

Transitioning Into a
New Neighborhood:
Muslim Community of
Western Suburbs

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Introduction and Methodology

Being born and raised in Michigan I always had a sense of belonging. I belonged to this country and I belonged to my heritage. I also belonged to my community and I was given an identity by my religion. Growing up as a minority I always wondered if I fit in or if I stood out from other students in middle and high school. I soon came to realize that any teenager goes through this phase. I considered myself normal and unique. Similarly Maseer Rabbaig said, “I never felt different at Crescent because we were all minorities, but at the high school I felt kind of different cause there was a whole bunch of people, so that took a lot of getting used to”¹. My parents, being immigrants from India, brought over their religion and culture and adapted to a whole new lifestyle. All of the changes that they endured were for a better life, a better opportunity. It is now my turn to experience these opportunities, and carry on my religion and culture. Although my religion is the same as my parents, I’d say my culture is not. Sure, I identify with my Indian heritage, but my social group and my nation are among those who reside in the United States, and more specifically, Michigan. Part of this identity confusion, or realization is similar to what Aliyah Banister experienced:

“They were all Desi [of Indo-Pak origin] and I didn’t really know a lot about the culture and I really wanted to get in with them and wear shalwar khameez and watch Desi movies with them just to fit in. I would try really hard to do that. Some aunties would talk about me in Urdu and I would understand them, that has been awkward. I have trouble trying to fit in with the Arab girls. Because everyone always thinks I’m Arabic. Once they would find out I wasn’t Arab

¹ Muhiuddin, Abdullateef, “Interview: Siyadath, Mirza & Maseer Rabbaig” (HIST 4999 Project, The University of Michigan–Dearborn, 2009).

they would lose interest, but that was when I was younger. I guess from that I really became anti nationalist, I don't care about being called Desi or Arab because both of my parents are Muslim, that's what I had to identify myself with. I'm just Muslim"².

In assessing the current situation of racial change and continuity of metro Detroit, I turned to the Muslim immigrants in Canton, Michigan. Often times when people hear the word Muslim, they imagine Arabs or the Middle East. Muslims are your coworkers, friends, and neighbors. They are no one specific race. I began by interviewing members at large from the Muslim Community of Western Suburbs (MCWS). I made sure to include an interview from a founder, from an avid volunteer, from previous board members, a current board member, and a participant in the community. I placed an advertisement in the community newsletter as well. This was to make sure that different perspectives were considered. I ended up with a diverse group of individuals, diverse in their age, gender, ethnicity, education, religiosity and profession. There were nineteen interviews total and they were conducted with some married couples, their children, and also with individuals. A list of questions, individuals' interviewed, and local masjids may be found in the appendix.

Synopsis of Islam in America

Around the world there are over 1 billion Muslims. Islam is considered one of the fastest growing religions. Just as in any religion, there are varying aspects of religiosity, culture, and self-will. Some of these Muslims may have been raised into it, but at the same time, there are those who leave the faith, and others who embrace

² "Interview: Suhail, Noor & Aliyah Banister"

it. What is it that makes Islam so appealing, or disheartening? Perhaps it is a lack of faith. Those who have faith hold onto it, those who don't have faith let go, and those who are searching for faith, come closer to God.

As Muslims, we believe that God knows all. He has foreseen time from its inception till when the world as we know it will end. After that, the true life begins. The Arabic term for God is Allah. Out of respect, many Muslims will say *subhanahu wa ta'ala* after saying Allah, meaning 'God is pure of having no partners and He is exalted from having a son'. This is often abbreviated as SWT. Likewise, when Muslims refer to Prophet Muhammad, the last Messenger of God, they say *sallallahu 'alayhi wa sallam*, meaning 'may the blessings and peace of God be upon him', often abbreviated as SAW for Arabic transliterated abbreviation or PBUH in English meaning peace and blessings upon him.

Believers rely on two sources for knowledge and understanding. Those are the Quran and Hadith. The Quran is the word of God as it was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) through archangel Gabriel. For another dosage of spiritual and moral guidance, believers rely on Hadith, which are narrations of what the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said, and how others perceived his conduct to be. The full collection of these hadith has been known to be called *sunna*. These two sources shape the conduct of many Muslims around the world³.

³ Read, Jen'Nan G & Bartkowski, John P. "To Veil or Not to Veil? A Case Study of Identity Negotiation among Muslim Women in Austin, Texas." *Gender and Society*, Vol. 14, No. 3 (Jun., 2000), p. 398.

The basics of Islam revolve around the five pillars of Islam. When asked ‘what is Islam?’ the response Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) gave was that Islam consists of the following (narrated in a hadith): witnessing and testifying that God is the one and only, and that Muhammad is His messenger, observing prayer, giving charity, conducting fasts, and embarking on a journey to Mecca if possible⁴. When asked ‘what is faith?’ the Prophet Muhammad’s (PBUH) response was that we have steadfast belief in God, angels (Gabriel), books (Torah, Gospel, Quran), messengers (Adam, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Muhammad), the day of judgment and also that God controls our fate⁵. These are known as the articles of faith. Through this there are established similarities with Christianity and Judaism.

