With the spread of Arab nationalism led by Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser and anti-colonial movements throughout the world, like many other countries in the Middle East, North and South Yemeni citizens were inspired to challenge systems of power. In 1963 in South Yemen, the National Liberation Front was established in order to push forth a campaign against decades of British imperial presence in the British Protectorate of Aden. They were also against the South Arabian Federation, which was formed under British guidance and intended to diffuse the spread of Arab nationalist demands for an end to colonial rule and help ensure the continuance of the vital British military base in Aden that was still under construction.[112] In North Yemen, political factions were being formed to overthrow the ruling monarchy and establish a republic. In 1967 South Yemen successfully decolonized Aden, ending over a hundred years of British imperial presence in the region, and became a Marxist regime known as the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen. A year later in 1968, North Yemen overthrew the monarchy.

Yet, despite the various political successes in Yemen and elsewhere in the Middle East inspired by Arab nationalism, the 1967 Arab-Israeli War marked the beginning of the decline of the Arab nationalist project. The "Six Day War" was fought from June 5

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[110] "UFWOC: A Strong Union for the Arab Farm Worker." *El Malcriado.* Nov. 1, 1970. Farm Worker Documentation Project. UC San Diego Library.

[111] United Farm Workers Administration Collection, Box 114, Folder 3, "Martyr Nagi Mohsin Daifallah Handad, 17 June 1980," Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

[112] Robert Stookey, *South Yemen: A Marxist Republic in Arabia,* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1982).

and 10, 1967 between Israel and the neighboring Arab countries of Egypt, Syria, and Jordan. Israel's powerful military success shocked Arabs across the Middle East and in the diaspora. In the aftermath of Arab defeat in the Six-Day War, the hope that had begun with Gamal Abdel Nasser's nationalization of the Suez Canal in 1956 began to slowly dwindle. Even back in Yemen, after the overthrow of the monarchy in 1968, North Yemen erupted into a civil war with factions split between monarchists and republican supporters and activists. At the same time, South Yemenis faced a dying economy following the end of British colonization in Aden. As a result of regime changes in both the North and South, the economy collapsed. By 1973, the individual yearly income in Yemen was $94 and much of the population was unemployed. Both North and South Yemen were economically dependent on foreign aid from countries including the United States, the Soviet Union, China, as well other Arab countries. [113] As a result of the failing economy and high rates of poverty, labor migration increased tremendously.

The 1965 Immigration Act, which ended restrictive immigration policies increased Yemeni immigration to the United States. By the 1970s, many of the Yemenis arriving in the United States worked in automobile factories in Detroit, steel plants in Buffalo, and agricultural farms across California. There are several reasons why Yemenis came to California. First was that many came with agricultural experience in Yemen, where families usually owned small numbers of acres in which they grew and harvested their own food. Following the wars in Yemen, however, a decline in national resources and limited economic opportunities pushed most families to rely on foreign imports. This also included sending relatives, usually young men, to other countries for work in order to earn money for the entire family. As California agriculture continued to boom in the mid-twentieth century, it offered immediate employment opportunities to many young Yemeni men who came to the U.S. with some agricultural experience in hopes of supporting their families back home. Nonetheless, employment in the fields was dependent upon knowing someone, usually a friend or relative, who was employed.

In February of 1968, Ali Baleed Al Maklani left South Yemen and immigrated to U.S. where he first arrived in Los Angeles. Maklani recalled that he had some friends working in Modesto as farm workers so that is where he went. "When you come to this country it [employment] depends on who you live with. If you live with someone who works in the factory, you will end up working in the factory. If you live with someone who works in the restaurant you will end up there. If they work at the ships, you will end up there." [114] From Modesto, Maklani moved to the Bakersfield and Delano area to cut grapes, and then worked in Stockton to harvest asparagus. Like Maklani, many Yemenis gained employment through experienced working friends and relatives. As a result, many Yemenis worked jobs alongside family. Ultimately, Maklani settled in Detroit working in the auto industry, but recalled continuing to help others gain employment in California. "We used to get people who come here [Detroit]. We'd get them their social security if they couldn't find a job here we'd get them a ticket and we would send them to California. Lot of people from Yemen used to work in the farms." Access to employment was a community effort and often times was part of an organized system of loans that

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[113] Mary Bisharat, "Yemeni Farmworkers in California," *Middle East Research and Information Project* 34 (Jan. 1975): 24

[114] Ali Baleed Al Maklani interview by Neama Alamri, October 7, 2015. Dearborn, Michigan

were set up between newly arrived immigrants and individuals already living in the U.S. An individual residing in the U.S. would provide a loan to friend or relative to fund the travel from Yemen. They often times provided housing and access to jobs upon their arrival. The lender, known as the *wakil* provided a more accessible lending service that also followed Islamic practices by not charging interest.[115] This type of loaning practice remains common today.

The last reason Yemenis came to California involved a credit system established by Trans World Airlines and backed by growers to help expedite travel for immigrants, predominantly young men, from Yemen. Based on testimonies from UFW volunteers and the few secondary sources available, there are speculations that growers themselves funded the travel to bring groups of young men from Yemen to work.[116] As growers were faced with the increasing resistance from farm workers against unfair working conditions, many were eager to employ Yemenis whom they believed to be "easier to control."[117] Records of Yemeni immigration to California indicate that many workers traveled through a credit system established by the Trans World Airlines (TWA) office in Los Angeles. Through this system, a relative or friend residing in California paid a $100 deposit with a cosigner in Yemen for a plane ticket from the TWA costing $800 with the condition that upon arrival the worker would pay the beneficiary back. While providing loans to help travel from Yemen was common among Yemenis, the involvement of the TWA in facilitating this communal practice was unusual. Yemenis who came in through the TWA credit system arrived in the dozens and essentially went straight from the airport to the hiring halls. A group of a dozen workers were represented by a spokesman who was in charge of beginning applications for social security numbers so they can begin working as soon as possible.[118] There are several discrepancies between the numbers provided by the Immigration and Naturalization Service records which reports 380 alien Yemenis registered in 1974 as opposed to the numbers given by the TWA office in Los Angeles which reports 100,000 in the decade leading up to 1974.[119] This discrepancy indicates the possibility that the number reported by TWA were of Yemenis who were undocumented.

Once in California, Yemeni farm workers migrated within three major agricultural regions: the Sacramento Valley, the San Joaquin Valley and the Imperial Valley. Migration cycles began with the April asparagus harvest in Stockton, and then moved to the southern end of the valley in the Delano-Porterville-Bakersfield area for the grape harvest until the end of November. Then, many Yemenis moved to Arvin or Coachella where the grapevine-pruning season began. They eventually returned to the

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[115] Gregory Orfalea, *The Arab Americans: A History*, (Northampton: Olive Branch Press, 2006), 200.
[116] Marcia Aronson, "My Involvement in the United Farm Workers of America 1973-1978," Farm Worker Documentation Project
[117] Mary Bisharat, "Yemeni Migrant Workers in California," in *Arabs in America: Myths and Realities,* (Wilmette: Medina University Press International, 1975), 208.
[118] Mary Bisharat, "Yemeni Migrant Workers in California," in *Arabs in America: Myths and Realities,* (Wilmette: Medina University Press International, 1975), 206-207.
[119] Mary Bisharat, "Yemeni Migrant Workers in California," 208.

Delano-Porterville area to complete more grapevine pruning and remained in that area until the next migration cycle.[120]

Yemeni farm workers faced several obstacles from low wages, language barriers, and limited access to health care and social services. Similar to other farm workers, the conditions for Yemenis were inextricably linked to the exploitive system established by the growers. In 1973, the cash receipts from farming in California totaled over 7.2 billion, nearly 13 percent of the country's entire agriculture business. From 1972 to 1973 the net income for growers in California increased by 62 percent while worker's conditions remained the same. The growers increased income was only possible through the exploitation of cheap labor, specifically the advantages of imported laborers such as the Chinese, Japanese, Filipinos, Punjabis, Southern Europeans, Mexicans and Yemenis.[121] Wages for farm labor in California differed according to the type of job but most farm work was paid by piece-work. Many earned $2.30 an hour, which amounted to less after social security fees were deducted, an amount they likely never saw since many retired not in the U.S. but in Yemen. Growers also deducted costs for workman's compensation and bussing. During the off seasons, some workers sought unemployment benefits. While the Ford Administration in 1975 enacted a program within California for unemployment benefits to farm workers with minimal stipends, due to the extensive requirements for the application and their lack of the English language, the majority of the farm workers did not apply.[122]

The experiences of Yemeni farm workers in California throughout the 1970s were reflective of many of the experiences of Arab immigrants who arrived post-1965. Unlike Arab immigrants who arrived in the early 20th century, Yemenis who came to the U.S. in the late 1960s and 1970s were predominantly working-class. Furthermore, whereas earlier Arab immigrants were predominantly Christian, the Yemenis and other Arabs who arrived post-1965 were majority Muslim.[123] While many Arabs in the U.S. prior to the 1960s had been racialized as white, the intersection of class and religion racialized Yemeni immigrants as non-white, "other" minorities. Because they were racialized through their Muslim and Arab identities, Yemeni immigrants at this time were a part of what Nadine Naber would call a "diaspora of empire," created by U.S. military intervention in the Middle East in the 1960s and 1970s.[124] This theorizing depicts the realities of many Arabs in the U.S. at the time who were "forced to engage with U.S. imperial discourses in their everyday lives, discourses that associate Arabs and Muslims not with the U.S. nation but with real or fictive places outside the boundaries of the United States, and against which the United States is at war." [125]Within diasporas of empire, the "empire inscribes itself on the diasporic subject within the domestic

[120] Juan J. Sanchez and Solache Saul, "Yemeni Agricultural Workers in California: Migration Impact," Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund Records, Bulk 1968-1995, box 18, folder 14, Department of Special Collections, Stanford University, Stanford CA.

[121] Mary Bisharat, "Yemeni Migrant Workers in California," 204

[122] Ron Kelley, "Yemeni Farmworkers in California," in *Sojourners and Settlers: The Yemeni Immigrant Experience,* ed. Jonathan Friedlander (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1988)

[123] Gregory Orfalea, *The Arab Americans: A History*, (Northampton: Olive Branch Press, 2006), 153

[124] Nadine Naber, *Arab America: Gender, Cultural Politics, and Activism*, (New York: NYU Press, 2012), 27

[125] Nadine Naber, *Arab America: Gender, Cultural Politics, and Activism*, (New York: NYU Press, 2012), 27

(national) borders of empire."[126] However, it is also within a diaspora of empire, that Yemeni immigrants found opportunities of resistance to critique empire. While Arab nationalism as a political project slowly began to decline following the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, it continued to prosper in the diaspora, particularly among Arab workers who were faced with the realities of living in a "diaspora of empire."

In the 1970s, Yemeni farm workers continued to invoke ideologies of Arab nationalism as a way to assert their political identities as immigrants in California and the farm worker movement. On October 1, 1970, after Gamal Abdel Nasser died of a heart attack, local Yemenis planned a funeral march in his honor. Nearly one thousand Yemeni farm workers in Porterville, California attended a funeral march to mourn the death of Gamal Abdel Nasser. Led by a drummer, marchers carried an American flag alongside the United Arab Republic flag and a portrait of the late President Nasser covered in a black veil.[127] Saeed Mohammed Al-Alas, a farm worker and UFW organizer was one of the organizers of the march. When asked about Nasser, Mohammed Al-Alas stated: "Nasser has been a father to us. He was the only great leader we had. He brought all the Arabs together, began economic programs, and threw the British out of Egypt. He was really interested in the people."[128] Mohammed Al-Alas' statement on Nasser discussed three political projects: Arab unity, economic justice and lastly anti-colonialism. All of these things contextualized Mohammed Al-Alas' involvement in fighting for farm worker justice in California. When asked why he remains in the Central Valley he replied, "Where else could I do as much for my countrymen?"[129] Mohammed Al-Alas' statement challenges the concept of geographic boundaries of an "Arab state" and embodies an Arab transnationalism that has less to do with forming an Arab nation-state, and more to do with bridging politics of the third world to labor politics in the Central Valley.

Following the funeral march for Nasser, Yemeni farm workers continued to work in the fields and join the UFW. By 1971, the UFW had 80,000 members and officially moved their headquarters to La Paz in Keene, California. One year later, the UFW became an independent affiliate of the AFL-CIO and created a national executive board.[130] While the funeral march for President Nasser in 1970 did not seem to affect the UFW, the turn to Arab nationalism later on proved to be particularly problematic for the union and Chavez. Three years after the funeral march for Nasser, the portrait of the late president was carried once more, but it would be down the streets of Delano, a city near Porterville, and it was for the death of not a president, but a young farm worker: Nagi Daifallah.

Arab nationalism, however, was not the only grounds on which Yemenis defined their resistance. The issue of food in the labor camps brought to the surface various

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[126] Ibid, 27.

[127] "Morning March Here For Nasser," 30 Sept. 1970, *Porterville Recorder,* Porterville Public Library; "Nasser Buried, Mideast Sad," 1 Oct. 1970, *Porterville Recorder*.

[128] "UFWOC: A Strong Union for the Arab Farm Worker," 1 Nov. 1970, *El Malcriado*, Farm Worker Documentation Project. UC San Diego Library.

[129] Ibid.

[130] Matt Garcia, "Cesar Chavez and the United Farm Workers Movement," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of American History*. http://americanhistory.oxfordre.com/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199329175.001.0001/acrefore-9780199329175-e-217.

forms of Yemeni farm workers' resistance. As practicing Muslims, many Yemeni workers demanded purchasing more lamb and less pork. The kitchen served as the space and Islam as the ideology for Yemeni workers to challenge and resist working and living conditions in the labor camps. Labor camps housed two to three men in a single small room or dozens in a larger room and often did not meet state standards for appropriate living. In 1974 488 of the farm labor camps in California failed to meet the state's housing, safety and sanitation standards.[131] The bathrooms included community showers with non-private row toilets.[132] Many of these camps were shared and divided between the Yemeni and Mexican workers, which included meals as well. At one camp, the company-prepared food was served for $3 a day, a cost deducted from the worker's paycheck.[133] In other Yemeni workers' living quarters, there was a Yemeni camp supervisor who managed the kitchen. While the company provided the facilities, and supplies in the kitchen, this elected worker was in charge of buying and cooking food for the group, and the cost was shared among the workers.[134]

Food studies scholars have demonstrated how food is not simply what people eat, but how what they eat politicizes and in some cases, radicalizes them. For Yemenis, the critical issue was the kitchen. Workers advocated having utensils separated from any pork items. The food Yemeni workers ate not only marked them as ethnic and religious others, distinguishing them from fellow Mexican and Filipino workers, but also provided an opportunity to assert agency in a system that functioned on the basis of denying workers their basic rights. By demanding kitchen spaces and meal options that followed their religious practices, Yemenis used their Muslim identity to resist conditions in the labor camps and challenge the agribusiness model as a whole.

A space of resistance for Yemenis, the kitchen was also a space that highlighted tensions between Filipino and Yemeni workers. This became particularly evident when in March of 1973 the UFW brought doctors from outside of California to treat Yemeni workers in their clinics. While health issues such as tuberculosis and respiratory infections were common among farm workers, many Yemenis suffered from schistosomiasis, an intestinal infection endemic in Yemen caused by contact of parasites in water. During that month, UFW tested approximately 216 Yemeni workers and found 100 of them to be infected with schistosomiasis.[135] As part of the test, clinics required a stool sample from each worker. The clinic informed those who were unable to drop off samples, to store them in the refrigerator in the labor camps prior to testing. According to UFW organizer Doug Adair, this caused Filipino workers who were already annoyed with the halal food preferences to become even more upset: "After all the uproar that the Arabs had caused about pork contaminating the kitchen and refrigerator, it was now the turn of the Filipinos to express outrage over the wormy Arab excrement being housed

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[131] Mary Bisharat, "Yemeni Migrant Workers in California," 206
[132] Ron Kelley, "Yemeni Farmworkers in California," in *Sojourners and Settlers: The Yemeni Immigrant Experience,* ed. Jonathan Friedlander (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1988), 76
[133] Mary Bisharat, "Yemeni Farmworkers in California," 23.
[134] Juan J. Sanchez and Saul Solache, "Yemeni Agricultural Workers in California: Migration Impact."
[135] "Clinic Program for Arab Members," 9 March 1973, *El Malcriado,* Farm Worker Documentation Project, UC San Diego

along with THEIR food!"[136] While Adair, an outsider to both the Yemeni and Filipino working community, does not offer the perspective from either Yemeni or Filipino workers, he does provide the reminder that despite the rhetoric of a multi-ethnic farm worker movement, tensions between communities existed.

The Legacy of Nagi Daifallah

The UFW was accommodating to the medical needs of Yemeni workers by providing medical services and they also recognized the need to offer halal food for Yemenis who did not eat pork. The issue of food and the testing for schistosomiasis demonstrated the ways in which the UFW ultimately helped to accommodate Yemeni workers following their demands. While the issue of food brought to the forefront tensions between Filipino and Yemeni workers, a few months after the incident at the UFW clinics, the death of Nagi Daifallah on August of 1973, would bring together Yemeni and Filipino workers, if only for a moment to mourn, in solidarity. Chavez spoke very highly of Daifallah who had been an organizer for the union and was deemed a martyr for the movement. However, after the death of Nagi Daifallah, it became clear that the UFW's acceptance and affiliation with Yemenis was very much conditional.

The portrait of Nasser allowed Yemenis at Nagi Daifallah's funeral to politicize their identities as Arabs and invoke the ideologies of anticolonial Arab nationalism. The decision to include Nasser spoke politically on the connections Yemeni workers made between social injustices abroad with the injustices they faced as farm workers in the U.S. However, it put Cesar Chavez and the UFW in a very tough situation. The choice Yemeni workers made to carry Nasser's portrait, a pro-Soviet and pro-Palestinian Arab leader, threatened the UFW's relationship with pro-Israeli Jewish religious leaders who had been very supportive of Chavez and the movement. After Daifallah's funeral, Chavez received several letters from supporters who were extremely disappointed to see Nasser, whom they viewed as anti-Semitic, associated with the UFW and the movement. A closer look at these letters and the UFW's response to these letters reveal how the controversy over Nasser's portrait pressured the UFW to engage in global politics, particularly when it came to the question of Palestine. The controversy over Nasser's portrait demonstrated the ways in which the UFW navigated between communities and conflicting definitions of social justice in order to uphold the portrayal of an inclusive, multi-ethnic farm worker movement. When Daifallah was killed and deemed a martyr of the movement, the UFW opened its arms to the Yemeni community. With the Yemeni community now on Chavez's side, however, the UFW's position on global issues such as the question of Palestine became complicated and difficult to navigate.

According to witnesses, Daifallah's death was a clear case of police brutality. However, at the time, there were conflicting beliefs on the cause of death. The major issue in the conflicting narratives of Daifallah's death was whether or not he died from injuries after falling and hitting his head on the street while fleeing, or whether the blow

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[136] Doug Adair, "Camp Life and the Forty Acres," Farm Worker Documentation Project.

to the head came from a flashlight forcefully used by Deputy Cooper. There was also questioning of Nagi's political affiliation with the UFW, which became sight of contestation when Kern District Attorney Al Leddy announced that Nagi had been working on a ranch under a Teamsters contract and was a spy for the Teamsters union.[137] Whereas authorities claimed Daifallah died from falling after fleeing the scene, the UFW reacted to the death as being directly linked to the pattern of excessive police force. In an article published in WIN magazine, UFW attorney Jerry Cohen stated, "There's a pattern of excessive force being used by the sheriff. If their skin is a different color, they are going to use excessive force."[138] In the eyes of the UFW and other activists and farm workers, Daifallah became a victim of the strike and a martyr for a movement among workers who had been subjected to police brutality, violence from the Teamsters, and class and racial oppression.

Daifallah's death provided an opportunity for the UFW to emphasize that the movement was for all immigrants and people of color. In his eulogy statement for Daifallah, Chavez highlighted his immigrant identity stating that "Nagi had come to this country from his native Yemen looking for a better life" and "gave himself to the grape strike and the struggle for justice for all farm workers." He also stated how Yemeni workers were "the latest group of people to come to California to be exploited by the California growers" and that "most of them, like Nagi, were young men in their early twenties, they were unusually shy, of slight frame, Moslem, spoke no English, and live in barren labor camps." [139] By characterizing the movement for all immigrants and people of color, Chavez answered to critics at the time who accused the UFW for being ethnocentric by prioritizing Mexican workers and too Catholic-based. It also addressed critiques that the UFW was too dependent on white, middle class volunteers and advisors.[140]

However, the characterization of Nagi as "unusually shy," portrayed him as a passive victim as opposed to the political activist he was. Beyond the dominant narrative which focuses solely on Nagi's death, the writings and letters he left behind for his father offer a look into his experiences working in the fields and being involved with the UFW. In actuality, when Nagi became a UFW organizer he already had experience in political activism back in Yemen. Nagi, originally from North Yemen, became politically involved at a young age. While going to school in Aden (South Yemen) during British occupation, Nagi publicly stood against the British as well as the North Yemeni government, which resulted in his imprisonment for some time. As a young man, Nagi was arrested for pulling down both the British flag and the North Yemen flag in an act of protest while attending a college in Aden.[141] Furthermore, based on letters he wrote to his father, it was evident that rather than being shy and inexperienced, Nagi had a keen

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[137] 15,000 farm workers honor fallen strikers," *El Malcriado,* September 21, 1973, Farm Worker Documentation Project, UC San Diego Library, San Diego, CA.
[138] Bob Levering, "Nonviolence In The Vineyards," 1973, *WIN* magazine, from The Farm Worker Documentation Project, UC San Diego.
[139] "UFW Martyrs: Nagi Daifallah," *United Farm Workers,* www.UFW.org.
[140] Matthew Garcia, *From the Jaws of Victory,* (University of California Press, 2014), 127
[141] United Farm Workers Administration Collection, Box 114, Folder 3, "Martyr Nagi Mohsin Daifallah Handad, 17 June 1980," Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

understanding of how power and exploitation was operating within agribusiness. In a letter to his father, Nagi wrote:

> Dearest father, you will be amazed at this which I am writing to you in this letter about the prisons for workers in American, and (when I) tell you how much an agriculture worker suffers and endures in terms of severe ill-will from the landlords of ranches. These workers live in encampments that resemble military barracks, surrounded by barbed wire and a massive barrier of governmental agents, who forbid anyone from contacting the workers, or even conversing with their friends, except by signals, or when they are completely outside the camp, where they are farm from the police. The landowners do not permit the workers to work in agriculture, except under laws the ranch-owners impose on them, with less than legal wages and insufficient safety precautions for the workers.[142]

He vividly paints a picture about the life farm workers, comparing the labor camps to prisons and war camps. He discusses grower exploitation of workers through, not only controlling their wages, but also by limiting access to services and communication and purposely putting them in unsafe conditions.[143] Nagi, like other Yemeni workers, also understood his oppression in both local and global ways, comparing his experiences in the Central Valley to those of living under an oppressive regime in Yemen.

