

## ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: Palestinians in Diaspora: An Ethnographic Study of Ethnic Identity Among Palestinian Families in Maryland

Faida Nimir Abu-Ghazaleh, Doctor of Philosophy, 2007

Thesis directed by: Dr. John Stolle McAllister (Chair)  
Dr. Beverly Bickel (Co-Chair)

This dissertation focused on seven Palestinian families and four adults in Maryland whose roots traced back to historical Palestine. The study analyzed how Palestinian immigrants in the U.S. construct, maintain, and transfer their ethnic identity through social practices and material cultural artifacts. Questions guiding this research were: How do individual Palestinians within the families construct their sense of ethnic identity while they are living in Maryland? How do history, place, and geography play a role, if at all, in maintaining a Palestinian ethnic identity in the United States? What types of cultural artifacts serve as important dimensions to the construction of ethnic identity among these Palestinian families in America? How has American society affected the behaviors, beliefs, attitudes, and values of Palestinians in America in maintaining their sense of identity? This ten-month study included semi-structured, in-depth interviews; participant observation; and a catalogue of 126 material artifacts.

A brief historical background of the main political events that shaped the construction and emergence of Palestinian identity and the Palestinian diaspora set the context for a review of literature related to the construction of Palestinian identity outside the homeland during the immigration waves of the last 60 years.

Analysis focused on social identity practices of Palestinians living in the United States in the context of the unique cultural and political challenges of their history. It became clear that Palestinians in Maryland move fluidly between Muslim/Christian Palestinian, Arab, and

American identities. An analysis of material culture explored the ways in which national, religious and social artifacts were of central importance to how Palestinians maintain, express and transfer identity. The study discovered that cultural artifacts contributed centrally to the unique identities of women and second generation Palestinians. Even as they struggle with the possibility of a disappearing homeland, the Palestinians in this study maintained a powerful connection to each other and their nation through their social practices and the material culture of their homes. Having the cultural artifacts ever present in the homes helped to bridge the gap between belongingness and homelessness to establish a sense of connection to their origins.