These basics translated throughout the years, became the message of Islam that spread through Arabia, across Asia, into Europe, down to Africa, and eventually to the Americas. Often times it was passed through the conduct of businessmen. African slaves were amongst the first Muslims in America, but were not able to practice the religion wholeheartedly. In the late 1800s, Alexander Russell Webb was a United States consul to the Philippines. In 1888, he embraced Islam and published a journal called the *Moslem World*⁶. He was also known for his

⁴ Smith, Jane I. "Faith." *Encyclopaedia of the Qur 'ān*. General Editor: Jane Dammen McAuliffe, Georgetown University, Washington DC. Brill, 2009. Brill Online. Univ. Of Michigan-Ann Arbor. 19 December 2009 <http://0-www.brillonline.nl.wizard.umd.umich.edu/subscriber/entry?entry=q3_COM-00061>

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Abd-Allah, Umar F. *A Muslim in Victorian America The Life of Alexander Russell Webb* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 57, 66.

involvement in the 1893 World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago and speaking on behalf of Islam⁷.

In more recent history, names such as Elijah Muhammad and Malcolm X are common amongst the Civil Rights era. Elijah Muhammad was a follower of the Nation of Islam (NOI), a group of mainly African Americans who practiced this faith as an alternative to the oppressive institutions of white-based religion in America⁸. However, Malcolm X converted to orthodox Islam in the 1960s after leaving the NOI. Black Islam was established during this time in major cities across America. Another famous African American who converted to Islam was world known boxer, Cassius Clay also known as Muhammad Ali. Many African Americans have converted to mainstream Islam and have maintained their cultural ideology amongst themselves.

In Dearborn, with one of the largest Arab populations outside of the Middle East, many Muslims had found a new home. In 1938, the first mosque opened its doors, as an ethnic community center and a religious safe haven⁹. Throughout the years it had transformed into a traditional masjid and has gone through multiple expansions. The U.S. Arab population has nearly doubled in the past two decades,

⁷ Ibid, 209.

⁸ Smallwood, Andrew P. 2005. "The Intellectual Creativity and Public Discourse of Malcolm X: A precursor to the Modern Black Studies Movement." *Journal of Black Studies*, Vol. 36, No. 2 (Nov., 2005), p. 256.

⁹ AlHajal, Khalil. "Michigan's Oldest Mosque." *The Muslim Observer*, May 7, 2009

according to the Census Bureau and has been growing in Dearborn since then as well¹⁰.

As Muslims from the Arab and Asian world began to arrive more steadily in the late 1960s and early 1970s, they began forming their own institutions and building their own communities to foster an identity for themselves. The suburbs of Detroit began growing as likeminded Muslims began moving to the area. They settled down, and were starting families, and a question came to mind, how were they going to preserve Islam for their children in a foreign land? Back in their respective home countries there was a family support system and the Islamic culture. These are two institutions that are still being built and perfected in the United States.

Within the last 30 years there has been a rise in interest about Islam in America. Ever since the Iranian Revolution in 1979, America has started to put more emphasis of Islam in the news¹¹. With the rise of cable television and the Internet, we have seen a wider audience introduced to Islam. The late American Evangelical Jerry Falwell and media analyst Ann Coulter have openly criticized Islam. Ever since 9/11, unfortunately Islam has been synonymous with terrorism and is forgotten to be a religion that stands for peace. Islam follows the same

¹⁰ Michigan Daily News. "U.S. Arab population doubles over 20 years." University of Michigan Newspaper, <http://www.michigandaily.com/content/us-arab-population-doubles-over-20-years> (Accessed December 18, 2009).

¹¹ Bohite, Russell. 2008. "Taken Hostage: The Iran Hostage Crisis and America's First Encounter with Radical Islam." *Historian* 70, no. 2: 308-309. *America: History & Life*, EBSCOhost (accessed December 18, 2009).

tenants as any monotheistic religion, to be kind to your neighbors and wish well upon others. President Obama has tried to convey that the United States is not at war with Islam, with his speech to the Muslim world in Egypt soon after his election. As Muslims try to establish themselves in America, there has always been a question between assimilation into society and a struggle of keeping the faith and cultural values. Finding this balance is what Muslim communities across the nation and specifically in metro Detroit aim to do.

History of MCWS

The Muslim Community of Western Suburbs of Detroit became an official nonprofit organization in 1979¹². Prior to the formation of the organization, there were several Muslim families who had moved into the metro Detroit area. Of these families, regular meetings were established to meet on Friday nights to go over Quran and hadith. These discussions would take place in the basements of these families¹³. From these weekly meetings, more families were getting interested and eventually Bryant Middle School in Livonia, MI would be rented out to serve as a temporary community center. Referring to these times, Muhammad Saleem Qureshi said, “we felt the needs to satisfy our religious needs, as well as the needs to provide religious and cultural education to our kids”¹⁴.

¹² “Interview: Muhammad & Atiya Muniruddin”

¹³ “Interview: Syed Sultan Mohiuddin

¹⁴ “Interview: Muhammad Saleem Qureshi”

Members include individuals and families from around the tri county area (Macomb, Wayne, and Oakland). In finding an area that was appropriate for all members, the *shura*, or executive board took their time in acquiring land. At first, the community purchased land in Macomb County, but then was turned down in acquiring city approval¹⁵. MCWS had not settled on their current location until 1990, when they had started constructing on the corner of Lotz and Palmer. Living in Canton since the 1970s, resident Michael Kadoura remembers his initial reaction:

“I heard a rumor that they were going to build a mosque and I said ‘nah that’s crazy, that’s not gonna happen here, that’s too far removed from Dearborn’. But as I drove by the area, I saw surveyor stakes out here, with little flags on them, lo and behold they were going to build a school here and a mosque¹⁶.”