The controversy over Nasser's portrait also complicated the narrative of the movement being one by and for "poor workers." Rather, the negative reaction over Nasser's portrait demonstrated that support from the community was not simply about justice for farm workers in California and the United States. Support from community members, including labor organizations and the Jewish religious community, was contingent upon the UFW's support for the state of Israel. After Daifallah's funeral in August of 1973, Chavez received several letters from supporters who were extremely disappointed to see Nasser, whom they viewed as anti-Semitic, associated with the UFW and the movement. While Yemeni farm workers, a minority within the movement, may have been overlooked, the death of Nagi Daifallah in 1973 made Yemeni workers visible to the larger pubic. Additionally, the portrait of President Nasser at Daifallah's funeral march, constructed Yemeni farm workers as radical immigrants clearly aligned with politics of Arab nationalism and the Palestinian cause. The death of Daifallah and the hypervisibility of Yemenis, set in motion a series of actions in which the UFW was forced to take a stance on the question of Palestine and Israel.

On September 17, 1973, Nate Bodin, President of the Local 800, American Federation of State County and Municipal Employees, AFL-CIO, wrote to Chavez, expressing disapproval at the inclusion of Nasser's image, a man he compared to "Hitler or Porferio Diaz [sic]."[144] Bodin attached the image from the funeral march with Nasser's

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[142] Chris Hartmire Personal Papers, Retrieved from Miriam Pawel; Arabic version is from United Farm Workers Administration Collection, Box 114, Folder 3, "Martyr Nagi Mohsin Daifallah Handad, 17 June 1980," Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

[143] Ibid.

[144] UFW Work Department, Box 3, File 1, Daifullah, Nagi, 1973," Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

portrait, which had been published in *The Los Angeles Times.* He first points out how the Local 800 has financially supported the UFW and then requests that the UFW produce a statement regarding the Nasser portrait:

> At the last meeting of our Executive Board, several of our people were disturbed that this portrait would be displayed lending, at the very least, an inadvertent approval on your part to a person who has vowed on many occasions the total annihilation of sovereign nation and its people—Israel…We know you to be a man of great courage and honesty. We know that unity among people of good-will is crucial. We applaud your efforts and wish you well with all the resources we can muster. However, we would like to have a statement from you regarding the above matter. We would like to know how you stand regarding the use of the representative of a people (Nasser) who have been in our opinion, misguided. We think the choice of 'hero' was a poor one for this sad occasion.[145]

Bodin's sentiments match the majority of the ways Americans viewed Gamal Abdel Nasser at the time. Although in the Arab world Nasser was deemed by many to be a leader of the Arab people against the imperial forces of the Western world, he was very controversial in the United States for his outspoken anti-Israel sentiments. Bodin's letter shows that Chavez's and the UFW's stance toward Israel mattered. Despite the fact that the union's focus was on farm worker justice, whether or not the union supported Israel affected the status of outside support. The image of Gamal Abdel Nasser, who like any leader in history has complex and contested opinions, he was of course a hero to many Arabs, provoked such indignation for Bodin and members of the Local 800 revealing the immense impact that politics of the Middle East has on labor politics in the United States. After all, it was only a year since the UFW had become officially affiliated with the AFL-CIO, boosting their political platform to a national level. It was clear that the portrait of Nasser threatened Chavez’s relationship with Bodin and the AFL-CIO.

[145] UFW Work Department, Box 3, File 1, Daifullah, Nagi, 1973," Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

Image 3: Chavez (center) at Daifallah funeral march, Delano, CA, 1973.

Alongside labor organizations, Chavez also received letters from Jewish religious leaders. On September 14, 1973, Rabbi David Polish of the Beth Emet the Free Synagogue wrote to Chavez. Rabbi Polish wrote about his disappointment in seeing the inclusion of Nasser's portrait. He also discussed a demonstration for the Soviet Jewry of Chicago in which counter demonstrators who claimed they were UFW members showed up.[146] In response to Rabbi David Polish, Ramon Romero, who was an assistant to Chavez at the time, replied September 27, 1973 on behalf.[147] Chavez himself in a reply to another similar letter from a woman named Mrs. Nussbaum. Chavez stated:

> Nagi's death and his funeral procession were deeply personal events for thousands of our members. As a movement, we were both mourning his loss and standing in solidarity with his family. If you can place yourself in that very personal context I think you will understand why no one in the farm workers union can, in retrospect, cast negative reflections on what happened during the Nagi's funeral march.[148]

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[146] UFW Work Department Collection, Box 3, Folder 1, "Daifullah, Nagi 1973," "Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.
[147] UFW Work Department Collection, Box 3, Folder 1, "Daifullah, Nagi 1973," "Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.
[148] UFW Work Department Collection, Box 3, Folder 1, "Daifullah, Nagi 1973," "Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

Both Romero and Chavez invoked Nagi's victimhood and martyrdom in order to depoliticize the presence of Nasser's portrait and continue positive relations with the angry supporters. It is evident that while Yemeni farm workers chose to march with the image of Nasser in expression of their political identities as Arabs and the UFW did not object to this, Chavez and his leadership, on the other hand, were not prepared to be associated with politics of Arab nationalism in fear of losing the faith from their Pro-Israeli supporters. In fact, the Oscar nominated documentary *Fighting For Our Lives* (1975), a film that portrayed the UFW's 1973 grape strike, edited out Nasser's portrait from the funeral procession scene. The original cut of the film showed the Yemeni workers carrying the portrait, but later versions of the film did not show this most likely because of Nasser's unpopularity within the US as an anti-west, pro-Soviet Arab leader.[149]

Despite Chavez's and the UFW's efforts to appear neutral in the controversy over Nasser's portrait, they ultimately issued a statement of support for the state of Israel in October of 1973. The statement followed the aftermath of the October war which began on October 6, 1973 when Egyptian and Syrian forced attacked Israel. On October 25, the United Nations secured a cease-fire between Egyptian and Israeli forces. Israel, while suffering heavy casualties, left the war in victory. On October 25, 1973 Rabbi Albert M. Lewis from the Isaiah Temple in Los Angeles wrote to Chavez thanking him, following up from a phone call, for his support and attempts to draft a statement that will "uphold the hands of our people in Israel who are struggling for the right of the State of Israel to exist."[150] Rabbi Lewis sent Chavez various copies of statement that had been signed by both religious leaders and Black political organizations and officials. Lewis indicated that Chavez had the intentions of writing the statement in association with other Chicano leaders as well as Christian clergymen in the community. For Lewis, these statements are extremely important, stating that, "These statements do not fall on deaf ears." He goes on to say: "I believe it is the feeling of the Arab people, which may well be a wrong feeling, that the rest of the world really has a 'wishy-washy' attitude about the existence of the State of Israel that leaves them to engage in the violence and destructive wars and acts of terrorism." October 30, 1973 Chavez replied to Rabbi Lewis in which he stated:

> Thank you so much for your letter of the 25th and also for the statements you included regarding Israel's right to exist. As of this moment, we are trying to get as many Chicano leaders as possible throughout California to join me in a statement. Max Nont called me yesterday and read a statement to which I made a couple of suggestions. I asked him to get in touch with Art Torres so we can compare notes with the statement that Art is preparing with some of the Chicano leaders in L.A. today. We will have is out as soon as possible. Your brother, Cesar E. Chavez. [151]

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[149] *Fighting for Our Lives, Glen Pearcy* (Nov. 1975. Chicago International Film Festival)
[150] UFW Administration Department Files Collection, Box 10, Folder 26, "Chavez, Cesar; Israeli statement, 1973,"
[151] UFW Administration Department Files Collection, Box 10, Folder 26. Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

On November 1, 1973 Rabbi Norman D. Hirsh sent a letter to Chris (Reverend Wayne Hartmire, Jr. National Farm Worker Ministry) in regard to Chavez's anticipated statement on Israel. Norman writes, "I have no doubt as to Cesar's sophistication in regard to the new left and I know that this particular problem of Israel poses difficulties for him. I realize that if he takes a strong pro-Israel position he opens himself up to attack from the new left Chicano forces."[152] In another letter from Tom Bradley, mayor of Los Angeles, dated October 23, 1973 to Rabbi Essrig Bradley agreed to be a co-signer of an advertisement that would have appeared in the New York Times. Bradley ends the letter saying, "Working together, we will help to achieve a just and lasting peace."[153]

By the end of that year, Chavez circulated a letter to the union staff expressing support for Israel. The October War as well as the controversy over Nasser's portrait at Nagi Daifallah's funeral march were both instrumental in pushing Chavez and the UFW to issue the following statement in support of Israel:

> As individuals committed to the cause of freedom, concerned with the fate of victims of racial, ethnic and religious prejudice and discrimination, we feel a particular sense of solidarity with Israel's struggle to survive as a democracy in peace. As persons of Mexican-American backgrounds, we share Israel's aspirations to integrate people from vastly different backgrounds and to provide them all, including Arab and Jew alike, with the benefits of an advanced social system…We appeal to our government to provide Israel with material aid to those in need and moral influence to bring both sides to the bargaining table in hope of achieving peace.[154]

Many progressive UFW organizers and supporters were appalled at Chavez's simplistic take on the question of Palestine. In a letter to Chavez dated November 11, 1973, Elizabeth Sommers from Madison, Wisconsin urged the UFW to not make a stance on Israel or Palestine. She goes on to say, "Furthermore, what would such a statement mean to Arab farm workers? What an insult to Nagi Diafullah!"[155] Sommers poignantly calls the UFW out for supporting Israel while at the same time using the death of Nagi Daifallah to paint a multiracial farm worker movement that even includes Arabs.

On November 26, 1974, a Palestinian woman and UFW volunteer named Ahlam N. Abu-Zayyad wrote a letter to Chavez addressing his support of Israel. Before stating what, the statement entailed or expressing her hesitance toward Chavez's statement, she starts off by describing how she got involved with the UFW and the movement: "I remember walking in a demonstration procession near St. James Park in San Jose. Next to me walked Fred and we both carried a heavy sign. He was Jewish. Then I walked with

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[152] UFW Administration Department Files Collection, Box 10, Folder 26.
[153] UFW Administration Department Files Collection, Box 10, Folder.
[154] Bruce Neuburger, *Lettuce Wars: Ten Years of Work and struggle in the fields of California,* Monthly Review Press: New York, 2013. 216
[155] "UFW Administration Department Files Collection, Box 10, Folder 26, "Chavez, Cesar; Israeli statement, 1973," Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

Jerry. He was Chicano. Milfred was Italian, and Milly my friend was from New York. You must know how I felt. I saw the world without boundaries. Simply, I felt good."

Ahlam goes on in the letter to describe her experiences living near Palestinian refugee camps writing how in 1967 "there was nothing more to lose." In critique of the UFW's stance on Israel Ahlam wrote: "Causes of justice are one. They cannot be compartmentalized and fragmented. One must be pragmatic in organizing, in using tactics, but not in principles. This is why I am writing, because I loved you and your people and I believe in your cause. I did not know that the UFW makes statements on international affairs. Please send me your statement on Chile, South Africa, Cypress and Cuba."[156] Ahlam's powerful letter and the pushback Chavez received from UFW members however went unheard.

By June 4, 1975 the passing of the California Agricultural Labor Relations Act won the UFW the right to bargain collectively, radically transforming the UFW and Chavez into an institution served and represented by the state.[157] While the ALRA tremendously helped the UFW win more elections, it also confined the movement to work within state-sponsored collective bargaining. Chavez and others on the Executive Board began to lose faith in this shift and felt the movement had lost its grassroots organizational skills and had become more legal-based with UFW attorneys working out settlements with Teamster and grower lawyers or state officials.[158] The UFW's affiliation with the AFL-CIO and the consolidation of state-involvement in the movement following the passing of the ALRA both contributed to Chavez's insistence to support Israel. Despite the fact that Chavez disliked the state-monitored path that the union was taking, his consistent efforts to support the state of Israel demonstrated that the union continued to cater to the U.S. government and nation-state.

On November 10, 1975, the United Nations passed Resolution 3379, declaring that Zionism is "a form of racism and racial discrimination."[159] Once again, community members were anxious to hear Chavez's and the UFW's official stance toward the U.N. resolution. In December of that year, the National Executive Board of the United Farm Workers of America, AFL-CIO adopted the following statement:

> The recent United Nations resolution condemning Zionism as racism is an affront to the Jewish people who have been history's primary victims of racism.
> As an embattled minority who have suffered the humiliation and degradation of racism and economic discrimination in this country, we know first-hand the ravages brought about by intolerance and prejudice. This resolution will encourage the latent anti-Semitism that has been a blot on world history and

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[156] Mary Bisharat, "Yemenis Abroad: A Study of Farmworkers in California," (Thesis, California State University, Sacramento, 1982), appendix

[157] Matt Garcia, "Cesar Chavez and the United Farm Workers Movement," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of American History*. http://americanhistory.oxfordre.com/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199329175.001.0001/acrefore-9780199329175-e-217, 8

[158] Ibid, 9

[159] UN Resolution 3379 was supported by the 1965 UN resolution which defined racial discrimination "as any distinction, exclusion, restriction, or preference based on race, color, descent or national or ethnic origin."

> continues to stain the conscience of humankind. A national home for the Jewish people is a natural and legitimate aspiration of one of history's most oppressed minorities. We are proud to stand with our Jewish brothers and sisters in America in affirming Israel's right to live in peace with her neighbors. As democratic trade unionists and human beings we can do no less.[160]

Following Chavez's statement, seven of the thirteen members of the UFW staff in Detroit wrote to the National Executive Board critiquing their position on Israel and urged the UFW to condemn the Israeli state for the subjugation of Palestinian communities stating that the board needs to "stand with all victims of oppression whether they be Arab or Jewish."[161] Given the large Arab American community in Detroit, staff members may have been Arab themselves, or at least aware of the Palestinian cause given the rise of Arab activism in Detroit at the time. Chavez replied to the Detroit staff saying that the board is "not convinced of the newfound distinction between Zionism as a political movement and the historic oppression of the Jewish people" and that "the ugly spector [sic] of anti-Semitism pervades" the United Nations General Assembly action.[162]

Despite pushback from progressives in the union, or the reminder that Nagi whom they claimed as a martyr was in fact Arab, it was clear that the support of the AFL-CIO and the Jewish religious community was more valuable than appeasing the progressive leftists in the union, or the political beliefs of the Yemeni workers who supported the union. In his auto-biography documenting ten years of work and organizing in the fields with the UFW, Bruce Neuburger wrote of Chavez's support of Israel stating, "How much this declaration of support of Israel was taken up on the initiative of the union or due to pressure from AFL-CIO president George Meany or other allies of the union is not clear. But the implication was obvious. This was an open and clear accommodation of empire."[163] The controversy over the Nasser portrait highlights the ways in which the farm worker movement was often transformed into a space to contest other issues and as Neuburger writes, "accommodate" empire. It is clear that the death of Nagi Daifallah made visible the presence of Yemeni workers who brought to the UFW their politics of Arab nationalism. This made the AFL-CIO and Jewish leaders nervous and they needed assurance from Chavez that the UFW would not follow in the path of other civil rights organizations at the time such as the Black Panther Party who were very adamantly pro-Palestine.[164] Although not often thought about together, the farm worker movement and the question of Palestine collided in ways that placed the UFW in awkward positions to take a stance.

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[160] UFW Michigan Boycott Collection, Box 8, Folder 10, "Zionism, Union Dispute, Dec. 1975," Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.
[161]UFW Michigan Boycott Collection, Box 8, Folder 10, "Zionism, Union Dispute Jan. 8, 1975," Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.
[162] UFW Michigan Boycott Collection, Box 8, Folder 10, "Zionism, Union Dispute Feb. 3, 1976," Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.
[163] Bruce Neuburger, *Lettuce Wars: Ten Years of Work and struggle in the fields of California,* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2013), 216.
[164] Araiza, Lauren, *To March for Others: The Black Freedom Struggler and the United Farm Workers,* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014).

During the time the UFW was scrambling to appease the political agendas of their pro-Israeli labor and religious community supporters following the death of Nagi Daifallah, UFW attorneys and volunteers were also working with Nagi's family in Yemen to push forth the case against Sheriff Cooper. They wanted to find ways to offer financial compensation to Nagi's parents, but they succeeded little in offering tangible help toward their son's case.[165] After the fall of 1973 when Chavez issued the first statement in support of Israel, the union received a letter from Mohsin Daifallah, Nagi's father. Mohsin Daifallah reminded the UFW that his son was a victim of police brutality, but went on to praise the UFW for the case: "I am sure the laws and constitution of the United States do not permit such acts and punish those who take the law into their own hands or misuse the responsibility bestowed upon them. However, I wish to express my deepest gratitude for the Chairman and members of the UFW for all that they have done in my son's case and wish them all success in their efforts for the good of their Union."[166]

However, Mohsin Daifallah began to feel restless and frustrated with the lack of progress. The union appointed Mrs. Hanafi in Los Angeles to carry out the case on behalf of Mohsin Daifallah against Mr. Cooper for the murder of Nagi Daifallah. However, in addition to Hanafi's representation, Mohsin received letters in Yemen asking him to appoint lawyers and "also said that everything will be done for our case, in respect of the murder, and the compensation etc etc." Mohsin believed that the UFW and the lawyer who represented the case were after different things stating, "I claim for a capital punishment against the murderer, while they are after personal advantages." It was most likely because of all this confusion that Mohsin eventually applied and received an Entry Visa to enter the U.S. in July 1974. He informed the UFW that he would be coming to the U.S. to discuss the case.[167]

A few years later, while Mohsin was in California, the UFW recommended him to a new lawyer, David B. Epstein. On March 23, 1977, Epstein concluded that Nagi's case was weak and that because there were no witnesses it was difficult to prove that the injuries he inflicted were as a result of excessive force by Deputy Cooper.[168] In early April Mohsin Daifallah wrote to Chavez directly updating him on Epstein's recent analysis. Mohsin also shared with Chavez the deep financial challenges he faced since Nagi was his family's only source of income stating, "For the last three years, I have been trying to get some results concerning the death of my son Nagi. During this time, I have borrowed a large sum of money to support myself. I hope you still remember that Nagi was killed because he was fighting for the just cause of the UFW."[169] By reminding Chavez that Nagi was killed "fighting for the just cause of the UFW," Mohsin pushed the

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[165] UFW Work Department, Box 3, Folder 1, "Things to be done in connection to Nagi's Death 21 Aug. 1973," Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

[166] UFW Work Department, Box 3, Folder 1, "Letter from Mohsin Daifallah to the UFW, 2 Dec. 1973," Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

[167] UFW Work Department, Box 3, Folder 1, "Letter from Mohsin Daifallah to Frank Contana and Robert, & other members of the UFW 18 July 1974," Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

[168] "UFW Peter Velasco Records," Box 5, Folder 4, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

[169] UFW Peter Velasco Records," Box 5, Folder 4, Daifallah, Nagi 1977, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

UFW to do more than simply claim his son as a martyr of the movement. Mohsin sought justice for his son's death and needed the union's help to collect evidence to support his case. Mohsin was disappointed in Epstein's assessment and requested help from the UFW in supporting the case by providing proof that Nagi's death was a result of excessive police force.

The UFW might have been in a position to offer substantial evidence to support the case. Immediately following Nagi's death, in a document dated 10:15AM on August 15, 1973 and titled "About Nagi Befula [sic]" a woman named Liza reported that the Sherriff's department was lying to the press about Nagi's death and that his injury was not a result of falling on the pavement but from excessive force by Cooper. The report also stated that UFW attorney, Jerry Cohen decided not to allow eyewitness to speak with the Sheriff's department since it was clear the department was prepared to lie about the whole incident. Instead, Cohen reportedly called the Justice department to send an investigator to speak with the witnesses. According to Liza's report to Chavez, witnesses reported the following:

> Our witnesses basically say that the following happened: Nagi came out of a bar, slightly drunk. He threw a bottle, but he hit no one. The police were hassling some of our picket captains. Nagi ran, and Cooper ran after him. With no call or warning of any kind, Cooper slammed Nagi in the back of the head hard enough to lift Nagi off the ground, then Nagi fell. Nagi was then dragged by police by the feet to a curb and left there. A private citizen (a woman) finally called an ambulance, the Sheriffs didn't even do that.[170]

This report indicated that at the time of Nagi's death, the UFW had records documenting eye-witness accounts that reported that Nagi was hit on the head by Cooper around 12:30AM and then "dragged by police by the feet to a curb and left there." Nagi wasn't admitted to the hospital until 4:55AM after a private citizen called for an ambulance.[171] It is unclear, however, whether the union actively attempted to push Epstein to look further into the case for additional evidence. On May 18, 1977, in response to Mohsin's letter, Chavez sent a request to the National Executive Board Members requesting that the union provide Mohsin with monthly allowances.[172] Other than this request, the UFW's relationship and communication with Mohsin was limited. Three years later Mohsin wrote to Chavez stating, "…for some time I have not heard from you." Alongside the letter, Mohsin enclosed a newsletter about Nagi that was published by the Embassy of the Yemen Arab Republic. Mohsin asked that copies of the newsletters be distributed to farm workers across the state. Written in Arabic, the newsletter covers the life of Nagi in Yemen and his experiences working in the fields.[173]

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[170] UFW Work Department Collection Box 3, Folder 1, "Daifullah Nagi 1973," Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.
[171] Ibid.
[172] UFW Peter Velasco Records," Box 5, Folder 4, "Daifallah, Nagi 1977," Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.
[173] "United Farm Workers Administration Files" Box 114, Folder 3 (Acc#221). "Nagi Daifallah." Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

Chavez replied to Mohsin thanking him for the newsletter and expressing that the union had been very busy with the lettuce strikes.[174]

While the UFW struggled to offer substantial support for Mohsin and Nagi's case, they continued to acknowledge Nagi's service to the union by holding commemorative events. Yemeni workers continued to be present and involved in the UFW. That same year on Tuesday, August 17, the UFW held a memorial service in honor of both Juan De La Cruz and Nagi Daifullah. Beginning in the evening at 7:00pm, members met at the Veterans Hall in Arvin. Jim Drake, Director of the Lamont field office at the time, introduced the event. In the service program a series of Catholic and Christian based prayers were followed by readings of the Quran, most likely done by Yemeni farm workers themselves. Listed on the service are Abduh Alwadi and then Hameed Nasser Ali as both reading the Koran. The cover of the program included a sketched portrait of Nagi and a paragraph of text stating that he was an "Arab farm worker from Yemen who served as a picket captain in the Grape Strike of 1973."[175] Alongside commemorative events, in January 1978 the UFW was even planning to institute the "Nagi Daifullah Farm Workers Vacation Fund," in honor of Nagi Daifallah. However, Chavez later suggested that the name be changed to a "Christmas Bonus Plan" since the funds would be distributed during the holidays.[176]

The planned vacation initially named after Nagi Daifallah's, but changed to a "Christmas Bonus Plan," in many ways symbolized UFW's relationship with Yemenis. The UFW acknowledged the presence of Yemenis, but were unable to provide tangible assistance for them. By the early 1980s, both the hope to achieve justice for Nagi Daifallah and Yemeni involvement in the union dwindled. While the UFW continued to recognize Nagi Daifallah through commemoration, Daifallah's family never received justice. Mohsin Daifallah criticized Attorney David Epstein for not doing his job stating that Epstein advised him to either accept the settlement of $3,568.66 or find another attorney. In a letter to Chavez on December 8, 1980, Mohsin wrote, "Due to the fact that I am a poor man and did not have the money to find another lawyer, I was forced to accept my lawyer's advice…No law in the world would put the value of a 24-year-old man at $3,568.66."[177] Mohsin made plans to return to Yemen and asked Chavez for a document reporting the circumstances of Nagi's death. Mohsin stated that, "…after seven years, I am convinced that justice is unaffordable to a poor man like me."[178] In 1985, the UFW sent Mohsin a cashier's check for $2,424 to his home in Taiz, Yemen for the period

[174] United Farm Workers Administration Files" Box 114, Folder 3 (Acc#221). "Nagi Daifallah." Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.
[175] Mark Sharwood Collection, Box 1, Folder 3, "Lamont-Delano, Nagi Daifuallah/Juan de La Cruz Memorial 1977 August 16, "Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.
[176] Marshall Ganz Collection, Box 5, Folder 38, "Nagi Daifallah Farm Workers Vacation Fund Proposal, 1978," Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.
[177] United Farm Workers Administration Files" Box 114, Folder 3 (Acc#221). "Nagi Daifallah." Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.
[178] Ibid.

of January 1985 to August 1985 indicating that the union attempted to offer financial support, but there was no justice for Nagi Daifallah.[179]

Alongside the controversy over Naser's portrait, the question of Palestine, and the issue of compensation for Nagi's father, conflicts between Yemenis regarding the UFW threatened the Yemeni community's relationship with the union. Some Yemeni "crew bosses," in charge of the "Arab crews," opposed the UFW and discouraged UFW organizers from communicating with Yemeni workers.[180] One such conflict was fought out through the Agricultural Labor Relations Board (ALRB), created in 1975 to protect workers from unfair labor practices.[181]

The conflicts first occurred on April 6, 1977 when Alomari joined a discussion that a UFW organizer was having with workers in a "customary gathering place in the labor camp yard." Alomari began to argue with the organizer and then refused to leave. Alomari had another altercation on on April 29, 1977 when Alomari entered the labor camp's television room during a meeting between the UFW, which Shaibi was leading, and workers. When asked to leave the meeting, Alomari refused. Finally, on May 27, 1977 Alomari threatened a worker, Nagi Mohsin, with arrest because of Mohsin was active with the UFW.[182] After investigation, the ALRB's Administrative Law Officer (ALO) at the time, Robert LeProhn, concluded that Alomari engaged in unlawful surveillance which was in violation of Labor Code Section 1153.

