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The Possibilities of Peddling

Imagining Homosocial and Homoerotic Pleasure in Arab America

> If we have inherited a colonial white heteronormative way of seeing and knowing, then we must retrain ourselves to confront and rearrange a mind-set that privileges certain relationships.
>
> —EMMA PÉREZ, "QUEERING THE BORDERLANDS: THE CHALLENGES OF EXCAVATING THE INVISIBLE AND UNHEARD"

In his 1962 interview with Alixa Naff, Elias Lebos discussed some of the characteristics of his Syrian peddling community: "In our community, we kept our traditions: eating, singing, drinking, and enjoying ourselves." Lebos went on to describe some of the living conditions for peddlers, people of all genders and marital statuses, up to twenty of whom might sleep in the same room together. In Lebos's telling, these circumstances seemed to aid the traditions he talked of, rather than simply marking a hardship or even a disruption of those practices. "We used to cook together and enjoy life and laugh," he recalled. "We'd join together and share expenses and the cooking, our traditional meals. Men did it, of course, but women too. We spent great evenings together. People then were more full of affection for each other than these days."[1] Francis Slay, in an interview conducted by Naff the same year, also talked about affection as part of these traditions, but in particular between men. Slay discussed how his father would kiss his sons and brothers and how he was always sure to kiss his own adult son and son-in-law. Naff remarked to him, "There seems to be a special quality about the Lebanese men," and Slay responded, "Honey, let me tell you . . . It's not a put-on. What it is, is a showing of love." In contrast, Naff suggested that "a lot of men are very uncomfortable with that kind of thing."[2]

Evoked in these interviews are ways of being and relating to one another that these immigrants understood to be constitutive of their cultural practices and of what made them who they were, be that Syrian, Lebanese, Arab, or some other

regional or village-based identification. Given that the oral history interview tends to encourage the interviewee to think back on their past, these statements also cement a loss of these intimate practices at the moment they are evoked, a melancholic reference to assimilation under white supremacy. To invoke "culture" here is not to refer to an unchanging and ahistorical set of practices and characteristics.[3] Rather, the very traditions mentioned were shaped through peddling practices in diaspora. Here, the dynamics of gender shifted and allowed all Syrians to labor together in the creation of these communal meals. Notably, as Syrian immigrants and their descendants gained proximity to whiteness, many of their distinctly regional or local cultural practices were called into question with regard to their compatibility with American life, posing a potential threat to that privileged proximity. Slay's exchange with Naff about the loss of men's homosocial affection indicates that not only were cultural practices incompatible with whiteness but more intimate ways of being were incompatible as well. What other kinds of intimate affections and pleasures, then, threatened "Syrian whiteness"?

Coverage of Syrian communities in the US press offers a starting point for identifying some of the aspects that fell outside white and middle-class acceptability. In 1902, the small Syrian community in La Crosse, Wisconsin, came under scrutiny for what the local newspaper described as "midnight orgies" that "shake the rattletrap dwellings and which can be heard in the dead of the night for several blocks." These so-called orgies were apparently distressing nearby white citizens.[4] What this newspaper described was a party held when long-distance peddlers returned from their peddling trips. As a member of that community explained decades later, men would gather to tell stories of their travels and drink, and the women would cook and talk together in the kitchen. There would also be lots of singing and dancing. Attendees would start late at night and draw down the shades, which perhaps contributed to whites' speculation about these soirees.[5]

By turning first to those practices and intimacies that attracted white supremacist scrutiny, we can also begin to ask what meaning these threatened practices held for Syrian migrants. The queer ecology of peddling is a useful site for this exploration because of the opportunities it provided for intimacy among peddlers, who were often of the same gender, as well as among those whose work supported the peddling economy in other ways.

That peddling was difficult and dangerous work is well documented. Peddlers were robbed on the road; they were subject to the whims of the elements, particularly when they could not find shelter at night; long-distance peddling could be a lonely and physically grueling experience; and numerous peddlers were assaulted or murdered while peddling, as discussed in chapter 1. More generally, transient workers were targeted by immigration restrictions, property ownership and voting laws, and police campaigns in the first half of the twentieth century.[6] Earlier chapters have also outlined the discursive violence enacted through the ideas

that circulated about peddlers and Syrians immigrants: for example, they were manipulative, distrustful, lazy, and subservient; their work was a ruse for begging; the men involved were ineffective and sexually deviant, and they abandoned their duties toward the family; and the women were irreverent, failed mothers who persisted in breaking the conventions for proper women.