The shura had surveyed the community at the time and realized that many of the members wanted an area close to I-275, north of I-94, and south of I-96¹⁷. Syed Sultan Mohiuddin was put in charge of finding an area of land that would be fitting for the community.

“The community grew large enough to collect funds and purchase land and finally after debating to construct a school or just a masjid, the group favored the idea to have a school and masjid. I was supporting that notion and I was given the responsibility to find a piece of land¹⁸.”

Thanks to the efforts of many, this community has gone from a few families to over 200 registered with MCWS. The community is open to all members and non-

¹⁵ “Interview: Muhammad Saleem Qureshi”

¹⁶ “Interview: Michael Kadoura”

¹⁷ “Interview: Mahmood Abdul Hai”

¹⁸ “Interview: Syed Sultan Mohiuddin”

members alike. The community has revived their Friday night programs, now called Angel's Circle, which will begin to incorporate weekend seminars. The program aims to freshen the minds in the community of what stories from history we can learn from and how to implement them in our lives. On average, 80 to 100 persons attend. MCWS currently hosts monthly dinners and a summer picnic, a Sunday Islamic School and a Summer Islamic School. Along with the masjid, a school was built as well; Crescent Academy International has been providing an Islamic, well-rounded education for children in preschool to 8th grade as a private school. Their alumni have gone on to medical school, have earned degrees in engineering, and business administration. MCWS has an active youth group for high school aged children called Young Muslims for Faith and Action.

Since the building was erected in 1991, it has gone through 2 phases of expansion, one for the masjid in 2000, and one for the school in 2008¹⁹. The masjid serves as a community center with a full kitchen, gym, basement and multipurpose hall. MCWS is comprised of its general members, a shura, Board of Trustees, and an Imam. Imam Ali Suleiman Ali, originally of Ghana, received his Ph.D. in Islamic Studies from the University of Michigan. He is also concurrently the Director of Muslim Family Services of Detroit²⁰. Although a structure was built in 1990, which resembled MCWS, the foundation was set long before that. Since the late 1970s,

¹⁹ "Interview: Mahmood Abdul Hai"

²⁰ <http://www.mcws.org>

Muslims in this region have come together in a concerted effort to make a difference for their families and provide an area to transition into new society.

Transitions

Until we consciously make an effort to recognize the accomplishments of a society, we don't often think of what our neighbors are advancing in. I feel that different racial and religious communities are so engrossed with themselves that they actually often overlook each other. Syed Sultan Mohiuddin described these different communities as islands, "people tend to see themselves as an island and not associate with other islands, but we're not on an island, we're not separate, we're all together. We need to integrate with other communities"²¹. There has been a recent initiative and effort to collaborate on community projects together. These opportunities of interfaith and intercultural work are stoic examples of how communities have advanced in the past. Networking, community outreach and expanding the realm of what a community can accomplish and should focus on are all ways nonprofit community centers have been successful. In November 2009, Dr. Hai worked together with community leaders to establish a clothes drive to benefit others in the area. This civic engagement is an example of the direction MCWS has taken in addition to its social and religious goals.

Transitional experiences form bonds for those who are involved. I strongly believe that Muslims in America are experiencing what all minorities have. First, it was Black Americans, Irish Americans, Italian Americans, German Americans, Polish

²¹ "Interview: Syed Sultan Mohiuddin"

Americans, and now Muslim Americans. I'm categorizing all Muslims into one culture, because of their similar interactions with assimilation and preserving faith. Associate professor of sociology at Temple University, Dr. Michelle Byng states that "Muslim Americans are characterized as showing the classic signs of assimilation...they are becoming a single Muslim American community in spite of their diverse emigrant origins"²². Forming a sense of identity has been a dialectical process and an interaction amongst Americans and immigrants alike. America has redefined itself over and over to the liking influential racial groups. The identity formation of MCWS relies on the congregationalism of its members. MCWS is a conglomerate of races and a single community. This has allowed for the masjid to incorporate many traditional aspects of Arab, Indo-Pak, African, and American culture into one, "Congregationalism promotes the voluntary nature of religious practice and institutions in the United States"²³.

When speaking to my father, Muhammad Khwaja Muniruddin, about his transition he said that they had no family over here, but the community in fact, was their family. Community members had been there in times of hardships, when they were sick, when they needed a hand, and when children were born into the community, they looked forward to it, "We had help. They were like family, sometimes more than a family. We did not have family here, but the community was

²² Byng, Michelle D. 2008, "Complex Inequalities The Case of Muslim Americans After 9/11." *American Behavioral Scientist*, Volume 51, Number 5 (Jan., 2008), p 661.

²³ Ibid, p 660.

here”²⁴. These transitions hold true for many of the founding members of the community. New members (using the term member just as someone who attends the masjid and is not necessarily a member of MCWS) often fit in quickly and find groups of friends whom they acclaim to. The community has always been open and friendly in that matter. Although the community began as primarily an Indian-Pakistani (Indo-Pak) congregation, it has always remained open to accepting those of other backgrounds. Today, it is a cosmos of cultures, “Let me tell you one thing,” Muhammad Saleem Qureshi said,

“There is a psychological need for ethnic groups to know each other, to share their feelings and learn from others experiences to be on the right track. In this community we have a really cosmopolitan type of community, Africans, Arabs, Indo-Pak subcontinent people, and people from all over the world, got together, and it helped us to get all of these people together to share their needs and problems. To help each other build a viable community so that they become part of American society.²⁵”

The community has grown tremendously. Although Muslims are expected to pray 5 times a day, they also have a day of worship on Fridays, similar to Christians and Jews. There are new faces every week at Friday *khutbahs*, or sermons. Each week, roughly 900 Muslims attend the two sermons provided.