By 1982, there were no Yemeni or Arab UFW organizers. In that same year, Ahmed Shaibi stopped organizing with the UFW and established the Delano chapter of the American Anti-Arab Discrimination Committee (ADC). Shaibi saw a dire need for an organization that focused on the specific needs of the Yemeni community, something the UFW was not capable of doing. Shaibi estimated that Arabs inhabited nearly 90 percent of labor camps in Delano and yet, there was nowhere they could go for social services. This was particularly challenging due to language barriers Yemeni workers faced and the lack of translators who spoke Arabic. For Shaibi, the lack of translators was a form of discrimination. In an article from the *Delano Record,* Shaibi states, "You can't find Yemenese in town. They are in the camps, in the fields, picking grapes, pruning. They don't come to town because they don't speak the language."[183] As the manager and only person working in the Delano ADC, Shaibi provided workers with a variety of services from assisting with paperwork with the Department of Motor Vehicles, welfare, immigration, and taxes. He even assisted a group of four workers who had been involved

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[179] Official Records of the President Cesar Chavez, Part 3, Folder title: "Daifallah, Mohsin." Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

[180] Growers divided groups into "crews" based on ethnicity and chose a crew boss who was in charge of the crew.

[181] The ALRB was created as a result of the passing of the Agricultural Labor Relations Act in 1975 which recognized "farm workers' rights to organize and join labor unions." According to historian Matthew Garcia, the ALRB, however, did not live up to its expectations, as it was often inefficient and not prepared to effectively handle conflicts in the fields. See Garcia, pages 122-130.

[182] "M. Caratan, INC., Respondent and United Farm Workers of America, AFL-CIO, Charging Party." State of California Agricultural Labor Relations Board. Delano, CA

[183] Philip Diehl, "Arab advocate bridges gap between cultures," 7 Dec. 1982, *Delano Record,* Delano Record Archives.

in a car accident get an insurance settlement.[184] However, the promise that the ADC had for Yemenis in the Central Valley never reached its full potential. By 1985, the same year that Palestinian American Alex Odeh, the West Coast regional director of the ADC, was murdered by a bomb planted in his Santa Ana office the ADC in Delano was defunct.[185] The closing of the Delano ADC was most likely a direct reaction of Odeh's murder, as many Yemeni and Arab American activists feared the consequences of political activism.

Conclusion

The death of Nagi Daifallah brought together Yemeni, Mexican, and Filipino communities on the basis of a shared oppression by law enforcement and agribusiness. This was one of several examples in which the possibility of the UFW achieving a multiracial movement toward social justice seemed feasible. Today, many leaders and members of the UFW continue to uphold this narrative by acknowledging how martyrs of the movement include Muslim, Catholic, and Jewish individuals.[186] In many ways the UFW served as a platform for Yemeni workers such as Saeed Mohammed and Ahmed Shaibi to express their political identities as Arabs, Muslims, and workers in the U.S. in addition to providing social, economic, and medical services. However, the presence of Yemenis alongside the portrait of Gamal Abdel Nasser also challenged the possibility of a multiracial movement. Nasser's portrait radicalized Yemeni workers in a way that connected their identities as farm workers in California with the experiences of living within a diaspora of empire. It was clear that while the UFW absorbed Yemenis into the movement following Nagi's death, they were not prepared to face the politics of empire, particularly in regard to Palestine. Following Daifallah's death, Chavez's continuous support for Israel demonstrated that the UFW was unable to follow in example of other organizations at the time, such as the Black Panther Party, and that their definition of social justice relied upon accommodations of empire. The UFW included Yemenis and celebrated Nagi Daifallah when it was politically convenient and chose to step away and disassociate when it threatened their political alliances.

The majority of Yemenis who worked as agricultural laborers in the 1960s and 1970s ultimately left the fields for other jobs. By the 1980s many of them found occupations in major California cities such as San Francisco as janitors, opened small businesses, or returned to Yemen. The history of Yemenis in the UFW demonstrates that fights for social justice are messy and politics of solidarity between communities are complicated. While involvement in the UFW was short lived and there was no justice for Nagi, Yemenis continued to use labor organizing beyond the UFW as a mechanism to connect and critique local challenges with global injustices.

Yet, the fight for justice was not confined to California. Yemeni auto workers in Dearborn, Michigan organized a march for Nagi Daifallah and highlighted the connections between these diasporic communities. Like farm workers in California, Yemeni auto workers in Michigan the 1970s faced similar challenges including

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[184] Ibid.

[185] Delinda C. Hanley. "Arab Americans Demand Answers in 1985 Slaying of Alex Odeh," *The Washington Report on Middle East Affairs,* Vol. 32.9, Dec. 2013

navigating shifting union politics that coincided with U.S. empire and imperialism. The next chapter explores the experiences of auto workers in Dearborn and Detroit Michigan and the challenges they faced with the United Auto Workers Union (UAW) and anti-Arab racism in the workplace.

CHAPTER THREE:

Yemeni Autoworkers and the Fight Against U.S. Imperialism and Anti-Arab Racism

In 1928, Henry Ford officially completed construction of the massive Ford River Rouge Complex in Dearborn, Michigan, making it the largest factory in the world at that time. Throughout the first half of the twentieth century Ford, alongside his competitors, General Motors and Chrysler, known as the "Big Three" auto companies, dominated and transformed the political and economic landscape of Detroit and its surrounding cities. The auto industry came to define many aspects of life for people living in the Detroit metropolitan region from who they worked for to where they lived. The booming industry also invited migrants from not just around the country, but around the world. Beginning in the early twentieth century, immigrant communities mostly from southern and eastern Europe and some Arab immigrants from the Ottoman province of Syria, quickly populated the neighborhoods surrounding auto factories.[187] Additionally, during the Great Migration which began in 1916, tens of thousands of black southern migrants moved to northern cities, including Detroit. All of these groups came to Detroit for one reason: in search of employment opportunities in one of the nation's fastest growing industries.

During this time, a story is often told in the Arab American community about a Yemeni sailor from Aden working as a merchant marine on Michigan's Great Lakes, who in the early 1900s personally met Henry Ford. This rare encounter is said to have started a migration of Yemenis to Michigan to work in the auto factories. Some say that Henry Ford personally sent a ship to Yemen to bring workers. While this story rests on word of mouth and no material evidence of such a ship has been made, it is clear that Ford saw value in Yemeni workers. From one of the most impoverished countries in the world, Yemenis had a reputation for being hard working. Even more valuable to Ford, perhaps, was the fact that their lack of English inhibited them from understanding the unions, particularly at a time when labor unions were beginning to infiltrate the factories.[188] Throughout the late 1920s, Ford's River Rouge factory became an important location for organizing led by the Congress of Industrial Workers (CIO) and the American Communist Party. Specifically, Southeast Dearborn, known commonly as the "Southend" and home to many of the workers at the Ford River Rouge, was regarded as a national organizing center by the Communist Party and the Socialist Labor Party. [189] Ultimately in 1935, the United Automobile Workers union (UAW) was officially established and union members worked to organize the factories that for far too long were left unprotected from the overpowering leadership of automobile moguls like Henry Ford.

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[187] Karen Rignall, "Building the Infrastructure of Arab American Identity in Detroit," *Arab Detroit: From Margin to Mainstream* (Wayne State University Press, 2000), 51

[188] Rosina J. Hassoun, *Arab Americans in Michigan*. (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2005), 1-2.

[189] Ismael Ahmed, "Organizing an Arab Worker's Caucus," *Middle East Research and Information Project,* no. 34 (Jan. 1975): 18.

While only a small number of Yemeni immigrants were in the Detroit region during these early years of labor organizing, by the mid-1960s and early 1970s, they constituted a large portion of the city's workforce. With the establishment of a stronger Yemeni community, Henry Ford's plan to hire docile workers who would keep faith in the company and steer clear of the unions failed. By the 1960s and 1970s, Yemeni auto workers, continuously facing discrimination in the workplace, joined the UAW, organized, and demanded better rights. But, much like black auto workers before them, Yemenis and other Arabs grew increasingly frustrated with the union's inability to address the issues most pertinent to them. By foregrounding the historical experiences of Yemeni auto workers in the Detroit metropolitan region during the 1970s, this chapter seeks to interrogate the tensions that arose within the UAW and the ways in which the Yemeni community mobilized to address them.

While the history of Arab Detroit has been closely linked with the rise of the "Big Three" auto companies (Ford, General Motors, and Chrysler), Arab immigrants had been living in the Michigan long before the consolidation of the auto industry in the twentieth century. Beginning in the 1870s, some of the earliest Arab immigrants in Detroit included individuals from Mount Lebanon in the Ottoman province of Syria, the region that became Lebanon in 1943. The majority of these immigrants were single men who made a living selling merchandise from suitcases and traveling from city to city throughout the Midwest. Those that were successful, moved to metropolitan cities like Detroit and Chicago and brought in their relatives.[190] In Detroit, Arab neighborhoods were situated near major auto plants in Highland Park, Hamtramck, and near the Jefferson Avenue Chrysler plant on Detroit's east side.[191] In the early 1900s, many Arabs found work in the Ford Model A facilities in Highland Park. By 1928, however, when Ford announced he would be moving the Highland Park facilities to Fordson (Dearborn), many of them moved to work in the newly established Ford River Rouge Complex. The world's largest factory at the time, the River Rogue Plant, which overshadowed the city of Dearborn, a city southwest of Detroit, became the capital of Henry Ford's company, specializing in the full production of cars and employed over ninety thousand workers.[192] The majority of these employees, many of them European or Lebanese immigrants, found residence in surrounding neighborhoods, which became known as the "Southend."

The Southend was a highly industrial area physically separated from the rest of Dearborn by factories, railroads, and a large cemetery. In the Southend, the neighborhood consisted of "row houses constructed by Ford" where the auto workers, many of them immigrants from southern and central Europe, lived. By the early 1950s to mid-1960s, larger numbers of Yemeni immigrants moved to the Southend where Arabs constituted about half of the neighborhood's five thousand population.[193] Nearly all of the Yemenis in the Southend were young, single men who immigrated to the U.S. to financially support their families back home.[194] Since many Yemeni men came without their

[190] Karen Rignall, "Building the Infrastructure of Arab American Identity in Detroit," 51
[191] Ibid, 52
[192] Ibid, 51
[193] Pamela Pennock, *The rise of the Arab American left: activists, allies, and their fight against imperialism and racism, 1960s-1980s*, (University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 169.
[194] Nabeel Abraham, "Detroit's Yemeni Workers," *Middle East Research and Information Project,* no. 57 (May, 1977): 4.

families, they usually found housing with other single men in apartments or rentals. The Yemeni community in the Southend stood out for a variety of reasons, but most notable was the fact that they were overwhelmingly Muslim and working class. This set them apart from earlier Arab immigrants who were majority Christian and had social capital through access to higher education. Yemenis were racialized through both their religion and class in ways that previous Arab immigrants had not. Unable to "pass" as white, Yemenis faced systemic racism in the workplace and in the various institutions they interacted with, making them one of the most vulnerable groups within the Arab community in the Detroit area at this time. In many ways, the experiences of working class Yemenis were similar to those of black auto workers.

Historians have demonstrated the ways in which Detroit post-WWII collectively organized to resist the black population by redrawing the city's racial boundaries and perpetuating racial inequality.[195] This was a direct response to the growing black community in the auto industry as a result of the employment opportunities beginning in the 1920s by Henry Ford. Unlike surrounding auto factories, Ford did not engage in employment discrimination, but in fact encouraged the hiring of black workers. Economic historians have argued that this was a reflection of Henry Ford's obsession with controlling his workforce and that he "took advantage of his rivals' decision to exclude black workers and effectively used their discriminatory practices to tap a large and dependent pool of workers."[196] By the beginning of World War II, over 17,653 African Americans were employed by Ford, and by 1941, black workers represented 21 percent of all Ford employees which amounted to half of Detroit's black wage earners.[197] The city of Detroit responded to the growth of the black community by enforcing a series of policies that created "isolated urban ghettos" in order to ensure residential segregation.[198] Similarly, when the Arab and Yemeni community in Dearborn grew, the city responded with new plans to isolate them from white neighborhoods.

During the same time that Yemenis began to arrive in Dearborn, the city initiated a series of urban renewal plans to further industrialize the Southend. As the Southend grew increasingly diverse with more Arab residents, concerns about the neighborhood's future and value grew amongst the white community. Mayor Orville Hubbard, who made known that he thought Dearborn was a "white man's town," spearheaded efforts to destroy the Southend.[199] In September 1948, a proposed housing development plan for Dearborn was strongly opposed by Mayor Orville L. Hubbard who was concerned over "undesirable renters." The proposal came from the John Hancock Mutual Life Insurance company and included a 30 to 60-year development in which Hancock would pay Ford motor company $10,000,000 to $12,000,000 for land to build houses. At a special city council meeting, Mayor Hubbard told Hancock that Dearborn was a "home owners city,"

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[195] Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit,* (Princeton University Press, 1996), 12.
[196] David M. Lewis-Colman, *Race Against Liberalism: Black Workers and the UAW in Detroit,* (University of Illinois Press, 2008), 6.
[197] Lewis-Colman, 5.
[198] Sugrue, 8
[199] Dan Georgakas, "Arab Workers in Detroit," *Middle East Research and Information Project.* No. 34 (Jan. 1975): 15.

and that while he was an advocate of privately owned homes, there was "no way of being assured that the project would not bring undesirable renters."[200] Although not explicitly stated, Hubbard's "undesirable renters" referred to racialized communities in the Southend. While the plan would have economically benefitted the city with Hancock's multi-million-dollar investment, Mayor Hubbard's anxieties over communities of color and their threat to the purity of Dearborn's white neighborhoods overpowered.

Throughout the 1950s, Mayor Hubbard continued to implement urban renewal plans for the Southend. Despite Hubbard stating that Dearborn was a "home owners' city," one of the initiatives he pushed forth included a city plan to rezone the Southend from residential to industrial use. By 1953, the Dearborn City Planning Commission was formed to officially reevaluate the use of the Southend as a residential space with the mission to transform the region into one for heavy industry.[201] Under Mayor Hubbard's plans, hundreds of homes and dozens of shops and religious centers would have been destroyed and replaced by factories operated by Ford and other industries. By 1968, nearly 200 families were displaced as a result of losing their homes to the city.[202] Throughout the early 1970s, urban renewal plans in Southend that began in the 1950s were further fueled by the continued growth of a Yemeni community. Don Unis, a Southend resident and third generation Lebanese immigrant recalled, "They wanted us out because you know what was coming after those Lebanese Arabs? Those Desert-Nigger Yemeni Arabs. I mean they would tell me, 'Donny, you're okay, it's those Yemenis."[203]

In response to the city's plans, Southend residents formed the Southeast Dearborn Community Council (SEDCC). The council's main objective was stopping the city's devaluation and destruction of homes. On Friday September 17, 1971, members and supporters of the council gathered at a house in Salina, a small neighborhood in Dearborn where nearly half of the 5,500 residents were Arab.[204] On Wednesday, earlier that week, the city signed papers officially buying the property at 2917 Salina and the house was scheduled to be demolished. The next day, protestors formed a picket line around the house. On Friday morning nearly 50 protestors, continuing the picket line, sang songs like "We Shall Not be Moved", and carried signs that read, "Save Our Homes," "Don't Tear Down Good Houses," and "Help." By the afternoon, however, when the bulldozers arrived, protestors watched as the house was demolished.[205]

Eager to take larger action, the council decided to file a lawsuit against the city. In 1971, the SEDCC, represented by the Center for Urban Law and Housing, a division of Wayne County Neighborhood Legal Services, brought their classification suit against the city. The council represented Salina residents as well as the Eugene Porath neighborhood, a mostly Polish community.[206] Many of the organizers involved in organizing the lawsuit

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[200] "Dearborn Housing Project Opposed," *Lansing State Journal,* Sept. 30, 1948.
[201] Barbara Aswad, "The Southeast Dearborn Arab Community," in *Arabic Speaking Communities in American Cities,* (Center for Migration Studies in New York, 1974): 70
[202] Pennock, 170
[203] Pennock, 171
[204] "Urban Renewal Halts in Dearborn," *Detroit Free Press,* March 16, 1972
[205] Judith Frutig, "Bitter Dearbornites Lose Their Fight to Save a House," *Detroit Free Press,* September 18, 1971.
[206] Urban Renewal Halts in Dearborn," *Detroit Free Press,* March 16, 1972

were second-generation residents from Lebanon and a few Arab students from Wayne State University. While working-class Yemenis in the Southend were amongst those most affected by the city's urban renewal plans, they were rarely involved with the council. Many have attributed this to passivity or docility on the part of Yemenis.[207]According to Pamela Pennock, "The most recent immigrants, especially Yemenis, lived in the southern part of the neighborhood and were scarcely involved in the struggle against the city's project." However, as demolitions continued to move to the middle of the neighborhood where more Yemenis resided, more participated in the actions and demonstrations.[208]

On Wednesday March 15, 1972, Judge Ralph M. Freeman officially ordered Dearborn to delay its urban renewal plans in, what the case referred, two "ethnically unique" neighborhoods in the southeast side. In his ruling, Judge Freeman prohibited the city from buying or offering to buy any further homes. Additionally, the city could not demolish any of the home they already owned unless they could prove health and safety. Lastly, Freeman prohibited the city from rezoning residential areas to industrial zones.[209]

By August of 1973, the SEDCC's case endured a seven-week trial and ended with U.S. District Court judge Ralph Freeman ruling in favor of the Southend residents.[210] Community council was represented by Arab American attorney Abdeen Jabara and by the Center of Urban Law and Housing at the University of Detroit law school. Despite the victory, Abdeen Jabara expressed that, "It wasn't won on community rights, but on the constitutional principle of due process of law to protect the taking of private property."[211] In addition, the Southend faced severe environmental concerns with constant air pollution. In the early 1970s, a report conducted by the Wayne County Anti-Pollution Division of the Wayne County Health Department found that the "level of fallout of the suspended particulate matter spewed into the air" from the River Rogue at 220 tons per square mile each year.[212]

Alongside the fight against urban renewal and residential segregation, the auto industry presented another set of institutional obstacles for the Yemeni community who found employment in the surrounding factories. In particular, the evolving politics of the UAW pacified the union, making the workers more vulnerable to oppressive working conditions. While black workers had previously placed their allegiance in the companies they worked for such as Ford, the precarity caused by the Great Depression, led many black workers to join the United Auto Workers Union (UAW) which in 1941, managed to organize Ford.[213] As members of the UAW, black workers organized to establish the Fair Practices Department and resisted racist employment legislation on both city and state levels.[214] However, by the end of WWII, the post-war decades pushed the auto industry to strike deals with the UAW. As a result, the UAW cooperated more with the companies and lost its radical grassroots approach which particularly affected workers of

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[207] Pennock 171
[208] Pennock, 171
[209] "Urban Renewal Halts in Dearborn," *Detroit Free Press,* March 16, 1972
[210] Pennock, 178 (CHECK DATE ON THIS, was it February?)
[211] Dan Georgakas, 15
[212] Barbara Aswad, 54
[213] Lewis Coleman, 9; (UAW was established in May 1935)
[214] Lewis-Coleman, 30-31

color.[215] One of the major ways this was reflected was with the lack of representation within union leadership. Over 30 percent of the UAW membership was black, but only two black members, Nelson Jack Edwards and Marcellius Ivory, served on the twenty-six-person executive board. UAW President Walter Reuther and Vice President Leonard Woodcock had previously been in the Socialist Party, but had now distanced themselves from the political left by purging any Communist Party supporters from the union. While President Reuther enjoyed being associated with and taking photos with civil rights leaders including Martin Luther King and Cesar Chavez, the UAW did little to combat racism in the factories.[216]

By the 1960s, black workers, continuously facing discrimination, became frustrated with the UAW who they now saw as part of the problem. The rise of black-power movements amongst black workers in Detroit helped to establish one of the first Revolutionary Union Movements at the Chrysler Dodge Main plant, where 60 percent of the workers were black. Chrysler Dodge Main employed the majority of black autoworkers in Detroit. At the time, Chrysler Corporation was Detroit's largest taxpayer and was the seventh largest corporation in the country.[217] Nearly all of the foremen, superintendents, and skilled tradesmen were white. Black workers, on the other hand, purposefully got the most physically exhausting and dangerous jobs. Located in Hamtramck, a mostly white-Polish city surrounded by Detroit, Dodge Main was the site for several wildcat strikes in 1967 and 1968. On May 2, 1968, a wildcat took place led by a Polish woman named Helen Demski who was joined by black activists such as General Baker who stood with the women in solidarity. After the strike, the company, clearly motivated by racist bias, discharged and suspended mostly black workers involved with the strike. The aftermath of this wildcat led to the establishment of the Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement (DRUM).[218] DRUM sought to address the challenges of black workers, a task that the UAW continuously failed to do.

