



## *Introduction*

Recent scholarly interest in Muslims in America has been growing, as has the literature on their community organization, religious ideas, political activities, family organization, and adaptation to life in the United States.<sup>1</sup> This book has several objectives. First it will add to this growing body of information by illuminating the diversity of family life within and between Muslim communities in various parts of the United States. Second, it will help meet the need expressed by human-service professionals and educators for increased information about the cultural traditions and values of their Muslim patients, clients, students, and neighbors. Finally, we hope it will rectify some of the negative stereotypes of Middle Easterners in general and Muslims in particular that have intensified dramatically in the American media because of escalating political conflict involving the United States in this region since World War II.<sup>2</sup>

One example of a stereotype held by most Americans is the allegedly low position of women in Islam. According to this stereotype, Muslim women must endure arranged marriages and polygyny, be subservient to their husbands, and shroud themselves in public—as shown in countless newspaper photographs and television images of veiled Saudi and Iranian women. Similarly, sensational reports of a handful of kidnappings of children by their Middle Eastern Muslim fathers who deceive or desert their American wives depict Muslim men as domineering and authoritarian. Yet these components of the stereotype are often exaggerated, inaccurate,

misinterpreted, or of infrequent occurrence. Arranged marriages are illegal in Turkey, although they still occur there in modified forms along with free-choice marriage; in other predominantly Muslim lands, the whole spectrum of marriages, from arranged by parents to agreed upon by mutual consent, independent of parents' wishes, can be found in varying frequencies. Although polygyny is permitted in all Muslim nations except Turkey and Tunisia, monogamy is, in fact, the predominant pattern. The interpretation of modesty for women and veiling is an issue of contention in many Muslim nations today; some Muslim women can be seen wearing bathing suits on beaches, while others prefer, or are pressured, to cover up in all public places. While it is true that a few Muslim fathers have kidnapped their children from their American ex-wives and returned to their homelands, it is also true that many American ex-husbands kidnap their children from the custodial mothers and go into hiding with their youngsters. The complex realities of gender and family relations among Muslims have many positive features, such as the kinship obligations of support through an extended family, including care of the elderly, and the right of women to own and dispose of property independently of their husbands.

Islam, based on patrilineal tradition, provides a basis for comparison of family structures because Islamic law is concerned with the regulation of many aspects of family life—of relations between husband and wife, of children to parents, of inheritance, divorce, custody of children, modest behavior of women, and proper behavior. There is a sharp differentiation between men and women, with an emphasis on premarital virginity for women, generally more controls placed on women, and a high value placed on childbearing and child rearing.

Yet, Islam also is interpreted and reinterpreted according to the specific pressures Muslims have encountered in different places at different times. Thus Islam is adapted, though rarely violated, to meet the needs of local Muslim communities. To explore Muslim communities in the United States, therefore, one must take into account the conditions both in the immigrants' homelands and in the regions of America in which they settled when they arrived. Sharon Abu-Laban provides a very useful typology of the different waves or cohorts of Arab Muslim immigration to the United States in relation to the generation concept. In her words (1989: 49): "As each cohort immigrated it carried some impress of that

encounter and its reverberations through its life and to varying degrees, into the lives of its descendants." The rise of Islamic values in the Middle East as echoed in the Syrian Muslim community in Canada has been described by Yvonne Haddad (1977). Lois Keck (1989) also notes the change in the Washington Egyptian community when the Muslims defected from an Egyptian society which included Christians to join Islamic American communities.

Background factors include the immigrants' affiliation with different sects within Islam's major divisions, the Sunni and the Shi'a; political and ethnic allegiances; whether they came from villages, small towns, or cities; their socioeconomic class; educational attainments and aspirations; past occupations and future goals; and their reasons for immigrating—whether they are refugees forced out of their homelands, sojourners who intend to return eventually to their native country, or voluntary and permanent settlers in their new land. For example, peasants and farmers will adapt differently than doctors and engineers, and Lebanese mountain villagers will adapt differently than urbanites from Cairo or Istanbul. All these factors shape their cultural outlooks and behavioral strategies on arrival, and their cultural patterns must be articulated with the particular cultural values and institutional structures of the places in which they take up residence in the United States, for the American scene is also richly variegated.<sup>3</sup>

Political and social integration or the lack of it in the new country affect immigrant communal and family life. N. Abraham shows how American culture marginalizes Arabs both politically and culturally and simultaneously produces opposing forces for integration and isolation within the mainstream of society (1989). Political pressures and discrimination by members of the dominant group have affected the community and family lives of other minorities as well. This marginality has led to the strengthening of family and community life in most Islamic groups.<sup>4</sup> However, most Muslims, like European white immigrants, have worked hard and reached the middle class. The national labor laws of 1930 through 1960 benefited immigrant populations by enlarging job opportunities, controlling access to those jobs, and providing supplementary income to the unemployed. But because of racial inequality, these same benefits seldom helped the black worker until the civil-rights movements of the 1960s (Smith 1989: 151–154).