These transitions have been taking place locally, educationally, and professionally and are always recycling as more immigrants are moving to the area and starting the process of generational identity transformation. The transfer of

²⁴ “Interview: Muhammad Khwaja & Atiya Muniruddin”

²⁵ “Interview: Muhammad Saleem Qureshi”

cultures on families brings identity and assimilation issues to the forefront. Michael Kadoura was born in Detroit and was raised in Dearborn, MI. His mother was a 1st generation Lebanese American and his father was an immigrant from Lebanon. He describes the issues of assimilation that he has noticed:

“My mother wanted assimilation and named me Michael. My family name is Hussein. Today, it’s a different world, people are proud of their names. All of my grandchildren have Arabic names. Becoming part of the mainstream was important for success. At the time when I was a child there were very few Arab or Muslim professionals. We were a working class, not professionals, but workers. We worked in the assembly lines; my fathers’ idea of a successful Muslim man was to be foreman in a factory. Not a lawyer, doctor or engineer”²⁶.

Today, there is a stark contrast of professions of Muslims in the 1930s to the 1950s and today. Although many Muslims are still laborers and workers, we have seen a tremendous shift in the success of Muslims in America. From being educated here to working as professionals, Muslims have been able to provide for their families and rise to upper middle class, living comfortably. Ihtesham Shahid describes the opportunities in America as the ‘survival of the fittest’ mentality. That “everyone has to prove his worth to be recognized by the place they are working”²⁷. Echoing the same statement is Mr. Kadoura, “you got to work for it, some cases it’s handed to ya, but you have to make an effort”²⁸.

This transitional experience for community members is in large part due to MCWS and it’s part in connecting Muslims in this region. In raising a family, Humera

²⁶ “Interview: Michael Kadoura”

²⁷ “Interview: Ihtesham & Humera Shahid”

²⁸ “Interview: Michael Kadoura”

Shahid recalls, “we were blessed in the sense that the community was focused with the same goals that we wanted to give our children”²⁹. Dr. Siyadath Rabbaig was first reluctant to all of the volunteering her husband did with the community, but now realizes the impact it has had on their family, “we have such an established community I feel like it is an extended family with a lot of support...I guess I found a home away from home. I’m comfortable now”³⁰. An echo of loneliness and the absence of family support in raising a family was a concern of many of the mothers I interviewed. My mother, Atiya Muniruddin said “I have a very big family, and then I came here [Michigan] and I felt lonely because I had no friends. With the MCWS community I didn’t feel lonely here”³¹.

Some of the similar goals that families had wanted to raise their children with was Islamic knowledge. Many parents have enrolled their children in the MCWS Sunday Islamic School and also in Crescent Academy International (CAI). Tariq Hafeez attended the Michigan Islamic Academy (MIA) when he was a child. MIA was formed by many of the same individuals involved with MCWS before the Canton masjid was built. In Ann Arbor, there was a newly built masjid with rooms available for a school. Tariq now sends his children to CAI. Tariq says, “it gives them [his children] more close ties to the religion. Their best friends come from

²⁹ “Interview: Ihtesham & Humera Shahid”

³⁰ “Interview: Siyadath, Mirza & Maseer Rabbaig”

³¹ “Interview: Muhammad & Atiya Muniruddin”

school. I think both the religious instruction and experience they get and also the friendships they make are very important to me”³².

As discussed earlier, MCWS has been a simple welcoming ground to different races, and has allowed the community to grow tremendously. Hani Mohammad Ali Ayesh moved to Michigan in 2000. Born in Tennessee to Palestinian immigrants, Hani knew many of the Arabs and Muslims in Tennessee and would feel familiar with them. When he moved to Michigan, he felt it was odd when Muslims didn’t greet each other openly with the typical saying *salaam alaykum*, meaning peace be unto you. In describing his experiences at different masjids around Detroit, Hani said:

“At the Canton Masjid, I felt like their thinking was more in line with what I was used to. In other Masjids like in Dearborn and stuff, I felt kind of out of place because of the fact that even though I’m Arab, I wasn’t Arab enough or something”³³.

Mona Youssef was born to Egyptian immigrants in New Jersey. When she moved to Michigan in the 1990s, their family began going to different masjids in the area and felt most warm here with MCWS. Mona recalls:

“Initially when we moved to Michigan we had tried to go more with the Arab community so we went to Franklin more. We felt the Canton community was much more warmer and welcoming. It has been a really positive experience. The ties that we made 20 years ago are still there”³⁴.

³² “Interview: Tariq Hafeez & Mona Youssef”

³³ “Interview: Hani Mohammad Ali Ayesh”

³⁴ “Interview: Tariq Hafeez & Mona Youssef”

As Mona's life progressed and she got married, had children and now practices law, she has been a bit removed from the community. In the beginning it was a family feeling, but now not knowing as many people she is interested in reclaiming a part in her community, "I think that unless we step up and play more of an active role and attend Masjid events and plan Masjid events that we're not going to get from the community what we're looking for"³⁵.

Dr. Ghazala Burney-Ahmad is a practicing gynecologist and found the community through her children. Living in Maryland, her children came to the University of Michigan. They had met many of the young college students, who were the products of MCWS,

"You know why we moved? Haaris had moved here before and made friends, and he said 'Ammi, you have to move over here, the community is the best'. So because of Haaris's recommendation, we moved here. The people who we had made friends from the beginning, they were extremely nice people and very helpful and that's why we liked this community so much and we moved to this community just because of that".