As a result of activism amongst black auto workers, Chrysler made a conscious effort to employ Arab workers who considered more docile. Like Ford, auto companies, offered employment to Yemeni men, whom they believed would be easier to control. There also emerged a corrupt practice in which influential foreman or company officials accepted bribes of up to $500 from newly arrived Arabs looking for work. After receiving his payment, the official wrote a special letter of introduction which allowed the individual to be hired in preference to other workers. This act of bribery and corruption on the part of management, allowed many Yemenis to get jobs in an industry without speaking English, which would have otherwise been very difficult.[219]

The increased employment and continued bribery was a direct response to the organizing conducted by black workers resisting against unfair working conditions in the plants. [220] In 1968, there were about 500 Arab workers at Dodge Main. By 1974, following DRUM's wildcat and continued growth, the number of Arabs at Dodge Main

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[215] Georgakas, 13
[216] Georgakas, 14
[217] Dan Georgkas, "Arab Workers in Detroit"
[218] Ibid, 97-98
[219] Ismael Ahmed, 18
[220] Ismael Ahmed, 197

increased to 2,000.[221] On February 29, 1972 SPARK, a radical worker's caucus at Dodge Main, put out a bulletin which stated: "Chrysler has a new version of an old trick up their sleeves. In the last years' time, they have hired a good many Arab workers. This was done for one reason—Chrysler figures that Arab workers in this country are now in a position that makes it hard to fight back. They are new to the country so that many people are unsure what few rights they do have. There is always the possibility of being deported. People are trying hard to save as much money as possible in order to bring their family here. And until a person learns English he may not know what is happening around him—and he will find it hard to complain. Finally, Chrysler figures that no one else will try to help an Arab worker when Chrysler attacks him."[222]

The SPARK bulletin goes on to state that foremen would tell Arab workers to do more work than their jobs originally intended. As a result, this "extra work" would be added to the job position and expected of everyone else in that role. Many Arabs were kept on the job as "floaters" who despite their seniority, were continuously assigned the worst job. SPARK points out that this was the "same kind of shit they pulled for years with black people." In order to prevent solidarity across racial lines, Chrysler manipulated employment practices to give preference to white workers. Black workers were routinely given jobs in the foundry which entailed the most labor working in very hot, dirty, and usually unsafe conditions that required heavy lifting. Many black workers avoided complaining to the company, which typically resulted in getting fired for bad "attitude." According to SPARK, Chrysler repeated these actions toward Arabs workers in hopes of turning black and Arab workers against one another.[223]

Many workers started to feel disillusioned by the promise of the auto industry, including the unions, and were forced to turn to government assistance and local organizations for help. One such organization was the International Institute (II), which was established in Detroit and specialized in assisting immigrant communities in the area. Dated January 11, 1971, on II report documents the experiences of a 19-year-old farm worker from Yemen referred to as "Mr. M" who had arrived in the U.S. on January 20, 1969. Mr. M first found work in California where he joined his father who worked for the Contandia Foods Company in Modesto. However, Mr. M quickly became frustrated with the low $2.75/hour wages and decided to move to Detroit where he heard offered high paying jobs in the auto industry. Mr. M took all of his savings and purchased a bus ticket to Michigan only to arrive to a declining economy that shook the auto industry. In the report Mr. M asks, "Why doesn't the government find us [a] job?"[224] In 1971, the International Institute reported that 69 percent of Yemenis who sought assistance from them were unemployed workers seeking jobs.[225]

During the late 1960s and early 1970s several Arab and Arab American organizations came to establishment, which was a result of the community's

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[221] Dan Georgakas, *Arabs in America: Myths and Realities,* (Medina University Press International, 1975), *188*

[222] Dan Georgakas, *Arabs in America: Myths and Realities,* 189

[223] Dan Georgakas, 14

[224] Nabeel Abraham, "Detroit's Yemeni Workers," *Middle East Research and Information Project,* no. 57 (May, 1977), 6

[225] Ibid, 6

politicization following the 1967 Arab-Israeli war. The Arab community became radicalized post-1967 and engaged in more Palestinian resistance movements. Among these organizations was the Organization of Arab Students, the Arab American University Graduates, the United Holy Land Fund and the Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services (ACCESS).[226] Additionally, older Yemeni immigrants established the Yemeni Arab Association (YAA), which began in 1967 and sought to address the needs of Yemeni immigrants in Dearborn.[227] Although led by the older generation of immigrants, the membership was predominantly recent Yemeni immigrants who had lived through the various revolutionary movements in North and South Yemen during the 1960s and 1970s. As a result, divides emerged between South Yemenis, who supported the left-wing communist National Liberation Front (NLF), and North Yemenis who opposed the NLF.[228] Yemeni leftists began to form alliances with fellow Palestinian immigrants in the Detroit region who shared a common interest in leftist political ideologies.

Alongside support committees for several Palestinian organizations, Yemenis became involved in the establishment of the Committee to Support the Omani Revolution (CSOR) in 1972. Palestinian and Yemeni leftists in Detroit united to form this committee with the objectives of raising awareness about the Omani revolution. Organizers also secretly hoped that the committee would grow into an Arab workers' organization. During the meetings, which were well attended by Yemeni autoworkers, organizers introduced work-related issues and connected them to the cause of the Omani revolution.[229] The committee reached up to 200 members.[230] While the committee dissolved only after a few months as a result of conflicting political views within the group, the goals of establishing an Arab workers' organization remained on the agenda.[231] The death of Yemeni farm worker Nagi Daifallah in California, discussed in the previous chapter, would be one of the many events that pushed workers to form an Arab workers' organization.

Almost two weeks after farm workers in California marched to mourn the death of Nagi Daifallah, auto workers in Dearborn, Michigan marched as well in solidarity with their fallen brother on the west coast. On Sunday August 26, 1973 an estimated 300 Arabs, many of them Yemenis, marched in a memorial service to honor Daifallah.[232] The march began on Salina and Dix street near the massive Ford Rouge plant, where many of the Yemeni marchers were employed, and ended a few blocks away from the local mosque where the services were held. Alongside the Yemeni community, UFW supporters of the Detroit area grape and lettuce boycott attended as an act of solidarity

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[226] Ismael Ahmed, 19
[227] Nabeel Abraham, "National and Local Politics: A Study of Political Conflict in the Yemeni Immigrant Community of Detroit, Michigan." (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 1978), 118.
[228] Ibid, 119
[229] Ibid, 130
[230] Ismael Ahmed, 19
[231] Nabeel Abraham, "National and Local Politics: A Study of Political Conflict in the Yemeni Immigrant Community of Detroit, Michigan," 131.
[232] "Arabs Hold March in Dearborn," *Detroit Free Press,* August 27, 1973, 3-A.

with the union and in support of Richard Chavez's call that previous Monday for Detroiters to join in a nationwide fast memorializing Daifallah.[233]

For many of these UFW supporters in Dearborn and across the nation, the news of Nagi Daifallah's death was not only the first they had ever heard of the presence of Yemeni farm workers in California, but a shocking revelation of the violence within agribusiness. However, for Yemenis in Dearborn, many of whom either worked in California's fields and vineyards prior to moving to Michigan, or had friends and family there, the reality of police violence and oppressive working conditions for farm workers came to no surprise. Nonetheless, Daifallah's death did send shock waves across Dearborn's Yemeni community, prompting many to seriously question their rights in this country. Those working in the auto industry became critical of not only their conditions as auto workers in terms of wages and opportunities, but the auto industry's role in upholding U.S. imperialism in the Middle East as well. Particularly, Yemeni and other Arab community members attending the march for Daifallah, started to question the United Auto Workers (UAW) support for the state of Israel through the purchasing of Israeli bonds. The Israeli bonds issue would be one of many issues that the Yemeni community fought against throughout the 1970s.

During this time, the Yemeni community's fight for social justice connected the struggles immigrants and workers in the diaspora endured in the auto industry with global politics of empire. As wars and political developments unfolded in the Middle East, the 1970s marked a new decade for Arab activism in the U.S. On October 6, 1973, a coalition of Arab states led by Egypt and Syria launched attacks on the Israeli military to gain back territories that had been occupied by Israel since the end of the Six-Day War of 1967. This move marked the beginning of what would come to be known as the "October War," a military battle between Israel and surrounding Arab states that lasted from October 6 to October 25, 1973. While the Arab world celebrated some of the early successes in the conflict, Israel, backed by the U.S., ultimately left victorious. With official ceasefires at the end of October in effect, all sides were left to pick up the pieces in the aftermath of another violent war.

Throughout that month, Arab communities in the diaspora watched from their televisions as the Arab-Israeli war played out. Many Arabs in the U.S. grew increasingly frustrated with the American media, whom they believed unfairly reported biased views of the Middle East. During the October War, the Detroit metropolitan region, emerged as a major site for Arab communities engaging in political activism. With the establishment of organizations such as the American Arab Coordinating Committee (AACC) and the Arab Mobilization Committee (AMC), the immigrant community in Dearborn's "Southend" had acquired the platform to organize on issues they felt were not being addressed, namely U.S. imperialism in the Middle East. These Arab American organizers, many of them college students inspired by other third world leftist activism at the time, attempted to mobilize the Yemeni community in support of Middle Eastern political or humanitarian causes. Following the October War, a series of demonstrations and campaigns led by local Arab political organizations took place. The Detroit auto industry became a platform for Arab community organizers to mobilize workers in large

[233] "Chavez's Brother Asks Detroit for Aid," *Detroit Free Press,* August 21, 1973, 12-C.

numbers. Arab organizers drew connections between U.S. imperialism abroad with anti-Arab racism facing auto workers in Detroit.

As Nabeel Abraham stated, "The October War set in motion a wave of Arab nationalist activity unparalleled in the history of the immigrant community."[234] The October War of 1973 began on October 6 when Egyptian and Syrian militaries led an attack to reclaim Israeli occupied land. This had a profound impact on the Arab community in the Detroit area. Arab Americans in the Southend of Detroit formed the American Arab Coordinating Committee (AACC), many of whom were members of ACCESS. The Arab Mobilization Committee (AMC), which was a sub-committee of the AACC, staged demonstrations in the community and teach-ins at Wayne State University to raise awareness about Israeli occupation in Palestine. ACCESS activists opened an office for the AMC in the Southend, which became an important space with the growing numbers of a large working-class Yemeni community. After the October War, the AMC office in the Southend became the "headquarters for the Arab nationalist activities that swept the community."[235] Alongside nationalist politics, organizers became increasingly concerned with labor and union issues surrounding the local auto industry. Like black auto workers, Arabs in the community became disillusioned by the UAW's growing allegiance to auto companies. Rather than protecting them, workers of color felt that the union only catered to the needs of auto companies and white workers.

The AMC staged their first demonstration on October 14, 1973 where 2,000 Arab autoworkers, the majority of whom were Yemeni, and community members came out to show support. The demonstration began outside of the UAW Local 600 headquarters (Ford Rouge union hall) to protest the union's investment in Israeli bonds. From the Local 600 office, protestors marched to the Islamic Mosque nearby which held a fundraiser for victims of the war. Throughout the speeches, speakers drew connections between the war and the corporate greed of the "Big Three" auto companies.[236] Speakers urged the U.S. government to "remain neutral" and "not cause another Vietnam" by providing military support to Israel.[237] Protestors held signs reading "No Vietnam in the Middle East" and "US out of the Middle East." The organizers pledged to raise one million dollars and one hundred pints of blood in support of victims of war.[238] Speakers at the event accused U.S. newspapers and media of inaccurately reporting on the Middle East. By the end of the demonstration, they had collected $23,000 worth of donations, the majority of which was from Yemeni workers who had attended. In fact, many Yemenis were reported to "have signed over their entire pay-checks to the fundraising drive."[239] In the weeks to come, however, those donations would become a site of contestation when Yemenis accused the group of misusing those donations.[240]

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[234] Nabeel Abraham, "National and Local Politics: A Study of Political Conflict in the Yemeni Immigrant Community of Detroit, Michigan," 132
[235] Ibid, 133
[236] Ibid, 133
[237] "City Arabs Pledge Support," *Detroit Free Press,* October 15, 1973, 56 (12-D).
[238] "City Arabs Pledge Support," *Detroit Free Press,* October 15, 1973, 56 (12-D).
[239] Nabeel Abraham, "National and Local Politics: A Study of Political Conflict in the Yemeni Immigrant Community of Detroit, Michigan," 133-134
[240] Ibid, 134.

Following the event, news outlets reported the rally as a protest against war in the Middle East and U.S. imperial efforts in the region The *Detroit Free Press* stated that speakers believed "most Americans don't understand that the Arabs are trying to regain land given to the Jews by the British and the UN in 1948, and other territory taken by the Jews during the 1967 six-day war."[241] However, what news outlets failed to fully comprehend, was that the demonstration served as an impetus for the creation of an Arab workers organization that protected the interests of Arabs not only in the Middle East, but the U.S. as well. After all, it was no coincidence that the demonstration began outside the UAW Local 600 headquarters. The AMC demonstration was a big success, but what was perhaps more important than the event itself was that it provided the opportunity for community organizers and workers to start organizing around the UAW Israeli bonds issue, a conversation that began after Nagi Daifallah's death, but hadn't evolved into direct action.[242]

After the October 14 rally, organizers created a petition that was circulated amongst auto workers to create the Arab Workers Caucus (AWC) and a meeting was held soon after in which 70 delegates, representing every auto plant in Detroit, attended.[243] At the meeting, three major items were discussed: to officially create an Arab Workers Caucus, to plan a day of religious mourning for the victims of the October War, and lastly to organize a protest against UAW President Leonard Woodcock who was receiving a humanitarian award from B'nai B'rith, an Israel advocacy group founded in the U.S in 1873.[244] According to Ismael Ahmed, "The newly formed caucus wanted to point out the hypocrisy of this leader who would force his constituency to finance the murder of their brothers and sisters back home with their union dues."[245] The American Arab Coordinating Committee (AACC) planned for a demonstration to be held on the evening of November 28 in Downtown Detroit outside of Cobo Hall, where the awards banquet for Woodcock would be taking place. A call to action published in the *Detroit Free Press* announced that "rank and file union members and their supporters are called on to participate in a peaceful assembly to protest this arbitrary purchase by the UAW of Israeli bonds on the occasion of an award ceremony for UAW President Leonard Woodcock."[246] Organizers distributed over 70,000 leaflets printed in Arabic and English calling on people to attend the demonstration, and Arab radio stations joined in to help pass the word. The AWC did not explicitly call for a work stoppage by Arab workers in any of their public announcements, but with the support of local religious leaders, called for a "mass memorial service" to "honor their lost brothers, and children in the Middle East."[247] Local religious leaders declared November 28 as a day of mourning for victims

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[241] "City Arabs Pledge Support," *Detroit Free Press,* October 15, 1973, 56 (12-D).
[242] Nabeel Abraham, "National and Local Politics: A Study of Political Conflict in the Yemeni Immigrant Community of Detroit, Michigan," 133
[243] Ismael Ahmed, "Organizing an Arab Workers Caucus," 19.
[244] http://www.bnaibrith.org
[245] Ismael Ahmed, 19
[246] "Is the UAW Leadership Acting in the Interests of its Members," *Detroit Free Press,* November 28, 1973, 53 (7-D).
[247] Nabeel Abraham, "National and Local Politics: A Study of Political Conflict in the Yemeni Immigrant Community of Detroit, Michigan," 174

of the war and wrote absence excuses for many workers who planned to attend.[248] The religious absent note would help to protect some workers from retaliation from their employers, although that wasn't the case for everyone.

On the day of the event, Arab high school students stood outside of the plant gates encouraging auto workers to turn back and join the demonstration.[249] Nearly 2,000 Arab auto workers left their jobs that day to join the protest. The majority of them were Yemeni workers at the Dodge Main Gear and Axle plant in Hamtramck. As a result, one of the assembly lines at Dodge Main was completely shut down while other the line was slowed-down due to lack of workers. This had been the first successful strike since the wildcatting of 1968-70 that had been organized by black workers.[250] Ismael Ahmed wrote, "This was the first and most successful action of the Caucus." Nabeel Abraham wrote that "this daring act succeeded only because the Yemeni workers employed at the plant supported the AWC's call for a work stoppage by not going to work."[251]

While the demonstration and shut down of the Dodge Main assembly line caught the attention of the community, the UAW, and auto companies, the workers who left the assembly lines would be the ones to face the consequences of the AWC's first successful campaign. Yemeni workers in particular faced disciplinary notices from their jobs and some were even laid off. Many of the workers with Ford received holiday pay if they presented a note from their mosques excusing their absence for a day of religious mourning, while others were given warning slips. However, hundreds of mostly Yemeni workers at Dodge Main received lay-off notices with the UAW doing little to intervene. [252] In fact, the UAW criticized the AWC and insinuated that the Communist Party was behind the Woodcock protest.[253] In the next issue of *Solidarity,* the union's newsletter, Secretary Treasurer Emil Mazey publicly accused demonstrators of being communists and stated that "…one can find members of the U.S. Communist Party—who still slavishly follow Soviet policy—agitating among union members of Arab descent in an effort to alienate them from their non-Arab union brothers and sisters.[254] This was of course ironic, given the fact that the very history of the UAW's establishment had been one of union organizers fighting off accusations of communist activities.

According to Abdeen Jabara, union officials even pressured workers to sign papers stating that "the reason for their absenteeism was to engage in a protest march for which the workers could be discharged." The union failed to get signatures and eventually stopped trying. While the UAW dropped their attempts to fire those who attended the Woodcock protest, Dodge Main issued about 500 disciplinary notices to the Arab workers who missed work on the day of the demonstration. Many of the works who

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[248] Ismael Ahmed, 19; Pamela Pennock, 185: "On ACCESS letterhead, letters from the American Arab Coordinating Committee, cosigned by eight Christian and Muslim clerics, were sent to nearby UAW locals requesting their endorsement and protection of the Arab workers' absence from work on the 'day of remembrance.'"
[249] Ismael Ahmed, 20
[250] Dan Georgakas, 16; Nabeel Abraham, 174.
[251] Nabeel Abraham, 135- 136
[252] Ismael Ahmed, 20
[253] Nabeel Abraham, 135
[254] Nabeel Abraham, 174 (quoted in anonymous, 1973) & Dan Georgakas also says Mazey accused of communists.

had not completed their 90-day probationary period were laid off. Some estimated that somewhere between 70-100 Yemenis at Dodge Main were affected by the lay-offs.[255]

While the timing of the lay-offs is questionable, it would be difficult to prove that Chrysler and the UAW were punishing Arab workers for their activism, as lay-offs in the Detroit auto industry, by the end of 1973, had been extremely common due to the "energy crisis." Nevertheless, these lay-offs made many Yemenis resentful of not only the companies they worked for, but of the AWC organizers whose livelihood wasn't sacrificed as a result of the Woodcock protest. From then on, many of those who had supported or participated in the demonstrations following the October War were now apprehensive about any type of activism, in fear of losing their only source of income.

The history of the October War activism and the Arab Worker's Caucus demonstrates the anti-imperialist organizing that swept the Arab community and the auto industry. However, this history alone obscures the local challenges that faced Yemenis at the time, most notably the threat of anti-Arab racism both within and outside the auto industry. In the early summer of 1976, the Yemeni community in the Southend of Dearborn faced a wave of violence from neighboring white communities including verbal assaults on the street to attacks on their homes and businesses. Beginning in the 1920s, many whites migrated from the South to find work in the Detroit area auto industry. They eventually settled in neighborhoods in Dearborn. By the mid-1960s and early 1970s, those same neighborhoods now included a growing Yemeni community, the majority of whom were young men working in the factories. Growing racial hostility had been brewing for years, but the killings of Saleh Nagi Shabain and Ali Shebrin El-Shamman in 1976 were the most shocking acts of violence that summer. Beyond sending fear across Yemeni working-class communities, the two murders also revealed the racial bias of the Dearborn Police Department and local press.

Sometime in the middle of May, Saleh Nagi Shahbain was killed while on his way to work. The suspect, who killed Saleh with a shotgun, was never identified by the police. A few weeks later on the morning of June 5, Ali Shebrin was also killed by a shot gun while on his way to work. The suspects emptied Ali's pockets taking his wallet and alien registration card, leaving only $2 and a "scrap of bread." In both murders, the police did not classify them as hate crimes or being racially motivated, despite statements among community members of growing racial hostility. Dorothy Whitt, who owned the Lincoln Hotel, where many Yemeni residents lived, stated to the *Detroit Free Press,* "I think this is being done to scare the Arabs out of the area."[256] However, others reported that tensions in the community had been "growing over the Arab men's interest in women from the white Southern community." Detective Jim Hughes who was assigned the Saleh and Ali cases stated, "We think this could be a revenge over a number of women who have been brought into this area and raped."[257] According to the *Detroit Free Press,* some Arabs in the community believed that the killings were connected to the presence of white prostitutes from the white Southern community who "regularly infiltrate the Arab area" and that Saleh and Ali were killed by "pimps who resent Arab

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[255] Nabeel Abraham, 136 and 175.
[256] Paul Magnusson, "2 Sought in Shotgun Slaying in Dearborn," *Detroit Free Press*, June 6, 1976
[257] Ibid

dealings with prostitutes."[258] However, others in the community verified that both Saleh and Ali were not involved in any such activities.[259] Regardless of whether or not that was the case, what was clear was that local enforcement and press were drawing from racial ideologies that described Arab men as sexually promiscuous, threatening to white women, and violent. These racial beliefs continued to inform the conversations around Saleh and Ali's death.