As recently as the 1960s, America was considered a nation of three major faiths: Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish (Herberg 1960; Kennedy 1952). Although Muslims have been in the United States since the early part of this century, their numbers have increased greatly since World War II. Estimates of today's Muslim population range from over five hundred thousand to nine million, but most expert estimates hover around three million Muslims, who are affiliated with over six hundred mosques (Haddad 1986: 1). They include immigrants and their descendants from many nations as well as converts whose families have lived in the United States for many generations. The essays in this book are concerned with the immigrant populations and, therefore, do not include groups such as the Nation of Islam (Black Muslims) or the orthodox Sunni Muslims of the African-American community. Although records of Arabic-speaking slaves exist from as early as the seventeenth century (Haddad 1986: 12), the vast majority were Christianized by the early decades of the nineteenth century. These essays primarily focus on Middle Eastern Muslim groups because of the paucity of published research on Muslim Americans from Indonesia, Southeast Asia, China, Central Asia, or North Africa.

In summary, in any consideration of immigration and ethnicity, several factors must be explored. First is the dynamics of ethnic relations in the home country. The complexity and locally specific character of ethnic and religious relations change from country to country. Geographical features have their effects: from the mountains of Lebanon, which support strong religious and kinship groups, to the valleys of Egypt, where state and class are pronounced. Second, the specific conditions of the historical periods that send the immigrants, and their personal characteristics, affect individual adjustments and adaptations. Does warfare drive them, so that they come as refugees? Is the motivation primarily economic? Are they peasants or doctors, single people or families with teenagers? Third is the context of interaction. A Lebanese man in Dearborn is Muslim and Arab to a Polish neighbor, whereas in south Lebanon, the distinctions of interest are whether or not he is Shi'a and the specific village from which he comes. Fourth are the conditions in the host country. Is it a time of economic expansion when immigrants may be welcome laborers, or one of economic contraction when they are seen as competitors for jobs and, therefore, a threat. The character and ethno-economic stratification of the

particular region is crucial: urban or rural, Georgia or South Dakota, Boston or Detroit (Aswad 1993). For example, the stratification of the country or the local region might find a different group in the merchant niche, thereby limiting the immigrants' entrance into it.

### *Immigration History*

Only a few Muslims settled in the United States during the nineteenth century (see Naff 1985; Younis 1983). The first sizeable waves arrived on American shores between 1900 and 1914. They came from many countries, spoke several languages, and belonged to various Islamic sects. Nevertheless, they shared certain characteristics. The overwhelming majority were illiterate village men, primarily from the Lebanese Syrian region, who hoped to return to their homelands after amassing a fortune in America. Given their lack of education, technical skills, and capital on arrival, their prospects for financial success were slim, and most were unable to realize their dreams. Moreover, the nation from which most of them came, the Ottoman Empire, was dissolved after World War I and divided among newly constituted nations and the colonial mandates created by Britain and France. Consequently, most of these sojourners never retired to their countries of origin; instead, they ended up, sometimes unwillingly, becoming permanent residents in the United States.

#### EARLY EMIGRATION

Most Ottoman subjects who came to the United States between 1880 and 1923 were members of Christian minority groups. Arab Muslims, who constituted a majority in the Arab East (93%), represented only about 10 percent of the Ottoman Arab emigration (Karpát 1985; Naff 1985; Saliba 1983), and most arrived after 1900. Muslims undoubtedly were concerned about their reception in a Western Christian country. The majority of the Arabic speakers were from what is now Lebanon but was then part of the province of Syria in the Ottoman Empire and were called Syrians. Their reasons for leaving include economic stress, increased population, and stories told by returning immigrants about the wealth of the West. The growing influence of the Western Catholic Church and other Western missionaries who established schools, provided new connections with the

West. Some historians also note the lingering effect of the sectarian clashes of the 1840s and 1850s. (Issawi 1992; Nabti 1992; Batrouney 1992; Naff 1992; Khalif 1987).