Dr. Burney-Ahmad has lived in Muslim communities around the world while practicing medicine. The people of this community have proved time and time again that they are open and accepting of others.

The early concerns of the community were to maintain this religion in America and preserve it for future generations. In establishing MCWS, Mirza Rabbaig said the "aim of the community was to have some religious and social

³⁵ Ibid.

activities in this area”³⁶. Dr. Hai’s memory of the early days include feelings of connection and hoping to preserve culture, identity, and religion:

A great love was developed at that point. We had no blood relation to each other, but we were looking for the same purpose of life. For whatever reason we had come to the United States and at this point we also felt that it was unlikely we would ever go back to our countries, which we came from. What could we do to preserve our values”³⁷?

The love that developed many years ago has evolved into a burgeoning civic center surrounded by faith, culture, ideologies, and unison. The goals that were set out back in the 1980s have now been accomplished. It is time for a change in commitment of those who have been watching the community grow, and those who planted the seeds. The generation that has grown with MCWS needs to realign themselves with the community and offer their hands in a movement to protect and preserve the neighborhood in which they transitioned. This point was reiterated again multiple times and summarized by Syed Sultan Mohiuddin, “we need to bring in new ideas, the young generation has a lot, we look at your leadership for a paradigm shift”

Transcription Highlights

At the end of each interview, I had the opportunity to ask the participants to summarize what MCWS meant to them. Along with this I’d like to include highlights of some of the transitional difficulties members faced. The best way for me to

³⁶ “Interview: Siyadath, Mirza & Maseer Rabbaig”

³⁷ “Interview: Mahmood Abdul Hai”

analyze this is to allow you to digest what they had to say for yourselves. This community has provided an open arm to thousands and in order to understand the community, you should understand the people from their perspectives. I believe it's important to include this into my report because it gives personalization to the uniqueness of the community.

Mahmood Abdul Hai

"It (MCWS) is a great organization because it did many things. At the end of the day we have all agreed, been civil, through differences, and not many organizations can do that. 1) It brought the community together. Here were people from different parts of the world, and with different languages, with the love of Islam, which brought them together. With Allah's help, there have been a lot of people who have given a lot of time. 2) Our children have come to be much more than we could have imagined. They have done well educationally, Islamically and professionally. The peace of mind that comes with having good children is invaluable. 3) Truly Islamic behavior

I think I'm concerned about the future of the organization. We have to come to the mainstream and interact with our neighbors, with the majority population around us and we have to take the banner of Islam and bring social reform, improvement in the society, and if we do that, then and only then will I feel our job is fulfilled. If you look at the life of the prophet, his life was a social movement for the betterment of society. He established a change in the society, honor, truthfulness and a sovereignty of God. I feel we need a younger leadership who is much more open-minded and get some of these things corrected. Our focus has been on ritual Islam.

The focus should be on the overall concept of Islam; we should be talking about hygiene, living healthy, social impact of things here. At the end of the day, ibadat (worship) is to make you, and your community a better place. Ibadat with you is between you and Allah. We are lacking in communication with the outside, and that's one of the reasons why we started the interfaith community outreach. We met with a priest at a church and we said we should do something that's beneficial to the community and we agreed on a clothes drive where all the communities are going to join hands together. It was a simple concept, all religions promote goodness and taking care of each other and we, as MCWS, need to promote activities like that and get out of our little shelters, meet with people and talk with people, there is no problem with that. We do an open house, but that should be a regular feature, to have people visit and see who we are. We need to become part of the

mainstream. Most of us are going to be here, live here and need to contribute here to this community on a daily basis”³⁸.

Michael Kadoura

“The only time I was seen as being different, and this is strange, I never experienced it in the military, I always felt like another marine. However, when I was a police officer, when the Iranians took over the US Embassy then I felt, aha, there is a difference. If you’re in a place long enough people begin to learn your history and know who you are. Americans always love a winner and when the Arabs lost against the Israeli’s in the 6-Day War, I used to take a lot of kidding about how the Rioters in the Detroit lasted longer than the Arabs did in the Israeli-Arab conflict. It was in joking and good fun, but it got more serious when the Iranians took over the embassy in Tehran. Things began to happen which made me uncomfortable, what happened was there was a crop of bumper stickers which started showing up on cars and it would say ‘Ayatollah kiss my ass-hole-ah’ and they would show up on my locker at the police station. Well, I’m not Iranian, I’m not Persian, and I’m more American than I am Arabic, I like to imagine, but these things started showing up on my locker and I’d peel them off and there would be snickering here and there. I didn’t pay much attention to it, and it dissipated. But it did occur to me that wow, I was born at Ford Hospital in Detroit off of West Grand Boulevard in February of 1942, as a US citizen. I was raised in an American neighborhood in a lower middle class family. I joined the United States Marine Corps and served 4 years honorably, I did 2 years on reserve. They saw fit to hire me as a police officer to protect and defend, and I attended the FBI National Academy and graduated of that, I was a police officer for a good number of years, and I thought to myself wow, after all of that, what do you have to do to become an American? I had two uncles that served in World War two. I remember down deep I was a little bit offended by the harassment I was taking, but it occurred to me it’s happened to all immigrants, then I recalled, I wasn’t an immigrant!