On the next day, Sunday, June 6, after Ali's death, 16-year-old Gary Engle was "slashed across the stomach" in what the *Detroit Free Press* reported to have been in "apparent retaliation" by the Arab community.[260] According to Engle and his friend Ernest Hausley, the two were peacefully sitting in their car waiting at a red light, in what reporters called the "heart of the Arab community," when they were suddenly attacked by a group of Arabs. However, Arab witnesses told police that Engle and Hausley had barged into Kamel's Restaurant, a popular Arab restaurant, on 10157 Dix around 6:30pm and started assaulting customers.[261] While both sides of the story were supported by only hearsay, the Dearborn Police Department, unsurprisingly, believed Engle and Hausley's version and Inspector Karl Parchert quickly sided with Engle and Hausley.

Whereas in the previous articles, the Arab community was depicted as a threat to white women, the stabbing of Engle perpetuated the belief that Arabs were also a threat to white men as well. By repeatedly referencing the use of the word "hillbilly," the press insinuated that the attack on Engle was a result of anti-white sentiment within the Arab community. In one article, they claimed that "one Arab leader speaking for several others interviewed complained that 'white hillbillies' from across the line are stalking anyone who looks like an Arab" and that when asked about Engle and Hausley, Arab witnesses referred to them as "two hillbillies."[262] While authorities considered the ways in which prejudice played into Engle getting stabbed, neither the press or the police seriously considered how anti-Arab racism played a part in the murders of Saleh and Ali.

On Tuesday, June 8 the Yemeni community gathered for Ali's funeral. An official representative from the Yemeni Embassy in Washington, Mohamed Khushafa, traveled to Michigan that day to pay his respects. Outside of the mosque where mourners prayed, a half dozen police cars were parked. One of the mourners, Ali Safi, spoke of Ali Shebrin saying, "He was so happy to come to America. He wrote to his family with pride when he got a job. Now we have to write to them and say that Ali is dead."[263]

The murders of Ali and Saleh demonstrate how the precarity facing Yemeni workers went beyond the oppressive auto industry. Nevertheless, the auto industry in Detroit was a major site in which the threat of unemployment and even physical harm was a common reality. One of the issues that Arab workers faced was consistently being under classified. In July 1976, three Yemeni workers employed at Chrysler's Hamtramck assembly plant (Dodge Main) filed a lawsuit against Chrysler and the UAW accusing

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[258] Bill Michelmore, "2 Slayings Rouse Fear, Outrage," *Detroit Free Press,* June 8, 1976, 3.
[259] "Oppose Government-Organized Racist Attacks Against the Arab People in Detroit," *The Worker's Advocate,* Vol. 6, June 24, 1976 (Newspaper of the Central Organization of U.S. Marxist-Leninists
[260] Bill Michelmore, "2 Slayings Rouse Fear, Outrage," *Detroit Free Press,* June 8, 1976, 3.
[261] Ibid
[262] Ibid
[263] Bill Michelmore, "Slain Arab Buried by Comrades," *Detroit Free Press,* June 9, 1976

them of discrimination which included "under classifying Arab workers, refusing to hire or employ Arab workers in skilled classifications, refusing Arab workers for journeyman status, refusing Arab workers training for skilled classification and retaliating against employees who protest the above described practices and pattern of discrimination." [264]

An example of anti-Arab racism in the auto plants is the case of Nagi Mohamed, a Yemeni auto worker who was charged in 1977 with a "felonious assault" following an altercation with a foreman. Nagi, who worked at Chrysler for nine years with a perfect employment record, found himself in the center of a huge case that exposed the daily racism that Arabs and other workers of color faced in the auto industry.

On July 27, 1977, Nagi Mohamed was fired after being allegedly involved in a fight on Chrysler company property with foreman Gregory Jurzak. Foreman Jurzak, who without Nagi's knowledge was the acting supervisor for the overtime shift that day, ordered Nagi to work outside of his classification. At the time, Nagi was working as a repairman on the Quality Assurance line, and Jurzak ordered him to retrieve stock form the watertower.[265] According to Nagi, this was completely out of the norm. Later in an interview, Nagi recalled: "My regular foreman left the plant early that day. In the afternoon, a man came to me. He swore very foul and ordered me to get stock from the water tower." Nagi, who did not know that Gregory Jurzak was a substitute foreman, decided not to go to the watertower and instead approached his supervisor about the confrontation. As Nagi left the office, however, Jurzak grabbed him by the ear and said, "I will teach you, you motherfucking Arab. You think you scare me by going to superintendent, camel jockey?"[266] According to witnesses who also saw Jurzak grab Mohamed by the ear and call him a "motherfucking Arab," Jurzak proceeded to physically assault Mohamed. Superintendent John Chryslyer and another worker held Mohamed down as Jurzak punched Mohamed in the forehead and repeatedly beat his face and chest.[267]

Following the attack, Nagi, dizzy and bleeding, asked for medical attention, but was forced to go to Labor Relations to make a statement, later saying, "I was in no condition to give a statement."[268] Nagi was eventually taken to a nurse at Chrysler who simply applied ice to his injuries and informed him that he could not see a doctor because "he had been fired or suspended." Ultimately Nagi received proper medical attention at Lynn Hospital and the Dearborn Medical Center. The next day, Nagi went to the Hamtramck Police Department to file a complaint against Gregory Jurzak, but was turned

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[264] Statement by the 4 workers to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and the Michigan Department of Civil Rights, April 1976. (from Nabeel Abahram, "Detroit's Yemeni Workers")

[265] Abdeen Jabara, "Anti-Arab Racism in the Auto Plants: The Case of Nagi Mohamed," *Al-Jaliyah,* vol. 1 no. 2 (February, 1979), 2-3, Arab American National Museum.

[266] "A New Immigrant Discovers Harsh Realities of American Life," *Solidarity,* March 5, 1979, Arab American National Museum

[267] Jabara: According to witnesses, the assault was clearly racially charged. Abdo Ali Shokais said, "I saw Gregory Jurzak holding Nagi Mohamed on his left ear, and I hear Gregory Jurzak insulting Nagi Mohamed by saying 'You Mother Fucker Arab, I will teach you." Other witnesses included Mused Ali Mohamed and Abdo Ali Shokais who both stated that they saw John Chrysler holding Nagi's arm while Gregory Jurzak hit Nagi Mohamed on the forehead.

[268] Abdeen Jabara, "Anti-Arab Racism in the Auto Plants: The Case of Nagi Mohamed," 2-3.

away with police refusing to accept the complaint.[269] Two days after the incident, Mohamed found out he was in fact fired from his job of nearly nine years at Dodge Main.

In response to the attack and charges against Nagi, workers at the Hamtramck Assembly plant formed the Nagi Mohamed/Dodge Workers Defense Committee which was supported by the UAW Local 3 leadership. The Defense Committee dedicated itself to four major demands: to reemploy Nagi with full pay, to drop all of the criminal charges against Nagi, to fire Jurzak, and to end all discrimination against Arabs and other workers of color.[270] Immediately following Mohamed's termination, thousands of workers signed petitions in critique of Chrylser's systemic racism against workers of color. The petitions, signed by 1,500 Chrysler workers, demanded that Mohamed get his job back with full pay and seniority. Even UAW Local 3, who in the past had tenuous relationships with its Arab workers, fought to get Mohamed's job back with president at the time John Smith negotiating without success to him back into the plant. Eventually, Mohamed filed a discrimination complaint with the Michigan Civil Rights Commission.[271]

Following Mohamed's discrimination complaint, three months after the incident, foreman Gregory Jurzak went to the Hamtramck Police Department and filed charges of "felonious assault against Nagi Mohamed. Jurzak claimed that the reason he waited so long to file charges was because he was on vacation. However, evidence suggested that Chrysler Corporation ordered Jurzak to file criminal charges after Nagi had filled a civil rights complaint and union grievance against the company in an effort to get his job back.[272] In the end, the Wayne County Circuit Court found Jurzak's charger to be "retaliatory" and dismissed the case noting that it had been filed months after the alleged assault. But, this was not the end to Mohamed's fight. Chrysler continued to delay his unemployment compensation for 13 weeks causing him to sell his family's home. The Michigan Employment Security Commission ruled, however, that Mohamed's dismissal was unwarranted and he eventually received full compensation. However, when Mohamed's case against Chrysler went into arbitration, he lost. Many of the witnesses were either afraid to testify or had gone back to Yemen. Nagi Mohamed found a job in small store and moved into a small Detroit apartment with his wife, stepson and two children.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the activism following the October War that shot through the Arab community in Dearborn is an important story about the history of the "Arab American left." While the Arab Workers Caucus held great potential, it was short lived. Shortly after the protests against UAW President Woodcock, the Arab Workers Caucus started to lose traction. Many believe that the group failed due to an unwillingness from the overwhelmingly Yemeni membership to continue participation. Several scholars at the time pointed to the passivity and docility of the Yemeni community as reasons for the

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[269] Abdeen Jabara "Anti-Arab Racism in the Auto Plants: The Case of Nagi Mohamed."
[270] Abdeen Jabara, "Anti-Arab Racism in the Auto Plants: The Case of Nagi Mohamed," February 1979.
[271] "A New Immigrant Discovers Harsh Realities of American Life," *Solidarity,* March 5, 1979.
[272] Abdeen Jabara, "Anti-Arab Racism in the Auto Plants: The Case of Nagi Mohamed," February 1979.

lack of participation in the AWC. None seriously considered, however, how the very real threat of unemployment, deportation, and anti-Arab racism, sometimes outweighed the anti-imperialist cause. By foregrounding the experiences of Yemenis, like Nagi Mohamed, and taking seriously the intersection of race and class, it becomes clear that the fight against U.S. imperialism and anti-Arab racism in Detroit at this time was difficult and complicated. Like farm workers in California, the labor of Yemeni auto workers was deeply connected to politics of U.S. empire. These politics impacted the lives of workers and prompted many to make decisions to resist through organizing or survive.

The past three chapters have traced the history of Yemeni labor and diasporic communities in both England and the United States. These three chapters examined how Yemeni workers were thrown in the forefront of political battles that grappled with the role of empire in Britain's shipping industry during the early 20th century, California's United Farm Workers in the 1970s, and Detroit's United Auto Workers in the 1970s, respectively. I hope to have provided archival and other historical evidence that not only demonstrates the presence of Yemenis within these histories, which had been previously erased, but also foregrounds the intersections of labor and empire. The next chapter turns to the literary in order to continue to explore the ways in which Yemenis have imagined the diaspora. Literature provides a different form of archival evidence that offers perspectives from marginalized diasporic voices, that is those of workers and women. In the following chapter, I interrogate the ways in which Yemenis themselves have imagined the diaspora and offered new configurations of the diasporic imaginary.

CHAPTER FOUR:

Strange Imaginaries: Yemeni Cultural Productions within the Diaspora

The Arabic word for expatriate, *mughtarib,* is used to describe someone who has left their home and relocated elsewhere either because they are exiled or, for the case of most Yemenis, they are in search of work. The etymology of the English word expatriate finds its origins in the 14th century French word *expatrier,* which translates to “banish,” with “ex” denoting “out of” and “patrie” denoting "native land.”[273] The Arabic word for expatriate, however, comes from the root g-r-b, which is also used for the word “strange” (ghurba) and “stranger” (ghurib). This goes beyond the definition of being forced out of one’s home and foregrounds the *feelings* of being strange, of being a stranger to the new land within which one has migrated. The concept of being a “stranger” is also familiar to Islam considering the historical context of the Prophet’s own traveling throughout the Arabian Peninsula as well as the hijra, in 622 in which the Prophet and his followers, fleeing persecution, traveled from Mecca to Medina. Islamically, the word is mentioned in a hadith in which the Prophet Muhammed (pbuh) said, “Islam began as a something strange and it will return to being strange, so blessed are the strangers.” Accordingly, Islam has a sense of familiarity and comfortability with strangers, making them as the Prophet said, “blessed.”

For Yemenis in Yemen and the diaspora, *mughtarib* and the word for “strange” (ghurba) is commonly used to refer to those who have immigrated, usually for labor. If asked where someone is, one might reply, “he is *mughtarib* in America” or “he is in *Al-ghurba*,” with *mughtarib* denoting a state of existence and *ghurba* describing the place. Yet, as the Arabic etymology and Islamic context for *mughtarib* demonstrates, this word carries meaning beyond the simple state of being an expatriate, and instead, connotes feelings of being *strange*, of being *estranged*. This is also the word that Yemeni writer, Mohammad Abdul-Wali used in his famous novella and collection of short stories, *They Die Strangers,* which chronicles the experiences of Yemenis living within the diaspora as a result of labor migration.[274] This chapter seeks to interrogate how Yemeni writers and artists have imagined the state of being a *mughtarib* in the diaspora. The Yemeni novels, poetry, and music that emerged in the context of large-scale transnational labor migration throughout the 20th century demonstrate the recurring melancholic theme of being away from home and family. These cultural productions created a diasporic imaginary rooted in being “strange.”[275] While strangeness denotes uncertainty, this

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[273] “Expatriate,” *Online Etymology Dictionary.* https://www.etymonline.com/word/expatriate

[274] Mohammad Abdul-Wali Translated by Abū Bakr Aḥmad Bāqādir, and Deborah S Akers. *They Die Strangers*. (Modern Middle East Literatures in Translation Series. Austin: Center for Middle Eastern Studies, the University of Texas at Austin, 2001). The stories in this 2001 translation were originally published in Yemen (in Arabic) throughout the 1950s and 1960s.

[275] Alicia Schmidt Camacho. *Migrant Imaginaries: Latino Cultural Politics in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands*. Nation of Nations. (New York: NYU Press, 2008): I am following Camacho’s definition of “imaginary” as a “symbolic field in which people come to understand and describe their social being.” (Camacho, 5)

chapter demonstrates that in the case of Yemeni literature, the strange is also transformative. Following Edward Said who preferred to feel "not quite right" and "out of place," literary works on the diaspora invite inquiry that foregrounds moments of dissonance and strangeness as moments of imaginative re-configurations.[276] Through an exploration of Mohamed Abdul-Wali's writings, I argue that the literary provides a complicated, multi-faceted look at the diasporic subject. In doing so, the stories explored in this chapter, challenge the historical erasure of Yemeni laborers.

As labor migration increased following the end of British colonization in Aden and the deterioration of Yemen's economy, Yemen's largest economic export became its labor force. The solidification of the diaspora fundamentally changed both Yemen's economy and family dynamics. As a result, this large-scale migration transformed Yemeni households into transnational families as wives were separated from their husbands and children were separated from their fathers. The formation of Yemenis as a transnational laboring class forced migrants and their families to articulate various definitions of what it meant to live in the diaspora and the impact it had on their intimate lives. With a larger diasporic population, Yemeni cultural productions such as literature and music began to grapple with the theme of leaving home. The notion of being *mughtarib,* emerged as a key component within cultural productions on the Yemeni diaspora. Writers and artists were forced to reckon with the theme of being both a stranger in a foreign land as well as estranged from the families they left in Yemen. Dozens of Yemeni folk songs include some derivation of the word *mughtarib* to express the sadness of longing for one's home and more specifically, the feeling of being a stranger.

The previous three chapters examined how Yemeni workers were thrown in the forefront of political battles that grappled with the role of empire in Britain's shipping industry during the early 20th century, California's United Farm Workers in the 1970s, and Detroit's United Auto Workers in the 1970s, respectively. The chapters analyzed the intersections of labor and empire. This chapter, turns to the literary, in order to explore the ways in which Yemenis have imagined the diaspora. In doing so, I demonstrate that these works of literature resist the politics of empire, which have historically worked to dehumanize migrant laborers, by telling complex stories from the perspective of Yemenis themselves.

Drawing from Alicia Schmidt Camacho's work in *Migrant Imaginaries,* I use "strange imaginaries" to define the process by which Yemeni writers and artists articulated and defined the diaspora. In *Migrant Imaginaries,* Camacho examines a range of oral, literary, and visual texts in order to trace Mexican migrant and Mexican American subject formation during the 20th century. By examining labor, migration, and subject formation, Camacho addresses how "artists, political figures, laborers, and writers engaged with the problem of representing the subjectivity of the noncitizen."[277] Set against a history of conquest, Camacho's work foregrounds the ways in which migrant subjects resisted assimilation narratives of Mexican and U.S. nationalisms and suggests

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[276] Edward Said, *Out of Place,* (Vintage Books: New York, 1999), 295.

[277] Alicia Schmidt Camacho. *Migrant Imaginaries: Latino Cultural Politics in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands*. Nation of Nations. (New York: NYU Press, 2008), 15.

that "the migrant most often embodies a melancholic condition, rather than one of simple autonomy from the strictures of national citizenship."[278]

While differing in social, political, and historical contexts, the experiences of Yemeni migrants has similarly been framed within assimilation and "immigrant" narratives that define Yemenis as either sojourners or settlers. This binary centers the U.S. (and U.K.), and defines the experiences of Yemenis in the diaspora within an immigrant framework that does not account for an intersectional look at race, class, and gender. In other words, the intimate and more defining aspects of the diaspora become obscured when assimilation is the only framework used to articulate the Yemeni diasporic experience. In her work on decolonial imaginaries, Emma Perez pointed to the limitations of the "immigrant," a concept with historical origins for European immigrants who were "mostly of white, assimilable ethnicities." A diasporic approach, according to Perez, "would open a space where people of color...could negotiate a raced culture within many kinds of identities without racial erasure through assimilation, accommodation, adaptation, acculturation, or even resistance." Rather than expecting to assimilate to the dominant culture, diasporas "intervene" and "construct newness."[279] Following Perez's call toward a diasporic approach, I argue that strange imaginaries defines a more complex look into the lives of Yemeni diasporic subjects which goes beyond an assimilation/immigrant and sojourner/settler framework. This approach allows for a race and gender analysis that highlights the impact that labor migration had on not only the men leaving for work, but the women who were left behind.

Drawing from the Arabic word used colloquially by many Yemenis to describe life in the diaspora, my theorizing of strange imaginaries takes a diasporic approach that locates Yemeni cultural productions working through with feelings of being a stranger in a foreign land and being estranged from your family: the more intimate effects of labor migration. No author better encapsulates these themes than Mohammad Abdul-Wali, whose novella *They Die Strangers* and other short stories guides this chapter. Through an examination of Abdul-Wali's writings, this chapter seeks to explore themes of home, love, and family which offer a more complex look into the impact of Yemeni labor migration and experiences in the diaspora.

Contextualizing Yemeni Literature on the Diaspora

In order to contextualize my analysis of Abdul-Wali's novella and short stories, this section provides a short overview of Arabic literature and Yemeni labor migration as well as places it within a postcolonial framework. In doing so, I hope to situate Abdul-Wali's novella and short stories within the genre of the postcolonial novel. I also discuss the use of a literary analysis method in my discussion of Abdul-Wali's writings, which have been translated into English from the original Arabic publication. Drawing from postcolonial theory, my turn to the literary acknowledges how the narrative is both a tool

[278] Camacho, 12

[279] Emma Pérez, *The Decolonial Imaginary: Writing Chicanas into History*, (Bloomington, Ind: Indiana University Press, 1999), 78

of colonial control as well as a form of resistance for colonized people. Edward Said points to how stories became "the method colonized people use to assert their own identity and the existence of their own history."[280] Following Said, this section explores how while the narrative form has origins in European colonialism, the theme of being a stranger has long been present in Yemeni culture. The use of the narrative in Mohamed Abdul-Wali's writings re-imagines the diaspora and in doing so constructs an imaginary for the diasporic subject.

The effects of labor migration are reflected within literature, poetry, and music. However, Yemeni history and literature has been marginalized, usually entirely absent, from academic scholarship. I argue that the literature that emerged from Yemen post-1950s such as *They Die Strangers,* should be included alongside postcolonial theory, history, and literature.[281] Grounded in the history of colonialism, particularly European colonialism, postcolonial theory and literature has collectively explored the ways in which history has, and continues, to disproportionality affect certain lives within the formerly colonized world, as well as in the diaspora.[282] In doing so, post-colonial theory and writing underscore the historical phenomenon of colonialism, as well as imperialism, and its multiple effects such as "slavery, displacement, emigration, and racial and cultural discrimination."[283] According to postcolonial scholars, postcolonial literature in particular is distinctively postcolonial because it both emerged within the context of colonization and has actively engaged in dismantling the assumptions of the imperial centre.[284] By telling the stories of colonized peoples, postcolonial literature has been dedicated to exploring the material and ideological effects of colonialism in a way that shifted as Robert Young wrote, "the dominant ways in which the relations between western and non-western people and their worlds are viewed.[285] Yet, the "post" in postcolonial novel does not simply denote the temporal shift from colonization, but marks a "critical orientation," in which the postcolonial novel makes space for "the representation of experiences of various kinds that subtend yet transcend the colonial encounter, including those of slavery, oppression and resistance, migration, race, gender, and colonial space-making, as well responses to the discourses of a reconstituted imperial Europe in modern times."[286]

If that is the case, then Yemeni literature focusing on themes of migration caused by colonialism in South Yemen and imperialism in North Yemen can be read within a

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280 Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism,* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), xii

281 See Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth,* (New York: Grove Press, 1963); Aime Cesaire, *Discourse on Colonialism,* (1950); Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967); Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*. (New York: Anchor Books, 1959); Sylvia Wynter, *The Hills of Hebron, A Jamaican Novel*. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1962).

282 Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *The Post-colonial studies reader.* (London: Routledge, 1995), 2.

283 Ibid, 7

284 Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Postcolonial Literature.* (London: Routledge, 1989), 2

285 Robert Young, *Postcolonialism,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 1.

286 Ato Quayson, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to the Postcolonial Novel*. (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2016, 3.

postcolonial framework. These cultural productions grappled with the effects of labor migration on the lives of migrants as well as the families they left behind. A famous Yemeni poet, Abdulla Al-Baradoni, was to have said that "being forced to leave one's homeland, the most agonizing of events, produces the saddest, most creative folk songs."[287] Following Al-Baradoni's assertion, my theorizing of strange imaginaries defines the Yemeni literature and cultural productions that engaged with the themes of being a stranger as both melancholic but also creative and transformative. Although rooted in the precarity of labor migration, these creative works centered the lives of workers and families left behind and created an imaginary in which diasporic subjects can exist and resist.