Under British and French colonialism, the Middle East came under the economic control of international markets as village economies shifted from subsistence crops to cash crops, such as silk in Lebanon and cotton in Egypt and Syria. Issawi notes that this brought economic success to the area between 1880–1914, after emigration to the New World had begun (1992: 17–18), but it also brought increasing stratification, with many peasants losing control of the means of their production and sustenance. Another factor that destabilized the Ottoman authority was the political and economic support given to minorities, especially Christian minorities, by Britain, France, and Russia. Sectarian wars and the oppression of Ottoman rule also were causes of emigration. Many Muslim and Christian intellectuals went to Egypt from Lebanon. An additional cause was the entry of the Ottoman Empire into World War I and the establishment of the draft. Many left to avoid conscription despite the Ottomans' unsuccessful efforts to stop them (Naff 1994: 144).

The vast majority of the early Muslim immigrants to the United States were traders, skilled craftsmen, and peasants (Issawi 1992). What began as a trickle about 1880 became a torrent by 1913. Many emigrants ended up in Mexico, Australia, and South America believing they had arrived in "Nay Yark" or "Amrika" (Naff 1992: 145).

Upon arriving in America some Arab Muslims associated with Christians because they worked for Christian merchants, or because of their previous political associations in the Middle East. Yet interfaith marriage between Muslims and Christians was not customary, as it was not in their home countries, and families settled in communities with village and religious ties. Population size, occupation, and political factors in the homeland and local American communities affected sectarian relations.

Many Muslim Arabs, primarily Lebanese, began working for merchants as peddlers in the coastal cities of the eastern seaboard. They then dispersed throughout the Dakotas, Montana, Alberta, and Manitoba, as well as Iowa and the Mississippi Delta. After World War I many purchased small farms, but others came to the factory cities of the east and midwest such as Pittsburgh, Gary, and Detroit. Others opened grocery stores, restaurants, and other small businesses. The Johnson Reed Immi-

gration Act of 1924 effectively curtailed immigration by establishing quotas for emigrants from the Middle East until after World War II.

Other major Muslim groups from the Ottoman Empire include Turks, Kurds, Albanians, and Bosnians. After 1920, these groups found jobs in the steel mills and auto factories on the eastern seaboard and in the Great Lakes area. At the turn of the century Pakistanis from the northwestern part of British-controlled India began to filter into California from Canada. They worked primarily as sharecroppers, farmers, and small businessmen. Pakistani immigration also was limited by the exclusion laws of 1924 (Kahn).

Except for the Lebanese, the sex ratio was highly skewed toward men. The Lebanese often returned for their wives while many of the Turks never married and left few descendants (Bilg  1985; Hitti 1924: 9). It was difficult for Muslim men to marry American women because of religious intolerance and the attitudes against the "new" immigrant groups (Hitti 1924: 125; Saliba 1983: 39).

In 1922 the colonial powers partitioned the Ottoman Empire, and the League of Nations awarded mandates for the control of the new Arab protectorates to Britain and France. By 1923 the Ottoman Empire was dissolved completely, and the Republic of Turkey was recognized internationally by the Treaty of Lucerne. Between World Wars I and II some Arab immigrants were able to bring wives from their homelands to the United States. During the Great Depression some returned to the old country for its duration and stayed there permanently (Aswad 1993). Pakistanis, constrained by the immigration exclusion law of 1924, remained on the west coast.

#### LATER MIGRATIONS

Many authors (Aswad 1974; Bozorgmehr and Sabagh 1988; Abraham and Abraham 1983; Abu-Laban 1980; Haddad 1986; and others) note that the emigration wave that left the Middle East after World War II and continued into the mid-1960s reflected changing circumstances in the newly formed Muslim countries and represented areas which had seen little previous U.S. immigration. For example, although a few Yemeni came to the United States during World War I, the vast majority arrived after World War II as did a large number of Palestinians fleeing the Israeli occupation of their lands. There were also Iraqis, (both Arabs and Kurds),

Egyptians, and Syrian Arabs who fled socialist regimes and periods of political turmoil. Peasant immigrants continued to come, often joining relatives already settled in the United States. Many of the new immigrants were educated, some had money, and many were professionals. Some already knew English and adapted well in American schools. Many had come for a university education and stayed, often marrying Americans. This was due in part to the fact that quotas established after World War II by the McCarran-Walter Immigration Act were abolished in 1965 by the Immigration Act that gave priority to professionals from all countries; and many decided to stay. With the idea of permanent settlement, Haddad (1986: 2) reports that members of the Muslim community invested time, energy, and money in the establishment of Islamic institutions, although there was also a significant number of non-mosqued Muslims. Immigrant Muslims often cooperated with the second and third generation American Muslims, who wanted their children to learn about Islam and worked to organize Islamic and Arabic classes, both in schools and mosques.