We are not alone anymore, there’s a pride in what we’ve accomplished. We have to hand it to people like your father and Dr. Noor and other people around here who have put themselves in the midst of the community as a great influence on the children and their own children and their stress upon ‘yes you live here in America, but you have to remember who you are, be proud of who you are, but you need to get an education and know what you’re doing’. There isn’t a feeling of loneliness; it’s a feeling of solidarity. This community is growing; every week we see new faces. It’s a good feeling; it’s a good thing.

I identify with this community very much, from its birth. I was one of the first ones here, not so much connected at the time, but a lot more now. This is like home to me now, I come frequently, I identify strongly with this community”³⁹.

³⁸ “Interview: Mahmood Abdul Hai”

Ihtesham Shahid

“I think it’s important for everyone to stick with their own roots in terms of religion, culture, culture can be different because there is no Islamic culture, that’s the beauty of Islam. As long as it falls within the dictations of Islam. We are blessed with this community. Our kids grew up here, so hopefully they will maintain it and they will carry the torch on to the next generation”⁴⁰.

Humera Shahid

“I believe that the young people in their early 30s, who are already established, married, with kids, and have their professional degrees from here, they should pass on the Islamic knowledge. They should take on the responsibility to guide the younger children. There are many families who are coming still from overseas”⁴¹.

Jamil Ahmad

“It (MCWS) is a very good community, it has increased in numbers while we were watching, from 1995 to now, a lot of new faces are there, which I don’t think we know so well, but the people who we had made friends from the beginning, they were extremely nice people and very helpful and that’s why we liked this community so much and we moved to this community just because of that.

I feel that we people coming from India and Pakistan are not reaching out to other communities as much as we could. We should invite the neighbors, non-Muslims; tell them about us, about our culture and religions. We don’t need to try to convert them, but we should engage them. We have started on that path now, I’ve seen a couple of open houses are held; those things should be done more often. We should not make friends with just amongst ourselves”⁴².

Ghazala Burney-Ahmad

“I would say that it’s a very good community as a whole, every place has its shortcomings, but I would like that the young people should be more involved in the community events and the direction that the community is taking because they have to take over after this. Whether they do a good job or not, they still have to learn”⁴³.

Syed Sultan Mohiuddin

³⁹ “Interview: Michael Kadoura”

⁴⁰ “Interview: Ihtesham & Humera Shahid”

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² “Interview: Jamil Ahmad & Ghazala Burney-Ahmad”

⁴³ Ibid.

“One time when I was working at Ford Motor we had a coffee club and from the profits, the coordinator would buy gifts for all the members who used the coffee club within the dept and one time he decided to pass out whiskey bottles. I had the choice of not accepting it, but I did and wanted to teach them a lesson. So I accepted the bottle and in lieu of all those people, in our test labs we had big dumpsters with metal and scrap, so I threw the sealed bottle in there and they became angry at me. So I wrote a 3-page letter, it was Christmas time and it was supposed to be a Christmas gift, so I invoked about Jesus PBUH, about his character and asked the question of whether he would accept this gift. I also pointed out the ills related to the use of alcohol and the cost to the health care industry and if all the alcohol would be converted to ethanol how many cars could be driven. So they immediately became my friends and began to respect me. Prior to that, they were mad at me, that’s just one example”⁴⁴.

Tariq Hafeez

“My neighbor who was a friend of mine was commenting on my name, and he said, ‘I know why your name is Tariq, tar is black, and you’re black, and it’s icky’. I remember as a kid just being so stunned by that comment. I don’t think he meant it in a bad way, but you know.

It (the community) is an anchor in my life and I hope it will continue to be an anchor in my kids’ life. Anchoring us to our religion and some extent our culture as well.

This community has played a big role in my life, and it will always play a role in our lives no matter how much we stay involved, it will always be part of our life. I think the interesting this is, the phase that we’re in right now, is determining how much or how little we are going to be involved in the community and what the benefits are for not only us but more importantly, our kids. I think, as our kids get older we’ll get more involved being at places they should be around and more often. It does depend on what kind of phase you are in life, the last 8, 9 years we’ve been really busy with these young kids and now they’re not young anymore”⁴⁵.

Mona Youssef

“I think the meaning of it has changed over the past 15-20 years that I’ve been in the community. Initially it was more of a family because it was smaller. Now I go and I don’t know most of the people around me at jumrah, because the community has grown so much that it’s very diverse and there are all different types of people, ethnically, but more than ethnically, even religiously they are different. So I think over the period of time, the 19 years I’ve been in the community, in some ways, it’s

⁴⁴ “Interview: Syed Sultan Mohiuddin”

⁴⁵ “Interview: Tariq Hafeez & Mona Youssef”

drifted further away, but again, I was very busy during a big chunk of that time. I kind of feel a desire to reclaim my part in the community”⁴⁶.

Suhail Banister

“Personally, I have a similar problem getting in tight with the uncles. Yeah I’m an older person, but I’m not an uncle, I’m not a desi (of Indo-Pak region). And believe me, 95% they’re chattering amongst themselves in Urdu and they’re thinking ‘oh he’s married to Noor, he knows what we’re talking about’ and so I end up tuning them out and on top of that my hearing is not getting any better, so I can’t understand them even if they were speaking in English. I often try and find myself gravitating to the Shaykh, I’m sure he has the same problem. Shaykh Ali doesn’t speak Urdu. And on the other hand, the young people typically, you guys, are Americans. Truth to say, the young guys are not Americans in the same sense that I’m American. I don’t know necessarily where I fit, and I’m not complaining, I’m very happy to be where I am and I think that if you have to live in the US of A and if you’re not living under the khilafa (Islamic governance), this is as good of a place as you can be”⁴⁷.