First, it is important to situate Yemeni creative works such as poetry and novels within the context of Arabic literature. The concept of "adab," the word used in the Arab world to refer to literature, is of particular significance here. In the modern world, adab is applied to "literary output that is entertaining and edifying at the same time." [288] While adab does encompass the genres of literature in the Western sense including novels, short stories, folktales, drama, or poetry, it is also more complex, and historically has been genre-less.[289] In Arabic, adab translates to "etiquette." In the pre-modern period, "adab" referred to not just "literature," but a knowledge of Arabic language and composition. Therefore, in addition to the literary, adab also refers to "culture, good manners, decency, and humanity." Like classical Greek literature, the origins of Arabic literature are difficult to trace because of its grounding in an oral rather than written tradition. Scholars have noted two "starting points" for classical Arabic literature. First, scholars have noted the emergence of "classical" Arabic literature in the middle of 6th century AD with the popularity of tribal Bedouin poetry circulating the Arabian Peninsula.[290] This pre-Islamic poetry grappled with themes of elegy, praise, revenge, and boasting. The poet was seen as "the spokesman of his tribe" and the poetry often was a celebration of their tribe's contributions and excellence.[291] The second starting point is the revelation of the Quran which was revealed to the Prophet Muhammed over the years between CE 610 and CE 632. Although grounded in religious philosophy, the language and rhythms in the Quran have deeply impacted the Arabic literary tradition.[292] During the classical era, the Abbasid caliphate, centered in Baghdad, emerged as a time of rich literary contributions grounded in Arabic, Persian, and Islamic traditions. By the time of the fall of Baghdad to the Mongols in 1258, the works that have come to classify the era of "classical" Arabic literature had already been written and the "classical" era came to an end. As historians

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[287] Mohammed Saad Al-Jumly and J. Barton Rollins, "Emigration and the Rise of the Novel in Yemen," *World Literature Today,* Vol. 71, No. 1 (Winter, 1997), 39.

[288] Gelder, G. J. H. van. *Classical Arabic Literature : A Library of Arabic Literature Anthology*, (New York: New York University Press, 2013), xiv.

[289] Paul Starkey. *Modern Arabic Literature*. New Edinburgh Islamic Surveys, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), x.

[290] Bedouin poetry is described to have emerged during the "Jahiliyyah" (pre-Islamic) era. These poems were secular and sophisticated with metrical and rhyme schemes indicating that they had perhaps centuries or earlier development.

[291] Starkey 12

[292] Starkey, 1; For a comprehensive history of Arabic poetry and literature see Starkey's introduction in *Modern Arabic Literature* (2006).

have noted, the "sacking" of Baghdad had a profound impact on the history of the Middle East, and of course its literary contributions. By the early 1500s, many regions of the Middle East, including Yemen (specifically north Yemen) came under Ottoman rule and Arabic was increasingly replaced by Ottoman Turkish as the language of administration and literature.[293] During this time, Yemen was commonly known as "Arabia Felix," which defined its happy and prosperous reputation. Yemen was a key location for commercial routes between Europe and Asia which increased the country's economy.

The development of modern Arabic literature is closely intertwined with the history of western colonization in the region. The 19th and early 20th century marked important shifts in Arabic literature as parts of the Arab world became increasingly in contact with the West through colonial and imperial domination. Yemen's key location made it vulnerable to foreign invasions not only by the Turkish Ottoman Empire in north Yemen, but the British Empire as well. By 1839 the British successfully colonized the port of Aden in the south. Western colonization in the Arab world, including Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in 1798, brought not only economic and political control in the region, but cultural control as well. Arabic literary forms developed in the classical era were increasingly replaced by Western literary genres such as drama, novel, and short story.[294]

The rise of the novel emerged in Yemen during the post-World War II period, one of the historical periods that scholars have denoted as context to the postcolonial novel.[295] Yet, the themes of alienation and estrangement had long been present in Yemeni poetry as a result of decades of war and oppression. In 1904, Imam Yahya became leader of the Zaydis, a Shi'i sect in north Yemen, and gained political power in the region. By the end of WWI, Imam Yahya and his followers successfully forced the Ottomans out of Yemen. While North Yemen gained independence in 1918, the country faced a failing economy and Imam Yahya's oppressive regime stripped rights from Yemenis and isolated the region from the rest of the world.[296] Following Imam Yahya's death in 1948, his son Ahmed Yahya took control. By 1962, when Ahmed Yahya died, military rebels sought to overthrow the monarchical regime resulting in six years of civil war in the North. Meanwhile in the south, the National Liberation Front fought to decolonize from the British and in 1967 the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen was founded. Finally, in 1968 the military rebels in the north established the Republic of Yemen. Following decolonization and the wars, Yemen's economy suffered.

The major impact of these tumultuous events in Yemen throughout the 20th century was large scale labor migration of Yemenis to other parts of the world, including

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[293] Starkey, 2

[294] Starkey, 23

[295] In the introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to the Postcolonial Novel,* Ato Quayson locates four overlapping time periods that serve as the historical background to the postcolonial novel: 1) formal colonialism from 1854 to the end of WWII; 2) decolonization and postcolonial nation-state formation in Africa, India, Southeast Asia, and the Caribbean from 1945-1965; 3) post-independence until the end of the Cold War, 1966-1989; and 4) period of intensified globalization and transnationalism. Abdul-Wali's writing can be situated somewhere between the first and second time period from 1945-1965 which is marked by decolonization and nation-state formation. See Ato Quayson, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to the Postcolonial Novel*. (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 1.

[296] Mohammed Saad Al-Jumly and J. Barton Rollins, "Emigration and the Rise of the Novel in Yemen," *World Literature Today,* Vol. 71, No. 1 (Winter, 1997), 39.

the United States, Britain, Southeast Asia, and East Africa. By the 1970s, Yemenis were also migrating to oil producing countries in the Gulf including Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates. By 1980, over three million Arabs had migrated to other countries in the Middle East to work in the oil industry.[297] The most significant effect of labor migration from the 1950s-1970s was the increase in remittances sent back to Yemen, which was primarily sent by men who left their families at home. In 1980, inter-Arab remittances, including various Arab countries alongside Yemen, were calculated to be nearly $3 billion. Discourse around migration has often emphasized the positive effects it has for the labor-exporting countries. Some of these benefits discussed have been: 1) investment capital with the remittances sent back home; 2) acquisition of skills amongst migrants; 3) migration from overpopulated and underemployed populations increases labor productivity; and 4) reduction of supply of labor relieves pressure on land and on social services.[298] However, these "benefits" don't account for the real life impact migration has on everyday lives of migrants and the families they leave behind. Grappling with the impacts of colonization and conflict, Abdul-Wali's writings are also about diasporic identity formations that go beyond the nation-state. As Yoon Sun Lee demonstrates, postcolonial novels on the diaspora "insist on seeing the nation-state as only one vector" for comprehending society and culture. On focusing on the diasporic experience, the emphasis is shifted to "the multifaceted character of identities that are stretched over transnational borderlands, and the concomitant opportunities and pitfalls that they produce for understanding such identities in the first place."[299]

With the rise of labor migration post-WWII, Yemeni literature emerged as a tool to articulate these real-life experiences as well as define the diaspora through art. An example of this is "Al-Balah," a Yemeni folk song by Motahar Al-Iryani, a Yemeni poet famous for writing about the themes of migration, that tells the story of an immigrant who escaped North Yemen during "the tyranny of the iman's soldiers," but leads a lonely life longing for home.[300] The last three stanzas of the poem explores the theme of being a stranger:

> A stranger's body put down upon the Western shore,
> His soul in the East, his heart gone.
> If only the Red Sea were narrowed or bridged
> Across to the other shore.
>
> Stranger away from home like me with not resting place,
> What if you weep and weep the stones and trees.
> You weep and weep, and tears pour down like rain,
> And you left your tears flow from the heart's blood.
>
> In my emigration I sing, "Oh God, don't degrade us."

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[297] Fred Halliday, "Labor Migration in the Arab World," *Middle East Research and Information Project* (May, 1984), 3
[298] Ibid,8
[299] Quayson, 8-9.
[300] Ibid, 40

And longing consumes my soul in exhaustive flames.
I will return, oh my homeland, oh happy home,
Oh, my paradise! Oh, my refuge! Oh, my precious
Mother![301]

In this poem, Al-Iryani describes a "stranger" whose body is buried somewhere on the "Western shore" despite the fact that his soul and heart are in the East. This demonstrates the significance of place and home in Yemeni poetry. Al-Iryani writes that this "stranger away from home" is like him because they have no "resting place" and are left weeping. Because Yemenis primarily migrated out of obligation to find work and not always necessarily by choice, the diaspora is often portrayed in dystopian language that emphasizes the pain and injustice of leaving one's home. Specifically, Al-Iryani's poem describes a stranger who is left on the "Western shore." This challenges the dominant immigrant narrative which always describes the West as a place of opportunity. In Yemeni poetry, literature, and music, however, the West, which is a strange place with no "resting place." This is one way that the theme of strangeness works to both express the conditions of the Yemeni diaspora but also provincializes the West which is usually depicted as region of freedom and opportunity.

Given the title of the poem, it is likely that it falls under a style of Yemeni poetry, popular in the north, called the "balah," which is created spontaneously during a live performance before an audience. Since the poems are not created in advance, the audience gets to witness first-hand the "act of creation, which in and of itself is of aesthetic interest." The balah is a very dramatic genre including multiple poets who create the piece and often compete with one another to earn the audience's approval.[302] In many ways, the balah embodies the features of labor migration. While the balah is occurring, both the poets and the audience are unaware of the next line or stanza which creates a sense of unpredictability and uncertainty. For labor migrants, the same feeling of uncertainty takes place, as many Yemenis left their homes unsure of when or if they would return to their families. For the balah, this sense of the unknown allows for organic imagination and creative production. Using the balah to express the lives of Yemeni migrants then, allows Yemeni poets to not only capture the precarious feelings of the unknown which defines the lives of diasporic migrants, but to transform that precarity and re-imagine it through art.

In another famous poem, "Al-Ghareeb," which translates to "The Stranger," Yemeni poet Mohammed An'am Ghalib explores the theme of being a stranger who is not only away from their homeland, but has no name:

There he lived many years,
His old name but a memory,
His new one engraved on papers written in a non-

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[301] Ibid.

[302] Steven Charles Caton. *"Peaks of Yemen I Summon": Poetry As Cultural Practice in a North Yemeni Tribe*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 81.

Arabic script.
And he wandered the seas and desolate regions of the
Earth,
Changing names and changing papers.
In his pocket many papers,
And the name! Any name,
Any name--no matter.

For this stranger, his old name is a distant memory as he is now known by the name on his travel documents. Ghalib writes that the stranger has many papers and can go by "any name--no matter." The concept of having no name is representative of the loss of identity that migrants face when leaving home. However, it also quite literally points to a trend amongst many Yemenis whose legal names, for immigration purposes, differed from their real names. Based on my informal conversations with many Yemeni immigrants, there are several reasons why one had to change their name in order to legally travel. However, this is not commonly known in scholarly work due to the fact that any official source reporting in detail about this would jeopardize many Yemenis' immigration status. The literary, however, allows writers to make the anonymous and invisible experience of the Yemeni migrant visible. With their anonymity, Yemenis have been lost in the official records. The literary, however, tells the stories that official records are literally unable to tell.

Abdul-Wali's writings reflect his own experiences as a *mugthrb* in the diaspora and his estrangement from Yemen. Throughout his stories, the characters struggle with feelings of estrangement from their families and their home in Yemen. For these characters, Yemen is not only a geographic space but a symbolic terrain in which notions of home, self, and family are constructed. The diaspora, then, functions as a foil to these constructions. If Yemen symbolizes family, home, and happiness, then the diaspora is portrayed as foreign and hostile. While often painting a dystopic scene for his characters, Abdul-Wali's work humanizes the Yemeni diasporic experience. This re-telling of the diaspora challenges the institutional erasure of Yemenis who become nameless through their labor.

Historicizing the Diasporic Subject: *They Die Strangers* and "The Color of Rain"

Mohammad Abdul-Wali's famous novella, *They Die Strangers* as well as his short story, "The Color of Rain," offer narratives of labor migrants throughout the 1950s and 1960s. In *They Die Strangers,* Abdou Sa'id struggles to retain a sense of home in Ethiopia where he runs a small shop. In "The Color of Rain," a man known only as "the sailor" has returned to Yemen, after years of working on the sea as a merchant marine, to fight in the North Yemen civil war. Both of these stories center the experiences of Yemeni men who have migrated for work, but grapple with the consequences of being away from home. Through a literary analysis, I argue that these two stories, although

gendered in problematic ways, create space for complex and contradictory diasporic subjects.

Mohammad Abdul-Wali was born in 1940 in Ethiopia to an Ethiopian mother and Yemeni father, Ahmad Abdul-Wali, an immigrant from North Yemen. Because of Abdul-Wali's descent, he was labeled a *muwallad,* "a person of mixed blood," and many of his stories wrestle with the experiences of being of mixed descent including questions of race, colorism, and belonging. Personally knowing the experiences of existing between two cultures, it becomes clear why the themes of home, exile, and identity weigh heavily in Abdul-Wali's writings. Mohammad Abdul-Wali's father, who most likely immigrated from North Yemen sometime in the 1930s, worked as a shopkeeper in Ethiopia. Like many immigrants, Ahmad Abdul-Wali struggled to maintain his son's Muslim and Yemeni identity amongst the predominantly Christian-African culture of Ethiopia. Growing up, Mohammad Abdul-Wali attended the Yemeni Community School in Addis Ababa. In 1954, when Abdul-Wali was 14, his father sent him to Aden to attend an Islamic studies institute and shortly after married him to his cousin. During these formative years, Abdul-Wali started to write. The next year, in 1955, Abdul-Wali traveled to Cairo and studied in various colleges, including Al-Azhar University. It was during his time in Cairo, that Abdul-Wali became engaged in Marxist political activity, which was one of the reasons he eventually got expelled from Egypt. Abdul-Wali then lived in Russia where he learned Russian and took a literature course at the Maxim Gorky Literature Institute. By 1962, following the establishment of the Yemen Arab Republic in North Yemen, Abdul-Wali returned to Yemen where he got involved in politics and served as the Charge d'Affaires in Moscow as well as East Berlin. In 1967, he was expelled for spying allegations. Following two separate occasions in prison, Abdul-Wali eventually escaped North Yemen and fled to the Marxist driven government of Aden in South Yemen. In 1973, Mohammad, alongside a group of Yemeni intellectuals and politicians, was tragically killed in a plane crash while flying from Aden to Hadramaut in South Yemen.[303]

As implicated in the title, Mohammad Abdul-Wali's novella, *They Die Strangers,* explores the negative consequences of Yemeni migrants who leave their homes and families behind to build lives in the diaspora. Set sometime in the 1950s to early 1960s, *They Die Strangers* tells the story of Abdou Sa'id, a Yemeni shopkeeper in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Abdou dreams of returning home to Yemen with enough money to build a mansion for his wife and son, whose faces he struggles to remember after spending over a decade away. During his time in Addis Ababa, Abdou has countless sexual relationships with women and his rumored to have fathered many children, though he doesn't take care of any of them. The story escalates when Fatima, a woman who claims to have had a son by Abdou, dies and the child is left alone. Local Yemeni religious leaders attempt to get Abdou to claim the boy and take care of him, but in the end Abdou dies tragically. In many ways, Abdul-Wali's novella serves as a cautionary tale portraying the moral dilemmas of labor migration, leaving home, and above all, turning away from one's family and duty.

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[303] Mohammad Abdul-Wali Abū Bakr Aḥmad Bāqādir, and Deborah S Akers. *They Die Strangers*. (Modern Middle East Literatures in Translation Series. Austin: Center for Middle Eastern Studies, the University of Texas at Austin, 2001), 1-2.

Abdou's story reflects the experiences of thousands of young Yemeni men who left their homes in search of financial success to support their families. The lack of jobs and opportunities in Yemen pushed many to migrate elsewhere. Abdou got married when he was 15 years old. Struggling financially while working in the fields near his village, Abdou's wife would bring him "bread and a plate of fenugreek" for lunch everyday.[304] After finishing work during the day, Abdou chewed qat, a plant chewed as a stimulant, and prayed from sunset to the evening in the mosque. However, Abdou began to question his life after hearing about his relative, Saleh Sa'id, who had immigrated and sent money to Abdou's father to build a lavish house in the village. The women in the village talked about how Saleh Sa'id will come back with "pockets filled with money," and how his wife must be very happy. They concluded that "whoever goes overseas comes back rich" and that "money must be thrown in the streets there."[305] Upon hearing the women, Abdou was heartbroken: "He saw his young child playing in the dirt, half-naked. He felt the fenugreek burning his mouth, the loaf of bread changed into dirt as the women spoke in their sharp voices." When Saleh Sa'id returned to the village, he brought sweets for all of the children. Abdou's eight-year-old son asked his father, "Why don't you emigrate and bring me something like this?"[306] Eventually, Abdou decided to follow in the footsteps of Saleh Sa'id, and the dozens of men in his village, and migrate elsewhere for work.

Desperate to achieve his dream to return to Yemen a wealthy man, the story meets Abdou who, having spent 12 years in Ethiopia, has lost all connection with his wife and son. Yet, while his crumbling connection to Yemen deteriorated each day, he established roots in the Sodset Kilo and Marqatah quarter in Addis Ababa and became an important part of the community. Even though customers knew very little about the personal life of their local shopkeeper, they admired the smile that "remained permanently fixed on his face, even when he seemed sad."[307] Abdul-Wali opens the novella stating that Abdou Sa'id "knew everything about the people who lived in the quarter, especially in the area where the neighborhood streets were always muddy from the constant rain, where in the winter intoxicating music played all night long, and hundreds of laborers and unemployed men sat guzzling Taja, the local alcoholic drink, while ogling prostitutes who had spent at least forty years in the business."[308] The description of Abdou's knowledge of the neighborhood not only establishes his connection to the space, but also paints the image that Addis Ababa suffers from unemployment and is an "intoxicating" place filled with vices, including alcohol and prostitutes. This depiction contrasts with the women's vision in the village of a foreign land where money is thrown in the streets. In portraying Addis Ababa negatively, Abdul-Wali pushes his readers, the majority of which are Yemeni, to see the diaspora as not a place filled with financial opportunity, but rather with struggle and sin, which is in opposition to the characterization of Yemen as the family-oriented home, representing all things good. This depiction of Ethiopia, and by extension the diaspora as a whole, is carried throughout the story, particularly through Abdou's lifestyle and shop.

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[304] Ibid, 26
[305] Ibid, 26
[306] Ibid, 27
[307] Ibid, 17
[308] Ibid, 17

Abdou's life revolved around his small store, ten meters long and three meters wide, where he not only worked but lived. The shelves were filled with goods including oil, honey, rice, buttons, and needles and behind them was his bed where he slept. Abdul-Wali writes that Abdou became "a part of the history of the quarter," and that the locals talked about how he never closed the store, even on religious holidays. He goes on to write that, "They also said he had left behind his wife and children ten years ago and that he cried whenever he received letters from them, but no one ever saw him crying."[309] While the store serves here as a symbol of Abdou's labor, sacrifice and struggle, it is also the site where his countless sexual relationships with women, whom he treats as dispensable, take place.

Throughout the novella, Abdul-Wali portrays Ethiopian women as hypersexualized. All of the local women are attracted to Abdou who they viewed as a "real man" who "never has enough."[310] The women in the story are portrayed as sexually promiscuous and always sexually available. Rumors circulate in the neighborhood that Abdul-Wali is the father of numerous children. Abdul-Wali writes, "All of the children loved him too, and people said he was the father of many of them, especially those who were born white, even though their mothers were black. In the quarter, however, and in a city like Addis Ababa, there was a lot of gossip but only a little truth."[311] This passage also points to the racialization of Ethiopian women as black in comparison to Abdou who is racialized as white. One of the most shocking relationships Abdou has is with Ta'atto, a 15-year-old girl who wishes to lose her virginity to him. One night, Ta'atto shows up to Abdou's store and stands in front of him silently, a moment "she had prepared herself for years." Abdou picked her up and laid her outside on a pile of empty sacks. Abdul-Wali writes, "The next morning, she slipped out the back door, satisfaction creasing her lips into an indelible smile."[312] This deeply problematic scene hypersexualizes a young Ethiopian girl and portrays this sexual encounter without interrogating the power between Abdou, and older man, and Ta'atto. The other relationship Abdou has is with the wife of a high-ranking civil servant who he uses to avoid paying taxes. In his relationships with these women, they are always sexually available and used to his advantage. Abdou justifies his treatment of women by distinguishing them from Yemeni women such as his wife who he views as superior. When thinking about his wife, Abdou struggled to remember her face:

> He sometimes smiled as he struggled to imagine her now, a woman in her thirties. Most of the time, he failed; her face was completely erased from his mind. When he succeeded, her face blended with those of ten other women he had encountered in Addis Ababa. This angered him. He did not want to compare his wife to these other women. From his perspective, she was a different type, 'pure,' like his country.[313]

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[309] Ibid, 20
[310] Ibid, 20-21
[311] Ibid, 21
[312] Ibid 23
[313] Ibid,30

This passage demonstrates how, for Abdou, the black Ethiopian women in which he established relationships with were not only dispensable, but impure. Abdul-Wali's message to the readers is one that seeks to portray the diaspora as filled with vices and impurities whereas Yemen, represented through the "pure" Yemeni woman, is desirable.

Scholars have interrogated how the vision of the nation intersects with gender constructions of masculinity and femininity. In *Gender and Nation,* Nira Yuval-Davis explores how gender both construct and are constructed by the nation and that "constructed notions of nationhood usually involve specific notions of 'manhood' and 'womanhood''[314] In other words, nationhood is deeply intertwined with notions of gender and vice versa. Through their reproductive labor, women emerge as literal reproducers for the nation. In connection to the nation, this excerpt from *They Die Strangers* also demonstrates the ways in which notions of gender define the diaspora as well. It is here that *They Die Strangers* functions as a very gendered cautionary tale disclosing the dangers of leaving one's home and working abroad

The remainder of the novella delves into the dilemma Abdou faces when learning of one of his "bastard" children. Years after their encounter, Ta'atto returns to Abdou's shop, now an older woman working as a prostitute in the quarter. She informs him that a woman named Fatimah died and left her young boy, who is Abdou's son. Hesitant to tell Abdou knowing he is a "worthless person," Ta'atoo hoped that he would do something to help. Instead, Abdou refuses to do anything stating that "God commands us, Ta'atto, to work as hard as we can, to work for our children, our legal children. But I have only one son. God created those others, and He will take care of them. Why would He create bastards if He didn't plan to take care of them?"[315] Frustrated with Abdou's response, Ta'atoo went to a local Yemeni religious leader, Sayyid Amin. The sayyid assured Ta'atoo that he would handle the situation and ordered his assistant to bring Hajji Abdul Latif, a wealthy Yemeni man and community leader in the area. The sayyid told Hajji Abul Latif that he had a vision in which God commanded that the Hajji intervene and convince Abdou to save the little boy. Hajji enlists the help of Saleh Saif, another Yemeni shopkeeper and they both go to Abdou's shop to confront him. However, Hajji and Saleh Saif were unsuccessful in their attempts to convince Abdou to raise his baby boy. The Hajji's secretary decides that he will take care of the baby and raise him as his own brother. The secretary, who is nameless in the story, connects with the boy because he himself has a Yemeni father and Ethiopian mother and understands firsthand the struggles of being a *muwallad*, a "half-breed." As Abul-Wali writes, "like the boy, he had been born without a country, a stranger in a strange land."[316]

That night Abdou, cold in his store, made a fire in a tank filled with dirt, ashes, and charcoal. He covered the charcoal with kerosene and as charcoal began to glow red, he dreamed about returning to Yemen. He was greeted by everyone in the village and praised for being the richest man. The following day, customers gather outside Abdou's shop which was surprisingly closed. They go to the back and find Abdou unconscious who is then rushed to the hospital where he was pronounced dead from consuming huge amounts of carbon dioxide. Shocked at the circumstances of his death, the Italian doctor

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[314] Nira Yuval-Davis, *Gender and Nation,* (London: Sage Publications, 1997), 1
[315] Mohammad Abdul-Wali, 37
[316] Ibid, 56

treating commented on Abdou's poor lifestyle. The nurse replied, "These migrants leave their homes, country, family, to chase after a living. They die running after scraps. That's all they think about."[317] Through Abdou's sudden death, Abdul-Wali highlights the mundanely tragic realities for migrants who leave their homes.