Few Iranians immigrated to the United States before World War II, but Bozorgmehr and Sabagh, through a careful census study (1988: 5-34), found that they came in two phases after the war: the first was before the 1979 revolution in Iran which toppled the Shah and brought Khomeini to power, and the second was after the revolution. The flood of Iranian students was increased by the impact of the oil boom after 1973. In 1986 the population of Iranians in the United States was estimated to be in the range of two hundred forty-five thousand to three hundred forty-one thousand and was primarily in the Los Angeles area. Because they were not only Muslims, but also Armenians, Bahais, and Jews, and their religious affiliation was not reported it is difficult to know how many of these Iranians were Muslims. Many who were of an upper-middle-class background were able to bring money with them and have been economically well established in this country.

The most recent Muslim immigrants are those who fled Lebanon's civil war from 1976-1988. They reflect a variety of occupations, ranging from professionals, the newly educated in Beirut, to both literate and illiterate villagers. Many careers have been interrupted, families separated, and finances ruined. Others brought their financial assets from the Middle East and the Lebanese Muslim communities East Africa. In areas such as Dearborn, Michigan, many new businesses are generating capital



and older neighborhoods are being revitalized. The loss of family members to warfare creates emotional problems, and social service agencies, such as the Arab Community Center for Social and Economic Services in Dearborn, assist members to cope with tragedies caused by the war as well as with problems of assimilation.

In Dearborn and other cities, we find a more fervent form of Islam, reflecting the Islamic revivals in the Middle East, an increase of Islamic dress, new Islamic schools, and increased competition among mosques (Walbridge 1991; Aswad 1992). As Muslims continue to immigrate to the United States, they are rapidly becoming a significant fourth religious community that needs to be understood and accepted by other Americans.

### ❧ *Essays*

This book is divided into three sections. The first consists of essays that discuss family structures and roles; religious and social values, such as the content and importance of honor and shame; generational differences; and changing gender relations as families adapt to life in different regions of the United States. The second section specifically addresses problems encountered by social workers, health professionals, and teachers who have worked with members of various Muslim communities largely from the area around Dearborn, Michigan. Dearborn was selected in part because it has the largest community center in the United States (ACCESS) that addresses the problems of an Arab Muslim population. The third section contains descriptions of the lives of individuals in order to demonstrate the richness and diversity of their responses to the opportunities and constraints of life in the United States.

The majority of the essays are original pieces based on research by authors from several disciplines: anthropology, history, sociology, nursing, social work, and education. The book begins with a study in which Yvonne Haddad and Jane Smith concentrate on Muslims' concern with the loss of their religious values in the United States and the specific problem areas of dating, marriage, birth control and abortion, drinking of alcohol, dress, and feminism. Haddad and Smith, scholars who have written extensively on Muslims in America, have presented a concise and interesting paper reporting Muslim attitudes and values.

Louise Cainkar's paper on immigrant Palestinian women presents an

excellent description of how women view their lives as women in relation to four main comparative referents: 1. women without an existing homeland as compared to those with one; 2. daughters' lives compared to those of their mothers; 3. Palestinian women's lives compared to those of Palestinian men; and 4. Palestinian women compared to western women. Interestingly, Cainkar found a similarity among Palestinian women of different socio-economic and marital statuses, places of origin, occupation, and other variables. They felt that even though American women were better off in some ways and worse off in others ways than they were, with the exception of having an existing homeland, they did not want to trade their lives for those of American women.

Barbara Bilgé's paper describes and analyzes the intermarriages of post-World War II Turkish immigrant men with American women in metropolitan Detroit and adjacent Ontario. She found that the partners' social class of origin was more important than education or religion to their, and their children's, happiness, acculturation, and assimilation. Couples fell into three groups: 1. working-class Turkish men married to American women from working-class families; 2. ex-military men who were educated in American universities, mostly from families of small shop-keepers or urban laborers who married American women of middle- and upper-middle-class background; and 3. affluent Turkish civilian professionals married to American women of working- and middle-class origins. Most couples in the first and third groups had stable, satisfactory marriages, while couples in the second group tended to have troubled relationships, many ultimately divorcing.