The practices and ways of being that endangered Syrians by shifting them closer to nonwhiteness (specifically peddling practices that crossed gendered and sexual norms of the white American middle class) were not exclusively sites of violence; they were also sites of pleasure. What were these possibilities for pleasure in the queer ecology of peddling? Peddlers could, for example, experience different landscapes and meet new people in the course of their travels. Peddlers who traveled together formed bonds with one another, as did the women who stayed home while men left to peddle. And women peddlers were able to experience a level of independence—in economics and mobility—that they may not have enjoyed otherwise. Arab American historiography has largely addressed pleasure in ways that reify heteronormativity and obscure how Arab familial and community structures were incompatible with US white supremacy. But peddling provided an avenue for infinite homosocial intimacies. As men peddled together, as women stayed home together, and as other women peddled together, homosocial bonds were not only inevitable but were constitutive of early Syrian American culture.

In an interview with Naff, one woman, Budelia, described growing up around other Syrian immigrant women. Budelia's mother had peddled before and after her husband's death, up until her own death at the age of seventy. Her mother's cousin, another Syrian woman, told Budelia's mother where to go and helped her find a supply of items to sell. Budelia remembered that women would visit together while sewing and crocheting items for peddlers to sell, especially embroidered pillowcases with "fringe and rickrack" and dust caps with wide ribbons. She recalled "women crocheting together while eating big beautiful tomatoes, beefsteak tomatoes, and peppers from the garden, and grapes and apples from a big bowl; hands and mouths moving at the same time."[7] The sensuousness of this language is a reminder that memory is embodied; it is a somatic experience. That sensory experience of a homosocial space also allows us to remember the slippages between homosociality and homoeroticism, or what Gayatri Gopinath calls the "latent homoeroticism of female homosocial space."[8] Gopinath writes, "It is often in moments of what appears to be extreme gender conformity, and in spaces that seem particularly fortified against queer incursions—such as the domestic arena—that queer female desire emerges in ways that are most disruptive of dominant masculinist scripts of community and nation."[9] This remembering—in Naff's interview with Budelia and in my labor to place it in a lineage of queer Arab American history—is sensuous knowledge.[10]

This chapter asks how we can account for the intimacies enabled by the queer ecology of the peddling economy, particularly those intimacies that ran counter to

the mandates of white, middle-class heteronormativity. I use historical-grounded imagining to examine the homosocial and homoerotic pleasures apparent in a number of photographs selected from the Faris and Yamna Naff Arab American Collection (housed at the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of American History). My discussion in this chapter focuses especially on a number of photographs that I believe were included in these archival materials because they lend themselves to a normative sexual and gendered reading—that is, because they can be interpreted as evidence that Syrian Americans fit within US heteronormative standards. Yet this heteronormative reading is not the exclusive meaning that we can glean from these images. In particular, the photographs examined in this chapter allow us to focus on the pleasure related to the peddling economy: the pleasures experienced in the act of peddling, the pleasures among peddlers while not at work, and the pleasures that others in the peddling economy experienced in their work together.

THEORIZING PLEASURE: EROTICS AND INTIMACIES

To understand how pleasure functions within and through these photographs, a working definition of "pleasure" is necessary. But pleasure is a subjective experience. Something that elicits pleasure for one person maybe be unpleasant for another; the experience of physical pain is a prime example of this. The variety of reasons and ways that people experience pleasure works against giving a singular definition of pleasure. A more feasible, and more productive, approach is to understand what links all of these varied experiences of pleasure.

First, pleasure is an affective and corporeal experience, one that touches not only the emotions and sensations that we recognize as our feelings, but also physical sensations in the rest of the body that may feel good but might be unarticulated or unnoticed. Second, pleasure occurs in relation to something else: to a physical sensation, to a thought or memory, to another person. Pleasure is thus relational as well as corporeal. Third, pleasure contains both erotic and intimate elements, two concepts that center the sensory and corporeal as well as the relational, respectively, in issues of power. Not all intimacies are pleasurable, but I understand pleasure as necessarily having an element of intimacy. In this section, I critically examine intimacy and erotics in order to ground my understanding of pleasure in the queer ecology of Syrian peddling.