Noor Banister

“We’ve lived in communities in Toronto, Erie, Pennsylvania, Cleveland communities, Indiana communities, but we found the community here to be the best, amongst all the ones that we’ve lived in. In that, the community is very cohesive, they’re all into real dedicated Islamic work, none of this nonsense gossip and I remember asking some of my sisters at one time, ‘what is your secret’ and she responded ‘you know sister, when we have any differences, we women stay out of it, the men get mad at each other, they get over it, and we’re a community again’, I found that to be very valuable. This community should be very proud of itself and then when I watched up close about some of the differences between MCWS and MEC, that kind of made me sad, but I was also very proud that they all got over it and swung back together again. Like they had part of the Masjid blocked off for class. So I felt very proud to live in this community. Because with all the fighting and bad blood we’ve seen in the other communities, this one has not allowed that to happen. They should pride themselves on that.”

Siyadath Rabbaig

“That was my dream, to come here. I think my incentive was my uncle. Everybody at home told me that I would follow his steps, and he was here, and he was a physician too, so that was the path to take me here. It’s a land of opportunity, you

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ “Interview: Suhail, Noor & Aliyah Banister”

get your rewards based on how hard working you are. Our life could be more fruitful here.

We didn't have family support, we had to struggle each and every step. I was nervous to leave my child under somebody else's care even though it was an organized center, but our beliefs were totally different than theirs. That was my biggest fear. I didn't work until the 2nd one was 2 years old.

I think physically I felt different, and you could feel that you were probably discriminated. You needed to work harder, twice or three times harder to prove ourselves.

Three years ago we went to India. They feel we have changed. We feel we have changed for better, but they feel we have changed for worse. Our attitudes have definitely changed, we have become more broad-minded, we look at things differently. We have become more selfish and more self-centered. But at the same time we also know to give a lot in different ways. Tolerance, we've learned tolerance.

I wanted my family to move here so they learn things through experience, but now we have such an established community I feel like it is an extended family with a lot of support"⁴⁸.

Mirza Rabbaig

"I think the turning point in my mind was the Iranian Revolution in 1979, where they had hostages and all that. Then this society was aware of this religion. There was a lot of queries about Islam and their activities and beliefs. From that point forward, it was easy to follow the religion and have social activities also"⁴⁹.

Hani Mohammad Ali Ayesh

"I think it's better here for the kids, when I was growing up I didn't have any Islamic schools, I got mad sometimes in school, you know, they had valentines cards and dances, and made me feel out of place. Why do they waste my time in school with this junk, when it had nothing to do with helping me in the future? It just made me feel out of place.

In Michigan, I feel the most at home, because the situation now is I'm Palestinian and I live in the US and here, I'm considered foreign, if I go to Palestine, I'm

⁴⁸ "Interview: Siyadath, Mirza & Maseer Rabbaig"

⁴⁹ Ibid.

considered an American. So in Dearborn and this area, there are a bunch of people that are like that”⁵⁰.

Muhammad Khwaja Muniruddin

“I came as an immigrant because at that time the United States government needed a lot of engineers and doctors and pharmacists and all that so I was in the category to get a permanent resident visa.

. Starting up, 30 years ago, we had a small community and we used to meet on the weekends, in their homes and we started doing some Friday night halaqas in which we used to learn more Quran and hadith. All of this we started from home and after a couple of kids, we thought about them and how to get their education in our beliefs so we thought we should have education for the children so we started teaching them in home first and then on weekends through the community.

In my childhood it was very easy because I was growing up in the same culture. We had more relatives around us, our own system in schools. Here we had to make our own culture, we have to make our own place where we can all see each other and pray together. There we were already established. For that we had to work hard”⁵¹.

Atiya Muniruddin

“It means a lot to me. With the MCWS community I didn’t feel lonely here. We enjoy each other in every span of life. We raised our children with a lack of culture. Even though we lived in India, with Hindu families, we had the same culture and values”⁵².

Muhammad Saleem Qureshi

“At large, we found American people to be very receptive to foreign students and definitely they weren’t very aware of our culture, religion, country and our background. They did respect our religious and cultural needs, at the same time, willing to learn about us as their own.

We felt the need to satisfy our religious needs, as well as the need to provide religious and cultural education to our kids.

We live in this community, it’s a peaceful community and we feel at home, largely, except minor problems when something happens nationally. Otherwise, nothing happens here except a few minor things, we never felt anything adversary. Of course it was a challenge to build a community and school. It was with the help of

⁵⁰ “Interview: Hani Mohammad Ali Ayesh”

⁵¹ “Interview: Muhammad & Atiya Muniruddin”

⁵² Ibid.

almighty Allah and committed people, they wouldn't like their names to be mentioned, all of them got together with their financial help and blood and sweat and we managed to have a very successful community in Michigan, which we call Muslim Community of Western Suburbs of Detroit. Some of the dedicated members of the society are no longer with us, but their commitment and their help and dedication will be remembered"⁵³.