Arlene Dallafar's study demonstrates how women are active participants in the Iranian ethnic economy in Los Angeles. While there are barriers such as language, age, and level of education as well as class and gender, women can make use of class, ethnicity, and gender to open small businesses. By using case studies, she demonstrates how females enjoy gender-specific opportunities for entrepreneurial activities and certain avenues of access to the resources located in their ethnic communities that are not open to men.

Nimat Barazangi analyzes the intergenerational transmission of the concepts of Islam as a religion and an Arabic heritage to the identity of the American-born generation. She studies the questions of what makes the

present first generation of Arab Muslim youth associate with the two identities, and how they perceive this dual identity in North American societies.

Linda Walbridge's discussion of a special form of marriage, *mut'a*, has helped to explain a subject often questioned by Westerners, that of temporary marriage among Shi'ite Muslims. She discusses its occurrence among the Lebanese Shi'ite community and shows the ways in which it has been adapted to the American experience.

The chapter by Nilufer Ahmed, Gladis Kaufman, and Shamim Naim focuses on recent Muslim immigrant families from Pakistan and Bangladesh. Most consist of highly educated professionals—physicians, engineers, scientists, and university professors. Nuclear-family households are the norm, although ties are maintained with extended family elsewhere in the United States and in other countries. The authors found that most of the immigrant generation's marriages have been arranged, but conflicts in adjustment to American life have resulted in some divorces. They also show how families take pains to socialize their children in the Islamic faith and to find them Muslim spouses of appropriate ethnic and educational background.

Gladis Kaufman and Shamin Naim's case study of an educated Pakistani shows the many problems that separate family members spread over a wide region as they strive for better education, jobs, and economic opportunities.

The second section of the book relates to the practical problems and conditions of Muslims in America.

A registered nurse and professor of nursing, Anahid Kulwicki describes significant Arab Muslim customs and beliefs as they relate to health. Some of the areas include concepts of cleanliness, dietary restrictions, religion and mental illness, family and gender roles, knowledge and superstition, folk healers, the evil eye, and sorcery. Data were obtained through her research on several Arab-American ethnic groups in Michigan, and are extremely valuable for those medical practitioners serving an Arab population.

Also addressing health issues, Anahid Kulwicki and Penny Cass discuss the perceptions and degree of knowledge about AIDS in the Muslim Arab community in Dearborn. They find a low level of knowledge about

AIDS, many misconceptions about the transmission of HIV, and a high level of anxiety about HIV infection. Kulwicki adds an insightful discussion of the various women's attitudes.

Barbara Aswad and Nancy Adadow Gray have combined efforts to present the problems and goals of a very successful Arab Community Center (ACCESS) in Dearborn, Michigan, and the nature of the problems brought to the Center. They found that there were major problems in effectively disciplining children. Since mothers are held responsible for their children's behavior, and daughters' behavior must be guarded according to rules of honor and shame, mother-daughter problems arose in a new environment in which girls are allowed more freedom. Others reported problems such as parent-child role reversals, child custody, divorce, disruptions of roles, extended families, and even boredom. In regard to the challenges of the Center, they discuss the problems associated with a change from a grassroots, small organization to that of a large and successful one, recognized locally, nationally, and internationally, and the importance of remaining community oriented.

Jon Swanson concentrates on the dilemma of a second generation Arab-American in facing ethnicity and role conflict and the problems of marriage. Swanson has a background both in anthropology and social work.

Charlene Eisenlohr focuses on the effect of cultural conflict on adolescent Arab girls. Through the use of personal dialogues, the author shows the reader the nature of conflicts produced by the generation gap, interaction with Arab and non-Arab friends, and communication with parents in English and Arabic. She also includes the effect of the length of stay in the United States on these conflicts. The writer finds that self-esteem is related to the teenager's style of coping and to family trust, which brings a degree of personal freedom and empowerment.

Mary Sengstock's study of elderly Arab Muslims concludes that differences in family structure often block effective service to the elderly. She analyzes several factors that limit assistance and stresses that the different family structures and cultural values related to requesting assistance outside the family are basic to the inability of many non-Arab service agencies to recognize and deal with their problems sufficiently.