Intimacy can be pleasurable or unpleasant or can involve multiple configurations of both. Intimacy, particularly as documented in Middle East and North Africa studies scholarship, is both interactive and intersubjective, and the study of intimacy reveals that the links between structural forces (such as the state, religion, and kinship networks) and the particular ways that norms of intimacy are mediated and change historically.[11] Lisa Lowe outlines three types of intimacy that aid in understanding how power (specifically racialized, colonial power) works through

relationships: spatial proximity, sexual and affective intimacy, and constellations of contact among people who are situated differently in terms of power.[12] The different environments and landscapes encountered while peddling were intimate experiences; they forced Syrians to think about their relationship to the lands they traveled and the power of those lands over them, especially regarding terrain, climate, and weather. Peddlers' encounters with their customers—whether friendly, hostile, or ambivalent—were also intimate, as Syrians (and their customers) had to negotiate power-laden differences of language, race, culture, gender, and sometimes religion. Peddlers in the course of their work also confronted state power in the form of local regulations that sought to restrict movement, public appearance, and sales (such as peddling licenses, vagrancy laws, and the "ugly laws" discussed in chapter 2). The bonds formed among peddlers while on the road—among siblings, cousins, friends, or others—were intimate bonds; and the new relationships that peddling enabled, specifically friendships and sexual relationships that may not have been possible within the Syrian settlements, were also intimate.

Lowe cautions against the uncritical acceptance of sexual and affective intimacies as belonging to the realm of the private, because doing so is part of the "biopolitics through which the colonial powers administered the enslaved and colonized and sought to indoctrinate the newly freed into [Eurocentric] Christian marriage and family."[13] The example of peddling intimacies that were affective and sexual can illuminate the constructed nature of that confinement, because these intimacies occurred during the course of work or were enabled by particular laboring practices.

These theories of intimacy and power link forms of contact and relationship that are commonly understood to be individual with systemic and macro levels of dominance. Audre Lorde's theory of the erotic is rooted in a different framework, but it is also one that connects the individual with the systemic—specifically, the power that queer women of color have in their lives in relation to one another and to their own experiences, feelings, and desires. Used in conjunction with theorizations of intimacy, Lorde's radical reenvisioning of the erotic further clarifies how peddling practices were sites of powerful possibility for homosocial and homoerotic pleasure. For Lorde, the erotic is not singularly about the sexual but more broadly about the sensual and the sensory as well. Lorde's theory of the erotic allows for an articulation of work in the peddling economy as a set of laboring practices that also contained a sensuality and physicality of relationship to one's work, world, and surroundings. Lorde calls this the act of "sharing deeply any pursuit with another person."[14]

I understand these erotics as a form of interdependence, as it functioned in the queer ecology of the Syrian peddling economy. The historical-grounded imagining of photos that I demonstrate in this chapter is important for reminding us that stories of race are always simultaneously stories of gendered, sexual, and classed legibility or illegibility. Specifically, the status of Syrian migrants' racial position hinged not only on whom they were positioned in relation to and where, but also

on how Syrian migrants were understood as gendered, sexual, and classed beings—that is, whether they were understood as such in normative or nonnormative ways according to white, middle-class, heteronormative standards. An analysis of pleasure that accounts for its erotic (corporeal) and intimate (relational) elements is essential for understanding this process for Syrians, because we can then clarify that their affective lives had significant potential to unsettle both normative white American ideals of personhood and the elite Syrian American response. Lorde says that the erotic is "the power of our unexpressed or unrecognized feeling."[15] Thus the verbal articulation of erotic feelings, desire, friendship, or care—let alone the claim to a sexual identity—is not a requirement for theorizing about the existence of erotic pleasure in peddling and making visible the possibilities of homoerotics.