Postscript

In assessing the community, I must say that it is unique in its nature, but definitely one of many in the *West*, a term coined as any country in Europe or North America where Islam isn't mainstream. Many communities in the West stimulated conversations with their neighbors to bring an understanding of Islam to their region. This has been an ongoing dialogue and new goal for many masjids to maintain. Our communes are developed to create an admiration for God (SWT) and His Prophet (SAW), and maintain an instant balance in our lives. This balance relates to the fact that we were born, and that we will die, and in between, our experience in life is what we will be handing to God, for Him to assess. During our life experience we are hoping to create a concrete change in society, to bring Islam to the mainstream and to show others in the West that Islam is not a religion of terror, but that it is an influential and academic society that is unified through its differences. Upright Muslims work to break stereotypes of being a violent and oppressive religion. We need to show people we are not ghettoizing their cities, yet we are making a good difference and benefitting them. This sense of ghettoizing is a form of nationalism, which to Muslims is an anachronistic system that reflects

⁵³ "Interview: Muhammad Saleem Qureshi"

atavism. No matter where in the world we are from, the thing that unites us, is our religion. We have no need to colonize or claim a land; instead we have only to perfect ourselves through allowing Islam to colonize our hearts. Our challenges have become greater in the West. Our prophet (SAW) lived as a minority as well and we should look at his life as an example. After the prophet (SAW) passed away, it has become our duty to present the religion to the next generation. We must gift wrap it, and make it presentable to all those who wish to receive it.

Thousands of Muslims in the West travel hours on end every year to attend multiple conferences such as ISNA (Islamic Society of North America), ICNA (Islamic Circle of North America), RIS (Reviving the Islamic Spirit) and other knowledge retreats to reestablish their connection to Islam. These conferences and sessions provide mini boosts to keep their *imaan*, or faith, going and are a great example of ways Muslims unite to work towards creating concrete change for themselves and those around them. We strive to create an identity for ourselves while maintaining one foot with humanity and the other with Muslims. This is to show the world that we are here, and to show our fellow Muslims that we support each other.

To my generation, we are indebted to our parents and their friends, because they understood that the people they associated themselves with would affect them. So they banded together, sharing their religion, morals, values, interests, and established masjids, Islamic schools, and halal meat markets. We must associate ourselves with those who will bring us closer to God. The elders in the community are like parents and grandparents to us because of how the community started.

This was instrumental in creating the extended family we were missing back home. Just think, we call our parents friends 'uncle and aunty' because that is who they are. Our parents call each other 'brother and sister' because that's who they are. We see that crime most often stems from poverty and a lack of family values. Having this healthy family system has a great effect; it allows us to be productive parts of society. Our entire community needs to continue to ascend with the next generation. In the community we are united through our differences and our children. We must preserve this community for the benefit of Islam and for the benefit of our progeny. Now it is up to my generation and the next to not only maintain our goals, but also redefine and expand the aims of not only MCWS, but also our society in the West.

It is with great humbleness and gratitude that I conclude this report, not only for my last semester of undergraduate work at the University of Michigan-Dearborn, but also for my experience in MCWS. I am who I am today because of these two communities, and each have reciprocated an understanding of learning and developing my cognitive abilities to think critically, assess situations and seek knowledge, thank you for that. Thank you to God (SWT), the prophet (SAW), my parents, family and MCWS for always helping me safeguard my religion and to encourage me to speak the truth. *Ameen*, amen.

Appendix A - General Questions Asked in Interviews

- 1) Tell me about your childhood.
- 2) How has education played a role in your life?
- 3) Let me know more about when you came to the USA.
- 4) How was life prior to moving into this community?
- 5) How do you feel this community has shaped your experience?
- 6) What were some of the challenges in raising a family?
- 7) Have you noticed any cultural conflicts between your heritage ever since moving here?
- 8) Tell me more about your profession?
- 9) How do you feel others perceive you?
- 10) When is the last time you visited family or friends back home?
- 11) What does MCWS mean to you?

Appendix B – Participants

- 1) Dr. Mahmood Abdul Hai
- 2) Michael Kadoura
- 3) Ihtesham Shahid
- 4) Humera Shahid
- 5) Jamil Ahmad
- 6) Dr. Ghazala Burney-Ahmad
- 7) Syed Sultan Mohiuddin
- 8) Tariq Hafeez
- 9) Mona Youssef
- 10) Dr. Suhail Banister
- 11) Noor Banister
- 12) Aliyah Banister
- 13) Dr. Siyadath Rabbaig
- 14) Mirza Rabbaig
- 15) Maseer Rabbaig
- 16) Hani Mohammad Ali Ayesh
- 17) Muhammad Khwaja Muniruddin
- 18) Atiya Muniruddin
- 19) Muhammad Saleem Qureshi

Appendix C - Masjids in Southeastern Michigan

- 1) Islamic Association of Greater Detroit (IAGD) – www.iagd.net
- 2) Muslim Unity Center of Bloomfield Hills – www.muslimunitycenter.org
- 3) Muslim Community of Western Suburbs of Detroit (MCWS) – www.mcws.org
- 4) Muslim Community Association of Ann Arbor (MCA) – www.mca-aa.org
- 5) Islamic Organization of North America (IONA) – www.ionaonline.org
- 6) Islamic Center of America (ICA) – www.icofa.com
- 7) American Moslem Society (Dix masjid) – www.masjiddearborn.org
- 8) Tawheed Center of Farmington Hills – www.tawheedcenter.org
- 9) Islamic Center of Detroit – icd-center.org
- 10) The Muslim Center – www.muslimcentermcc.org
- 11) Masjid Umar bin Khattab of Brownstown, MI – www.masjid-ubk.com
- 12) American Muslim Center of Dearborn – www.americanmuslimcenter.org
- 13) Islamic Institute of Knowledge of Dearborn – iiokonline.org

For a complete list of addresses, names, and pictures of masjids in Michigan, please visit:

http://www.cairmichigan.org/programs/mosque_in_michigan/