Rather than achieving his dream of success, in the end, Abdou dies alone in his shop. Most tragic of all, he dies a "stranger." During the funeral, the secretary looks upon Abdou's grave and says, "You know when he died he left nothing behind. A woman deserted for years there, a son he didn't know, a land to which he didn't offer a drop of his blood. He died like a stranger, like hundreds of Yemenis die in other lands."[318] For Abdul-Wali, labor migrants like Abdou remain strangers in a land that is not their home, and with the time spent away, become estranged from their loved ones. They are strangers both in the diaspora and in their homelands. The character of the secretary highlight how *muwallads* are also strangers who belong to no land. When talking about himself, Abdou's little son, and the dozens of other mixed children, the secretary goes on to say that, the *muwallads* are the "most lost of all" because they cannot fully claim their homelands of Yemen or Ethiopia: "They were the lost ones who were stuck in the middle, pulled by both sides. They would always be strangers, even if they finally found a place to grant them refuge."[319] For Abdul-Wali, the biggest tragedy is that not only did Abdou die a stranger, but he left one behind too.

Focused on the trauma of dying before returning home, the characters in *They Die Strangers* struggle with conflicts in identity and belonging that come with being away from your homeland. In Abdul-Wali's short story, "The Color of Rain," which focuses on two Yemeni soldiers fighting in the North Yemen Civil War sometime between 1962-1970, the characters though set in Yemen, continue to face similar issues as those in *They Die Strangers*. The short story meets two soldiers who are stationed on a mountain in southern Yemen. One soldier is a young man from Aden, who was recently married but reluctantly left his wife to fight in the revolution. The other soldier is a much older man, known simply as "the sailor," who has worked for over twenty years traveling the world's ports. The soldiers endure a rainy and cold evening surrounded by the sound of gunshots while carrying on a casual conversation. An opposing solider attempts to climb to the top of the mountain to attack them, but tragically falls. The young man and the sailor hear his screams until his body hits the floor, then carry on with their conversation. The contrast of the two characters' dialogue alongside the violence surrounding them represents the mundanity of war, a theme Abdul-Wali explores in his other stories.

What is particularly interesting about "The Color of Rain," is alongside Abdul-Wali's commentary on the cruelty of war, is a story about the diaspora represented through the sailor. The anonymity of "the sailor" represents the thousands of nameless sailors lost in the historical record. As explored in the first chapter of this dissertation, thousands of Yemenis found work aboard mainly European ships beginning in late 19th and early 20th century. Relaxed laws and regulations were implemented at the time in order to allow ship owners to exploit an endless supply of cheap labor. Yemeni sailors were categorized as "Oriental lascars," a racialized term that conflated a diverse group of

[317] Ibid, 64
[318] Ibid, 65
[319] Ibid, 65; 56

ethnic and national identities including Asians, Arabs, and Africans. As a result of the ambiguous category of oriental lascar, the institutional existence of Yemenis was obscured, making historical records of Yemeni sailors difficult to obtain. Although not necessarily at the core of "The Color of Rain," the sailor and his musings capture the historical experiences of thousands of Yemeni sailors. The sailor tells stories about his twenty years working on ships and traveling the world. He recalls his experiences fighting in other wars alongside the British and the Italians during World War II, which was the case for many other Yemenis. Yet, as the sailor states, fighting for the countries didn't make him feel anything, "Then neither the mountains nor the stars not even the color of ran, nothing in the world excited me."[320] This passing detail in the story is empowering because it historicizes the role Yemenis had in WWII, which otherwise has been largely ignored in historical scholarship. It also humanizes the sailor's experience by granting him the space to express his thoughts on his time fighting for the British and Italian. Rather than being reduced to a statistic in British or Italian government and military record, the sailor tells his own story on his terms. Although "nothing in the world" excited the sailor, his very telling of these experiences is transformative by remembering the role Yemenis played in the war. This demonstrates Abdul-Wali's construction of a diasporic imaginary. Grounded in precarity and strangeness/estrangement, the story of the sailor re-imagines the Yemeni diasporic subject as one with a history.

As the two characters sit and talk, the young man complains of hunger and cold, the sailor sits and admires the rain stating that it "has a color" and while you can't feel it, "you can see it when you want to see those creatures that fall into it."[321] The sailor recalls that during his twenty years working on ships, he never thought of the moon or the rain because it only made him miss his village in Yemen. For the younger solider, the rain is a nuisance, but for the sailor it is a reminder of how much he missed his homeland while away. The sailor goes on to tell the young man about the struggles he endured working on the ships and living in port cities around the world:

> Yes, my son, I knew streets in ports all over the world. I slept on their pavement. I was a beggar in the narrow streets of Marseilles. I was hungry. I worked days and nights. I worked in coal mines, near the flames of ovens and under an icy cold sky. I knew what it means to fight a war that is not your war. It's difficult to see hungry faces and now, don't you want me to shout happily here, 'I'm so happy, I'm so happy!' I'll tell this to all the people everywhere. Oh. How ashamed I was to tell them where I'm from, but now I won't be ashamed at all, but I'll tell them your story.[322]

This passage provides a look into the experience of the sailor who was a "beggar" in Marseilles, a port city in France. Given the historical evidence available, it is very likely that many Yemenis faced similar situations due to the employment discrimination in the shipping industry. Yet, the limited historical record doesn't provide a look into the

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[320] Ibid, 105
[321] Ibid, 102
[322] Ibid, 105

intimate experiences of labor migrants. The sailor, however, provides a voice to this diasporic subject.

They Die Strangers and "The Color of Rain," provides us with a look into labor migration and the struggles Yemenis faced abroad in the diaspora. Functioning as a cautionary tale on the negative consequences of labor migration both stories are gendered, focusing only on the male experience. In *They Die Strangers'* portrayal of the Yemeni diasporic community in Ethiopia, Ethiopian women are problematically represented as hypersexualized and disposable, while Yemeni women are desexualized and "pure." The novella does, however, define a diasporic imaginary that is reality for many men who leave their wives and children in Yemen in search of a better life. Similarly, "The Color of Rain," constructs a diasporic subject rooted in history as the sailor's story makes visible the historical experiences of Yemeni sailors which have otherwise been erased. In both stories, the themes of home, exile, and memory emerge as important components in the Yemeni diasporic imaginary. Yet, what is transformative about both these stories is that despite the trauma of being strangers/estranged, the characters re-imagine the historical record by centering the diasporic subject. In the next section, I analyze Abdul-Wali's stories centering women, in which the diasporic subject is further re-imagined allowing space for the experiences of women.

Gendering the Diasporic Subject: "Nothing New" & "This Land, Salma"

The stories of labor in the Yemeni diaspora are predominantly male centered given the fact that historically migration has been overwhelmingly men. Whereas Abdul-Wali's other writings, including *They Die Strangers* and "The Color of Rain," focused primarily on the experiences of migrant men, "Nothing New" and "This Land, Salma" provides a look into the experiences of women whose husbands migrated. With a focus on estrangement from their spouses, both stories exemplify my theorizing of "strange imaginaries" by foregrounding the feelings of being strange. Yet, the stories are transformative because through the perspective of women, they re-imagine the diasporic imaginary, which normally centers the experiences of male labor migrants. The short stories "Nothing New" and "This Land, Salma," point to the ways in which the labor migration of Yemeni men created shifts in the types of labor for women left in Yemen. Now the head of the household, the wives left behind were not only in charge of child rearing, but also maintaining the land and agriculture. Both grounded in the seemingly mundane moments of the everyday, these two stories center the experiences of women. The characters of Laila, from "Nothing New," and Salma from "This Land, Salma" are complex and multi-dimensional women who struggle with surviving the everyday while being separated, *estranged,* from their husbands and having to keep their homes afloat.

In this section, I argue that these stories demonstrate how life in the diaspora is not separated from life in Yemen, as families maintain connections both materially, through letters and goods like clothes, food, and money, and also emotionally. Therefore, the diasporic subject is not only the labor migrant who is a stranger in a foreign land, but also the women left behind who become estranged to their spouses. While struggling with the pain of that estrangement, both Laila and Salma find empowerment and meaning

through their connection with the land. Yet, while the themes of the land and being "estranged" are present in both narratives, this section demonstrates how it impacts the characters differently.

The short story "Nothing New" focuses on Laila, a Yemeni woman awaiting word from her husband who has been in "a faraway place," the United States, for over two years, working in the coal mines. Though not stated explicitly, the story takes place most likely during World War II, given the references to a war as well as the time period in which Abdul-Wali would have written the narrative. The premise of the story is Laila's wishes to receive a letter from her husband in the mail, "something new." Every day, Laila anxiously waits for the letter carrier hoping to hear from her husband Modhesh. The narrative begins describing Laila's home, "a house as old as time" with one story collapsed. Every day, Laila wakes up and goes outside to tend to her vegetables which suffered due to the lack of rain that year. As soon as her plants began to turn green, "they withered on. The arid land." [323] However, Laila continued to waiter them daily. Laila's garden symbolizes both the declining livelihood for her and her son and also her withering hope for the return of her husband. Yet, despite her fears, she continues to water the plants every day, representing her continuous hope that one day her husband will return or that she will receive something new in the mail.

Laila's neighbor walked by announcing that the caravan leader from Aden was in the village and offered to find out if a letter for Laila had arrived. Anxiously waiting to hear from the letter carrier, Laila thought how lucky her neighbor must be because her husband is in Aden, unlike Modhesh who is overseas in a faraway land. Modhesh used to send money and clothes at each port he stopped as a sailor, then suddenly it stopped. When other migrants returned to the village, they told Laila that Modhesh was in the United States working in the coal mines but would eventually return with lots of wealth. Abdul-Wali writes, that although the prospect of riches sounded assuring, "Laila wanted *him*."[324] This challenges the narrative that the livelihood of families left behind is improved by the remittances sent by labor migrants. For Laila, the material items were not of interest, instead she longed for the physical presence of her husband.
Laila continues to write countless letters to her husband but begins to suspect they are lost and never delivered due to the war. Hearing of many ships with Yemenis aboard sinking, Laila's fears grew each day.

The climax of the story is when the neighbor returned to Laila and informed her that the caravan leader had a letter for her. Laila grabbed her baby and rushed outside. As she took the letter from the leader, he said, "Your husband is in good health and he salutes you and his son. He sent you money for house expenses, the livestock, and taxes. He works very hard in America." Laila immediately asked if there was any word on when he would return. The caravan leader shook his head and said no but pulled out one hundred riyals and a care package filled with rice, sugar, clothes, and soap. The other women watched with sadness wishing to hear from their husbands. While her child was ecstatic with the new items, Laila couldn't help but feel that the one thing she wanted the most was her husband's return. The story ends with Laila holding the letter from

[323] Ibid, 89
[324] Ibid, 90

Modhesh. Abdul-Wali concludes with “Years passed, followed by more years; the letter became tattered from so many kisses and tears…”[325]

Only taking place in the close parameters of Laila’s home, the narrative arch of “Nothing New” is mundane when compared to the dramatic events in Abdul-Wali’s other works such as *They Die Strangers.* Perhaps done purposefully, Abdul-Wali captures the uneventful and grueling everyday life for Laila, who represents the experiences of many Yemeni women whose husbands leave for work. Struggling to keep her and the livelihood of her child afloat, Laila carries the burden of maintaining the life in Yemen for her husband whose ultimate return remains unknown. The story also engages with Laila’s mental health as she battles with her longing for Modhesh and above all the constant waiting for his return and “something new.”

“This Land Salma*,*” tells the story of another Yemeni woman who is struggling with the absence of her husband who has also immigrated for work. Salma’s husband, Dirham, has been away for 5 years. Unlike *Nothing New,* this story is narrated by the voice of Salma’s own thoughts as she grapples with life without her husband. The short story opens with Salma talking to herself:

> Salma, finally, you’re facing yourself. You must admit the truth; don’t try to run away from yourself, for that won’t help you. Admit it, you’ve been waiting for him for a long time and you can’t bear it any longer. Try to remember how long your husband Dirham has been away. Five years, exactly, Oh, Salma, five years and you’re starting the sixth year of waiting. How old are you? Count, you don’t need to rush. You’re twenty-six years old. Yes, you’ve started to feel that you’re getting old--quickly, without noticing and without enjoying life. Do I have to remind you, Salma, that you were married then years ago? Yes, your husband went away after leaving a seed inside your womb. He didn’t even know. You didn’t tell him, as that was the custom of the village. You thought he wouldn’t be gone for long.[326]

This passage demonstrates two major themes of the story: time and happiness. Salma emphasizes the amount of time Dirham has been away, five years, as she starts her sixth. She also highlights her age and how she is starting to feel old “without noticing and without enjoying life.” In discussing time, the story also grapples with the concept of happiness and the amount of time someone can endure without being happy. Salma recalls that she was happy when she first married Dirham but questions whether she really loved him. She recounts the routine she had in which she would wake up at dawn to milk and feed the cow and go to the water well. She would make breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Salma says to herself, “It’s the same life you used to live at your father’s house. Nothing has changed except your boss--first your father, then your husband.”[327] When Dirham first left, he returned after two years with money. Yet, Salma says, “But, your life

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[325] Ibid, 93
[326] Ibid, 95
[327] Ibid, 97

didn't change whether he was at home or away. In both cases, you worked for his family and for the land."[328]

Now, five years since Dirham's last visit home, Salma contemplates the meaning of her husband being so far away, "across the big sea, the one they say has no end."[329] She wonders whether her husband is with other women, remembering her Uncle Zaid who left his wife for twenty years and married another woman. They say Zaid's wife still waits for him. Salma wonders what makes her husband any different, stating, "The truth is unknown; it's there overseas with your husband."[330] Salma quickly stops this train of thought and remembers that people are beginning to gossip about her behavior has she has started to wear make-up again for the first time since Dirham has left. Salma thinks to herself, "The truth, Salma, is that you're wearing make-up for him, for Hassan...See how much you love him?"[331] This secret leads Salma to contemplate on her own agency and choices. She concludes that pursuing Hassan or getting a divorce would be pointless. If she married Hassan, he would most likely travel abroad for work like Dirham and she would be left alone once again.

Salma suddenly remembers the one thing she does have: the land. It is the land that Salma has given her life and youth for. Salma concludes that no one, not even her husband and son, would care for the land the way she does. Each day Salma's labor for the land not only helps sustain her life and her son's life, but for the entire village: "And you...it's you who keeps producing the good things from this land, the grain, the fodder, the milk, and the ghee. Everything in this village comes from the land. Isn't the land your life?"[332] The story ends with this final monologue and as Salma's thoughts poured through, it began to rain. Watching the rain seep slowly into the land, Salma holds her son and "fiercely" thinks, "I'll teach him. I'll teach him to love the land."[333] In the end, Salma realizes that the one thing she does have is knowledge of the land which is something no one can take away from her. Even more important, it is this knowledge that she has the ability to pass on to her son.

Both "Nothing New" and "This Land, Salma," explore the experiences of Yemeni women whose husbands migrate for work. Both women are faced with the task of raising children on their own while also maintaining their homes and land in the absence of their husbands. "Nothing New" portrays the rather bleak reality for Laila as she waits every day for news from her husband. The story ends anticlimactically, much like the title itself, with years passing of Laila waiting, but not receiving a new letter. In "This Land, Salma," Abdul-Wali tells the story of Salma who experiences a similar situation to Laila, but the reader is given a more in-depth look into her deepest thoughts. Alongside the challenge of her husband being away, Salma also struggles with her own sexual desires and attraction to other men. This portrayal counters the dominant representation of Yemeni women as asexual. However, order is restored by the end of the story when

[328] Ibid, 97
[329] Ibid, 97
[330] Ibid, 97
[331] Ibid, 98
[332] Ibid, 99
[333] Ibid, 99

Salma realizes that her desires are pointless and ultimately her biggest possession is knowledge of the land. The ending maintains the narrative that Yemeni women are not only responsible for maintaining the land as their male counter parts migrate for work but are also symbolically important for men in the diaspora. In *They Die Strangers,* Abdou's memory of his wife, whose face he cannot remember, is equated with memory of Yemen. Despite the fact that Abdou left Yemen because of the harsh conditions in search of financial resources, like the image of his wife, he holds the image of Yemen on a pedestal compared to the life in Addis Ababa. The construction of Yemen as a nation, therefore, is placed on the shoulders of women who must aspire to maintain an image of perfection. Salma's attraction to other men shatters this expectation, and she realizes that even if she were to pursue those desires, they would lead her nowhere. Instead, she learns that her knowledge and relationship to the land is one she can indulge and depend on.

Both themes of the importance of land and the notion of being a "stranger" figures prominently in all of Abdul-Wali's writings but impacts the characters differently. Salma's relationship to the land contrasts with Abdou's relationship to land from *They Die Strangers.* For Abdou, he longs to return to his homeland, which remains only a distant memory as he slowly becomes a "stranger." For Salma, who cares for the land each day, her relationship with her homeland is concrete and material. The land is the only redeemable and reliable thing in her life. Yet, in all three stories, the characters are strangers in different ways: Abdou, a stranger to his home, and Salma and Laila strangers to their migrant husbands.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have attempted to demonstrate how Abdul-Wali's novella and short stories in his collection *They Die Strangers,* offer a complex look at the Yemeni diaspora by creating a diasporic imaginary rooted in "strangeness." Through my translation of the Arabic word for expatriate, *mughtarib,* which is used to define those in the diaspora, I have offered a theorizing of "strange imaginaries," that I believe is exemplified in Adbul-Wali's stories. Under strange imaginaries, we can locate cultural productions that engage with the precarious formations and conditions of diasporic life. These works of literature sought to imagine the state of being *mughtarib* in the diaspora, that is of being a stranger in a foreign land while simultaneously becoming estranged from your homeland. Through and analysis of the novella *They Die Strangers* and the short story "The Color of Rain" I first explore how the male diasporic subject struggles with retaining a connection to his homeland. The series of events that unfold in *They Die Strangers* cautions the reader against the consequences of labor migration and life in the diaspora. The protagonist, Abdou, symbolizes the desire, yet ultimate failure, of retaining one's connection to home. In "The Color of Rain," the character of the sailor, offers a historical subject that represents the thousands of Yemeni sailors lost in the historical record. While both stories are grounded in the themes of estrangement and loss, they reimagine a diasporic imaginary and center the diasporic subject. Similarly, "Nothing New" and "This Land, Salma," foreground the experiences of Yemeni women whose husbands have migrated to labor. The complex and multi-faceted experiences of Laila

and Salma challenge the erasure of Yemeni women from the diasporic imaginary. Although grounded in themes of the strange, of estrangement, and uncertainty, I hope to have demonstrated that these stories document the lives of migrant workers and families who have historically been marginalized from the archive and historical record. In doing so, these "strange imaginaries" provide an imaginative reconfiguration of the Yemeni diaspora, one that foregrounds the complex perspectives of Yemenis themselves.

EPILOGUE

"Diasporic subjectivity is always in movement, disrupting, re-creating, and mobile in its representation, converging the past with the present for a new future."[334]

Emma Perez, *Decolonial Imaginary*

Throughout this dissertation, I have explored the history of the Yemeni diaspora, its formation and conditions, throughout the 20th century. I argue that Yemeni workers drew connections between local challenges in the diasporic spaces they labored with global politics of empire. By foregrounding experiences of Yemeni diasporic communities throughout the 20th century in Britain's shipping industry, California's United Farm Workers, Detroit's United Auto Workers, as well as literary works by Yemeni writers, this project interrogates the intersections of labor and empire while also highlighting the complicated, multifaceted, and often messy realities within histories of activism and community organizing. It analyzes how labor and labor activism in the diaspora became an ideological arena in which politics of empire were obscured, accommodated, exposed, and challenged. This dissertation seeks to contribute to the study of Yemeni diasporic communities, a population who remains misunderstood in mainstream media as well severely understudied in academic scholarship. In doing so, this project also seeks to contribute to imagining new ways of doing research in Middle Eastern and Arab communities.

Through an examination of Yemeni labor history in diasporic communities in England and the U.S., this dissertation has demonstrated the ways in which empire was resisted and at times accommodated in through labor politics. Chapter one explored the history of Yemeni sailors in South Shields, England from the early 1900s leading up to the infamous 1919 and 1930 "race riots." The historical narrative surrounding the "riots' is that they were about class and not race. This chapter argues that they were about both class and race, but they were also about empire. Chapter two and three focus on Yemeni labor during the 1970s, the peak of migration to the United States. In chapter one, I argue that Yemeni farm workers invoked Arab nationalism to contest social injustices they faced in agribusiness. In doing so, Yemenis highlighted the role of empire with union politics, specifically in regards to the question of Palestine. Following Nagi Daifallah's funeral and the use of Gamal Abdel Nasser portrait during the funeral march, Chavez and the UFW were pressured into issuing a statement in support of Israel. This narrative demonstrates a quintessential theme in the history of Yemeni labor in the diaspora: that local politics of labor are not separate from global politics of empire. Similarly, in chapter two, Yemeni autoworkers in Detroit and Dearborn, Michiagn challenged the UAW's

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[334] Perez, 79

purchasing of Israeli bonds. This pushback was a way for workers to resist not only pro-Israeli labor unions which reflected a consolidated newfound U.S.-Israeli alliance, but to challenge discriminatory practices in the factories as well, such as anti-Arab racism.

Finally, chapter four departs from the historical case studies in the first three chapters, and turns to the literary in order to interrogate how Yemeni writers themselves imagined the diaspora and diasporic subjectivity. Here, I propose a notion of "strange imaginaries," drawing from the Arabic word mughtrb (expatriate) used to describe someone living in the diaspora. I argue that although rooted in the precarity of being in a strange land as well as being estranged from your family, the Yemeni diasporic imaginary challenges the historical erasure of migrants and workers by seeking a new diasporic subjectivity. It is here that the discord of being "strange," actually serves to offer critical re-imaginations of the diaspora. Through an examination of Mohammed Abdul-Wali's writings, the diasporic subject is defined in terms of "strangeness," yet the writings and characters consider notion of home, love, and family which offer a more complex look into the impact of Yemeni labor migration and experiences in the diaspora. Together, these chapters tell a story about the Yemeni diaspora. If the chapters read as disjointed or too broad in their scope of time and space, that is because they are representative of the diasporic experience which itself is one of distance and fragmentation.