The third section of the book gives us a glimpse into the lives of individual immigrants. Linda Walbridge, a novelist and anthropologist, writes several interesting vignettes covering individual experiences in

immigrating and adapting to the United States. Through these portraits, members of the communities come to life, and the issues brought forward in many of the previous papers become vivid.

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## About the Authors

NILUFER AHMED, Ph.D., is an adjunct assistant professor of sociology at Providence College in Rhode Island. She has conducted studies on cross-cultural fertility and on women and class in Bangladesh.

BARBARA C. ASWAD, Ph.D., is a professor of anthropology at Wayne State University. She is editor of *Arabic Speaking Communities in American Cities* and has published articles on Arab and Turkish women in the Middle East and Arab American women. She is a past president of the Middle East Studies Association of North America.

NIMAT HAFEZ BARAZANGI has a Ph.D. in education. She is a visiting fellow at the Women's Studies Program at Cornell University. She specializes in curriculum and instruction, Islamic and Arabic studies, and adult continuing education. She has edited *Islamic Identity and the Struggle for Justice in the World Today*.

BARBARA BILGÉ, Ph.D., is a lecturer of anthropology at Eastern Michigan University. She is the author of articles on ethnicity and families, and on Turkish and other Muslim communities in the United States.

LOUISE CAINKAR has a Ph.D. in sociology. She is the director of the Chicago-based Palestine Human Rights Information Centre—International and author of *Palestine and South Africa* and a forthcoming book on Palestinian Women in the United States.

PENNY S. CASS is dean of the Indiana University—Kokomo, School of Nursing. Cass earned a doctoral degree in nursing from the University of

Michigan—Ann Arbor and specializes in maternal-child and HIV /AIDS issues. She has published in the areas of nursing education, the politics of nursing, and HIV and AIDS.

ARLENE DALLALFAR has a Ph.D. in sociology. She is currently a research associate at the Five College Women's Studies Research Center and teaches in the Department of Sociology at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. She is completing a book on immigrant women, entrepreneurship, and the use of gender resources and social capital in ethnic economies.

CHARLENE JOYCE EISENLOHR has a Ph.D. in educational psychology and is a retired counselor at Ann Arbor Huron High School. She has conducted research on the self-esteem of female Arab adolescents in the American high-school setting.

NANCY ADADOW GRAY, M.S.W., A.C.S.W., is the director and a founding member of the Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services (ACCESS), the first provider of bilingual/bicultural, Arabic/English family counseling, community mental-health, and substance abuse services in Dearborn, Michigan, which has one of the largest concentration of Arabs outside of their original countries.

YVONNE Y. HADDAD, Ph.D., is a professor of Islamic history at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. She is an expert on Islam in America and author of numerous books and articles on Islam in America. She is author of *Muslims of America* and coauthor of *Islamic Values in the United States* and *Mission to America: Five Islamic Sectarian Movements in the United States*. She is a past president of the Middle East Studies Association of North America.

GLADIS KAUFMAN, Ph.D., is an associate professor of anthropology at the University of Wisconsin—Waukesha. She is the author of articles on South Asians in the United States and on various aspects of family and gender relations.

ANAHID KULWICKI, D.N.S., R.N., is an associate professor of nursing, Oakland University, Rochester, Michigan. She has conducted research on health care and attitudes among the Muslims in Dearborn.

SHAMIM NAIM, Ph.D., is an assistant professor of geography, University of Wisconsin, Waukesha. She is the author of articles on South Asians in the United States and South Asian geography, economics, and demography.

MARY C. SENGSTOCK, Ph.D., is a professor of sociology, Wayne State University. She is the author of *The Chaldean Americans: Changing Conceptions of Ethnic Identity* as well as numerous articles on the elderly.

JANE I. SMITH, Ph.D., is vice president and dean of academic affairs at the Iliff School of Theology in Denver, Colorado. She is an expert on Islam and coauthors of *Muslim Communities in America* and *Mission to America: Five Islamic Sectarian Movements in the United States* as well as numerous articles on women in Islam.

JON C. SWANSON, M.S.W., Ph.D., has published extensively on Middle Eastern migration. He is a clinical social worker at Southwest Detroit Community Mental Health Services in Detroit, Michigan.

LINDA S. WALBRIDGE has a Ph.D. in anthropology. She served as the assistant director of the Middle East Center, Columbia University and now teaches at Indiana University. She is the author of *Shi'i Islam in an American Community*, which is forthcoming from Wayne State University Press.