Rather than attempt to simply conclude, the goals of this epilogue are to introduce the next sites of exploration of this research project as well as connect the history of the Yemeni diaspora with the contemporary moment. Given the lack of time, the scope of the dissertation is limited to the resources available to me while conducting this research in graduate school. As I continue this research and build it into a book manuscript, I intend to broaden the project both temporally and spatially. First, I plan to interrogate other key historical sites in the Yemeni diaspora including San Francisco, CA and Buffalo, NY. First, I plan to expand the discussion of Yemeni labor in the U.S. throughout the 1970s by exploring the communities in New York. Chapters two and three explore the history of Yemeni farm workers and auto workers in California and Michigan respectively. Not examined however, are the experiences of those who found work in New York's steel industry, specifically the Buffalo area, another key location in Yemeni labor history. Just as the 1970s opened employment for those in agriculture and the auto industry, the steel industry took advantage of recent Yemeni immigrants who were willing to do some of the hardest jobs in the factory. Second, future research will explore Yemeni labor history beyond the 1970s, where the dissertation ends. For future research, I intend to explore events taking place in the 1980s and 1990s. Many of the Yemenis who worked as farm workers in California's Central Valley throughout the 1960s and 1970s, moved from the Valley to the Bay Area where thousands found work in San Francisco's service industry, mainly as janitors. This period also marks some important shifts in Yemeni labor, activism, and community formation, particularly in California, as more Yemenis shifted from wage labor and started to open small corner shops.

Finally, I plan to include the historical experiences of Yemeni women in the diaspora. In focusing on a labor history of the Yemeni diaspora, women have been marginalized in this dissertation. This has to do with the gendered nature of labor as well the archive which only documents the experiences of Yemeni migrant men (which itself

is a marginalized history). With more time and resources, I hope to build new archives that center the voices of Yemeni and Yemeni American women historically and in the present moment. This epilogue concludes with a look at the organizing by Yemeni American women following the 2017 "Muslim ban."

Directions for Future Research

An important diasporic community includes the generations of Yemenis in Buffalo and Lackawanna, New York. One of the few studies on Yemenis in New York includes Shalom Staub's work in *Yemenis in New York City: The Folklore of Ethnicity,* which explores the ways in which Yemeni workers in New York City expressed social identity "through traditional genres of their folkloric repertoire" including poetry and song. [335] For my future research, however, I would be interested in exploring the labor history of Yemenis in Buffalo and Lackawanna, in particular their experiences in the steel mills during the mid-20th century. In 1912, the first group of Yemenis arrived in Lackawanna, a city south of Buffalo named after the Lackawanna Steel Company, the second largest steel company in the world from 1840-1922. The Lackawanna Steel Company was merged with Bethlehem Steel Corporation which thrived throughout the 20th century as one of the largest steel producers and shipbuilding companies. By the 1950s, when more Yemenis began arriving in New York, the Yemeni community in Lackawanna grew larger as a result of increased employment in the surrounding steel mills, which had previously been employing predominantly Eastern Europeans. Many of the Yemenis arriving in the 1950s and 1960s worked for Bethlehem Steel, which at the time was a leading steel making factory in the U.S.[336] With the decline of industrial jobs in the 1970s, however, many Yemeni steelworkers found work in the service industry or opened small grocery stores and corner shops. Today there are over 5,000 Yemenis living in the Buffalo region including surrounding suburbs such as Lackawanna. Nearly 350 small businesses in Buffalo are owned by Yemenis.[337]

By the 1980s, many Yemeni migrants throughout the United States opened small businesses, often grocery or corner shops. The shift from wage labor occupations in factories on the east coast or as agricultural workers in California to becoming small business owners is reflected in many Yemeni diasporic communities. For future research, I am interested in exploring the opening of Yemeni owned businesses and the experiences of Yemeni merchants. There are several reasons why Yemenis left their jobs to open their own businesses. By the late 1970s, deindustrialization led to the decline of both the auto and steel industry. After losing their jobs, many Yemenis struggled to find employment. As a result, groups of Yemenis would often pool any saved money together to purchase a small location to start a business. Secondly, based on tensions often found

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[335] Shalom Staub, *Yemenis in New York City: the Folklore of Ethnicity*, (Philadelphia: Balck Institute Press, 1989).

[336] Ted McClelland, *Nothin' but Blue Skies: The Heyday, Hard Times, and Hopes of America's Industrial Heartland,* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2013),

[337] https://ppgbuffalo.org/files/documents/data-demographics-history/populations_and_cultural_groups/datademographicshistory-_yemeni_immigrants_in_western_new_york.pdf

within unions such as the UFW and UAW, I am interested in exploring how Yemenis became disillusioned with unions as an avenue for their representation and empowerment. As Yemeni merchants no longer had to turn to a union that didn't always have their best interests, small businesses empowered merchants to strengthen their own community.
During the 1980s and 1990s, around the same time that more Yemeni owned businesses were opened, we also saw an increase in Yemeni American organizations such as the Yemeni Benevolent Association in San Francisco and the Yemeni American Association in Fresno, California.

The establishments of Yemeni owned businesses and organizations strengthened the notion of a "Yemeni American community." The discourse within the community now revolved around the need to help each other rather than turn to outside resources such as unions or government aid. This often translated into more conservative politics demonstrating shifting notions of cultural identity amongst Yemeni Americans. In an article published on June 18, 1980 in the *San Francisco Examiner*, Bay Area resident and president of the Yemeni Benevolent Association, Ali Saleh proudly claimed that out of the over 10,000 Yemenis in California none are on welfare, "not a single person," as he stated. Saleh stated: "We help each other. When we first arrive we stay with kins. If no kin, we stay with friends. If there is no work in the city, we go to the farms and pick fruits. But we do not go on relief."[338] Saleh's quote demonstrates the desire to build community rather than rely on the government while at the same time reflects a classist view of welfare. Saleh, 47 years old at the time of the article publication in 1980, was an instructor at Chabot College in Hayward teaching woodwork and machine shops. Yet, Saleh goes on to state that, "People think we are the rich Arabs who have taken over the mom and pop grocery business in San Francisco. We are the poor Arabs getting into the grocery business in Oakland." While there were many Yemeni grocery businesses, many still worked in the city as restaurant workers and custodians and had a reputation for being "the hardest workers with the lowest rate of absenteeism."[339]

While the 1980s and 1990s saw an increase in Yemeni owned businesses, many continued to work in various jobs including the service industry. Thousands of Yemenis found work as janitors in San Francisco beginning in the 1980s and throughout the 2000s. Many lived in the Tenderloin, a predominantly working-class neighborhood with other immigrants and people of color.[340] Another avenue of research for the book manuscript will involve the history of Yemeni janitors in San Francisco during this period. In the early 2000s, 90 percent of janitorial work in San Francisco was unionized. The majority of Yemenis were members of Service Employees International Union Local 87. In 2002, SEIU, Local 87 had 3,400 members in which 20 percent were Yemenis, 60 percent

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[338] Ken Wong, "Yemeni in Bay Area retain their proud independence," *San Francisco Examiner,* June 18, 1980.
[339] Ken Wong, "Yemeni in Bay Area retain their proud independence," *San Francisco Examiner,* June 18, 1980.
[340] Lucia Volk, "Kull Wahad La Haalu': Feelings of Isolation and Distress among Yemeni Immigrant Women in San Francisco's Tenderloin." *Medical Anthropology Quarterly,* 2009. 23 (4): 397–416.

Latinos, and 20 percent Chinese.[341] Many of these Yemenis had previously worked as farm workers in the Central Valley and were UFW members. They drew connections between their experiences as farm workers with their labor as service workers. SEIU even organized commemorative events to honor UFW martyr Nagi Daifallah. Senior SEIU organizer, Monadel Herzallah stated in a 2002 article published in SF Gate that Yemenis "work at night, so they're invisible." Herzallah goes on to state that "Being a part of a union has helped Yemenis relate to other ethnic groups, Asian and Latino workers, and to feel part of American society, part of the people that contribute to the economy with taxes and hard work."[342] As demonstrated by Herzallah's statement, there are clear historical connections between the experiences of Yemeni farm workers in the Central Valley in the 1970s with janitors in San Francisco in the 21st century. I intend to expand on chapter two which ends in the late 1980s and add the history of Yemeni workers in San Francisco.

Finally, given the emphasis on labor, the dissertation is male-centric, because Yemeni labor migrants were overwhelmingly men. Therefore, I plan to interrogate the experiences of Yemeni immigrant women, the majority of whom migrated in the 1980s, although there were numbers migrating earlier. In the few publications on Yemeni immigrant women, they are portrayed as helpless victims, living in isolation. I am interested, however, in how Yemeni women actively constructed space and home in the diaspora for their families. In chapter four, I analyze how the women whose husbands left Yemen for work are left in charge of sustaining their families and home. In Mohamed Abdul Wali's stories, it became evident that the Yemeni diaspora was imagined by both the labor migrants, but also the women left in Yemen. For future research, however, I am interested in examining the experiences of Yemeni immigrant women and how they created space in the diaspora by upholding the home. This chapter seeks to follow in other feminist and gender studies work that deconstructs notions of labor to allow for a labor history of the home. The methods for this chapter will include interviews with Yemeni women, with whom I have started to create contacts with, particularly with individuals in New York who immigrated in the 1960s and 1970s. I am also interested in utilizing family portraits as an archival source that constructs notions of family, culture, and identity in the diaspora.

The Yemeni Diaspora Today, Creating a New Future

On January 27, 2017, President Trump signed Executive Order 13769 entitled "Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States," halting entry of new refugees to the U.S. for 120 days and indefinitely closing admission of any refugees from Syria. The order also blocked visa applicants from six predominately Muslim countries: Iraq, Iran, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, and Yemen. Hundreds of Yemenis with visas and flight tickets in their hands and plans to travel to the U.S. were immediately turned away at airports in Djibouti. News of the ban reverberated throughout

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[341] Tyche Hendricks, "Legacy of Yemeni Immigrant Lives on Among Union Janitors/ Farmworkers Organizer to be Honored in S.F.," *SF Gate,* August 16, 2002.
[342] Ibid.

the diaspora as thousands of Yemenis in the U.S. were awaiting the arrival of their relatives, friends, and loved ones. Yemenis in the U.S. were confused by the uncertain terms of the order, which was poorly executed and scrambled for resources and assistance in order to ensure that their families were able to board planes as soon as possible. While the media emphasized the crowds of demonstrators that gathered in airports across the country, few looked at the organizing that was happening within the communities affected by the executive order.

Following the Muslim ban, Yemeni communities throughout the U.S. felt the consequences of decades of Islamaphobic, anti-Arab rhetoric that had been cemented into the American psyche. The ideologies that made the Muslim ban possible were, of course, reverberations of the historic marginalization of Muslim Arabs in the diaspora. Yet, the forms of resistance that emerged in response to the ban were also echoes of previous forms of activism in the Yemeni diaspora. On February 2, 2017, nearly 1,000 Yemeni-owned bodegas and small-businesses in New York closed shop in protest of Trump's executive order.[343] Over 5,000 of these owners alongside supporters gathered in Brooklyn outside Borough Hall to speak out against the overtly anti-Muslim rhetoric that defined the executive order, known as the "Muslim ban" and the continuous Islamaphobia perpetuated by the Trump presidency and his supporters.[344] The bodega strike highlighted the important role that Yemeni businesses played in the state of New York and the impact that closing down the stores had on local communities. Yemenis utilized their labor and positionality as business owners to protest an explicitly Islamaphobic policy driven by U.S. empire. The Brooklyn bodega strike illuminated a convergence between the past and present as current Yemeni Americans drew from the history of Yemeni workers who utilized their labor to contest social injustices. These connections demonstrate the diasporic subjectivity Emma Perez describes in the quote opening this epilogue, that is, one that disrupts, recreates, and converges the "past with the present for a new future."

Much like the history of Yemenis in the UFW in California and the autoworker industry in Detroit, the Brooklyn bodega strike demonstrates the ways in which labor served as an arena to critique the negative effects of U.S. nationalism and empire. Following the Brooklyn bodega strike was the creation of the Yemeni American Merchant Association of New York (YAMA). On April 23, 2017 YAMA founders held an event in which 300 merchants attended and introduced plans for the creation of a nonprofit organization that would assist in community engagement, immigration advocacy, and social services. The creation of YAMA represents the connection between labor and politics of empire. Unlike labor activism in the past, however, Yemeni American woman activists emerged as the leaders and organizers. Community leaders such as Dr. Debbie Almontaser emerged as leaders of YAMA which not only sought to represent the Yemeni community through their labor as merchants, but simultaneously critiqued the ideologies that allowed the Muslim ban to be a reality.[345]

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[343] Adam Chandler, "The Yemeni Bodega Strike," *The Atlantic,* Feb. 4, 2017

[344] Rozina Ali, "The Bodega Strike Against Trump's Executive Order on Immigration," *The New Yorker,* Feb. 3, 2017

[345] Yemeni American Merchant Association Facebok Page. https://www.facebook.com/OfficialYAMAUSA/

Additionally, in response to the Muslim ban, New York City based activists Rabyahha Althaibani and Widad Hassan created a Facebook page for Yemenis across the U.S. to document their history living in the diaspora. Titled, "Yemenis of America—Stories from the Diaspora," the project which is a Facebook page, posted stories from Yemenis across the U.S as a way to claim space and critique the limited terrains of American nationalism. The page's description states that their mission is to collect and share stories of Yemenis in America. They also include an email address for individuals to submit their stories. In an interview with *Middle East Eye*, Hassan stated: "We felt that the stories and experiences of the Yemeni community were largely absent from the larger story of immigrants in America. We wanted to document and share stories of the Yemeni migrant's experience resettling in America as well as the story of those impacted by the recent travel ban."[346]

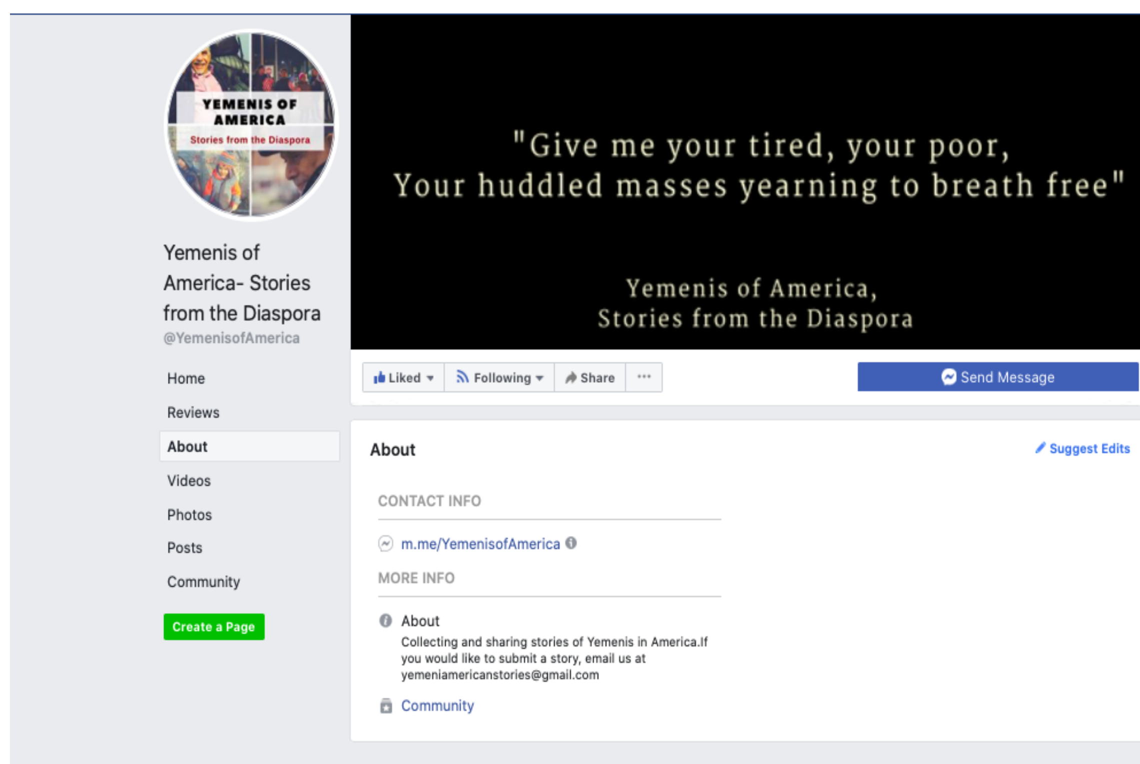

Image 4. Yemenis of America--Stories from the Diaspora, Facebook Page.

[346] Susana Mendoza, "Yemenis of America—Stories from the Diaspora," *Middle East Eye,* March 24, 2017

The platform was appealing to young Yemeni Americans and their social media skills. It also played to their strength: knowledge and access to the historical experiences of their families. Unlike many other immigrant communities who are able to point toward a body of work including history, literature, film, and art that represents their communities and is well-known to the general public, Yemeni Americans continue to be underrepresented. When the Yemeni community is highlighted it is only in the context of crisis and war and is usually told through the perspective of an outsider "expert." Yemeni blogger and freelance writer Afrah Nasser addressed the consequences of this reality in an article regarding the problems of having outsider experts on Yemen. According to Nasser, the issue with the ways in which the conflicts and humanitarian crisis in Yemen are being portrayed by the media today, and indeed within academia, is that outside voices are valued more than actual local perspectives. Nasser writes:

> I see how Yemen can be regarded as a baffling case that needs to be "studied up." This reflects why foreign Yemen experts are on demand. As an expert, he or she is expected to deliver the truth about this 'mysterious' country. Nevertheless, many Yemeni local journalists and writers who are unable to reach international audiences due to the language barrier or other economic reasons have often been recognized by the world only when they became attacked or killed in tragic circumstances. The agency that materializes in their work is denied when they are only represented in the event of tragedy.[347]

For Nasser the problem with outside voices is that it relies upon the destruction of the "agency that materializes" the work of local Yemeni journalists and writers. These writers are only recognized within tragic circumstances. Although grounded in the diaspora, the "Yemenis of America" page also addresses the loss of agency for Yemenis and their stories. The very purpose of the page is to hand the mic over to the Yemeni community to record their own stories, on their terms. The result is an archive of stories about migration, diaspora, and labor. In one of the posts, Rabyaah documents the experiences of her father's great uncle who migrated to the U.S. in 1972:

> This is my father's great uncle Mohamed. Uncle Mohamed aka Mo immigrated to the United States in 1972 and first settled in Northern California to work in a fruit farm. When he relocated to NYC, he worked for more than 30 years as a busboy and later on as a cook assistant. With his labor and love, he has contributed greatly to this country of ours. #NoBan #WeAreAmerica" - Story submitted by Rabyaah[348]

Rabyaah's post emphasizes "Uncle Mohamed's" labor history, beginning in California as a farm worker and moving to New York City as a busboy and cook assistant. The hashtags #NoBan and #WeAreAmerica were used by Yemenis to critique the blatant Islamaphobia found in the Muslim ban.

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[347] Afrah Nasser, "The Problem of Yemen Experts," *The New Arab* (March 29, 2016)
[348] https://www.facebook.com/YemenisofAmerica/

The reason that “Yemenis of America—Stories from the Diaspora” was effective is because it was both started and created by the Yemeni community and not compromised by the agendas of institutions or universities seeking to monopolize the experiences of marginalized communities. Hassan and Althaibani created the platform with the awareness of the nuances and intricacies within the Yemeni community. One of the strategies that the organizers implemented to ensure inclusion is that posts can be anonymous, and submissions do not have to include a photograph. This allows for more inclusion of narratives, particularly from Yemeni women, who are typically left out of histories of the Yemeni American community due to cultural norms. In an anonymous post submitted to the page, a daughter tells the story of her mother who immigrated to the U.S. in the late 1960s and found work at a machine job. The writer states:

> Never held a pen, let alone got an education - spoke no English yet she was able to help my father support their family. Her boss was so impressed with her work ethics, she was promoted and received raises without her ever asking. She took the bus, took care of my sick father, yet every day we had a home-cooked meal. For me, she is THE "Woman in Manufacturing." Today, as an owner of the manufacturing company she helped found with my father, she reaps the benefits of her hard work. It takes resilience and tenacity to push through barriers. She inspired me to work hard and believe that I can succeed, no matter what the odds.[349]

This post opens an entire avenue of historical research that is otherwise ignored. While many are not familiar with the history of Yemeni women in machine shops, this narrative opens up the possibilities for future research. Given the subjectivity, lack of names, official documents, or specific dates, archivists and historians might disregard the “Yemenis of America " Facebook page as a legitimate archive. Yet, the choice of anonymity is precisely what makes it radical. In order to challenge traditional historical epistemological and methodological ideologies, scholars doing work in marginalized and vulnerable communities must embrace what has typically been referred to as “gaps” or “silences” in the sources. Rather than defining sources by perceived “gaps” or “silences” radical historical methods understand them as moments of resistance.

The Yemeni community has been characterized by scholars of Arab American studies as overly “conservative,” particularly in regard to gender roles. The little work on Yemeni American women focuses primarily on limitations and oppression posed by a patriarchal community supposedly informed by Islamic and Yemeni cultural ideals and practices. In relation to the Yemeni community’s characterization as “conservative” it has also been described as being “tight-knit.” This is one of the reasons why non-Yemeni scholars have faced challenges when conducting scholarship on the Yemeni American community. The brilliance of the “Yemenis of America” project is that rather than defining their community’s normative views on gender as conservative and therefore limiting, the creators embraced anonymity because they knew they would open the door for more voices, particularly from Yemeni women. It is also clear that the audience for

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[349] https://www.facebook.com/YemenisofAmerica/

"Yemenis of America " is the Yemeni diasporic community whereas existing scholarship on Yemenis in the diaspora has been written by those outside of the Yemeni and even Arab community. While I am not interested in romanticizing Yemeni-led work and activism, I am interested in creating room for community driven historical records within Western academic scholarship because it offers much needed alternatives to historical narratives that have over-simplified experiences within the Yemeni diasporic community.

By foregrounding the experiences of the Yemeni diaspora, the aim of this dissertation has been to demonstrate how the diaspora is intrinsically a history of labor and that it is also deeply connected to the larger project of empire. Yemeni workers have historically used labor to claim space and contest politics of empire. In turning to this history, we not only contextualize the current precarities facing the Yemeni community but can take from the past to build a new future. The history of the Yemeni diaspora matters now more than ever. Specifically, as Yemeni Americans face increasing restrictive immigration legislation and xenophobic rhetoric, this history is a reminder that Yemenis have long been a part of history, despite not always being recognized.

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