Syrians adapted to peddling practices in ways that maintained the system of interdependence, care, and companionship that they valued. Syrians who peddled together experienced this kind of interdependence; they relied on one another for safety, food, shelter, and companionship on the road. The Syrian women who did not peddle but worked from home while male relatives were away combined households with other women to consolidate childcare, cooking, and cleaning—and, again, for companionship. Those who stayed home spent days preparing for the return of long-distance peddlers by readying rooms, harvesting crops, procuring ingredients, and making large quantities of Arab foods.[16]

Based on interviews with Syrian Americans from this early community, Naff poignantly described the joy in these reunions and the rest that peddlers could find in the Syrian settlements:

> It was in the settlements that peddlers revived their spirit and reveled in a sense of belonging. Here they rediscovered continuity with the past; *values, which often seemed out of place elsewhere, were validated*. It was here that life's vitality, numbed by the frustrations of the road, was restored; here people of their own kind spoke the same language, laughed at the same humor, called their names, and bantered in familiar accents. Here, they bathed, perhaps for the first time in weeks, and savored tastes they had craved. *Emotions, pent up on the road, poured forth in the settlements.*[17]

We could interpret this description as one that builds a homogeneous and essentializing portrait of the Syrian community, in which all members felt complete just by belonging, with no differences in power to complicate these feelings. Instead of this interpretation, which does have merit, I focus on Naff's articulation of the cultural validation felt within the community and of the affective release. I argue that the Syrian values viewed as "out of place" were precisely the ones I mention above—interdependence, companionship, and care—as being at odds with normative American ideals of independence, individualism, and self-sufficiency. This argument complicates the recuperative positioning of peddlers as pioneers, given that the settler colonial pioneer embodies those normative American ideals. The emotions that were "pent up on the road" and finally released when peddlers returned home could also be understood as Lorde's "unexpressed or unrecognized

feeling." Thus, this validation and this release had power that conflicted with the disciplinary economy of heteronormative white supremacy in which Syrian Americans lived. This theoretical framework of pleasure is particularly pertinent for thinking about the queer ecology of peddling, wherein Syrian migrants traveled together, braved unknown and sometimes hostile geographies together, and came home and rejoiced together.

HOMOSOCIALITY, HOMOEROTICS, AND SYRIAN AMERICAN COMMUNITIES

Diasporic communities in which homosociality was normative have often been places where homoeroticism also existed. Scholars such as Gayatri Gopinath have documented the numerous slippages between homosociality and homoeroticism, particularly between women.[18] A reckoning with same-gender desire and sex in Arab American history is essential for combating the intertwined effects of white supremacy, Orientalism, and the "metanarrative of modernity" under which Syrians toiled.[19] The apparent absence of identifiable homosexual Syrians from this time period should not preclude us from knowing that these desires and sexual acts existed in the early Syrian American community. Historians of sexuality have long chronicled the obstacles in finding archival evidence of queer subjects. In addition, the identification of historical subjects as "queer," "homosexual," "gay," "bisexual," or "lesbian"—whether through sexual practices, aesthetics, or expressions of interiority that resemble identity—is an endeavor frustrated by the particularities of how these ways of being have developed in culturally, economically, regionally, and nationally specific contexts. Middle East and North Africa studies scholars have also long examined the existence of sexual practices, regimes, and ways of being that do not fit within the modern Eurocentric model of the heterosexual-homosexual binary. This examination includes the effects of colonialism on those ways of being, as well as the efficacy and effects of various practices of naming sexuality that conform to a neoliberal and cosmopolitan legibility framework. Nor do Middle East and North Africa studies scholars of sexuality agree what this history of colonialism and imperialism should then mean for contemporary sexual and bodily autonomy.[20]

These histories are varied and dynamic in the North American context as well. For instance, historian John Howard has shown that in rural spaces, where most of these peddlers operated, queer sexual practices followed trajectories of circulation and mobility, in contrast to the congregation more commonly found in urban areas.[21] The bars, boardinghouses, train stations, and cars through which Syrian peddlers and other transient workers passed were what Nayan Shah calls "queer sexual publics": they were semiprivate spaces in which same-gender sexual encounters were possible and frequent, even as they were heavily policed at the same time.[22]

In describing the small Syrian settlements that developed along peddling routes, Naff explains that living in crowded quarters was a new experience for those who came to the United States from villages: "In the settlement, one might share a tight space not only with relatives or fellow villagers but with strangers. Consequently, the settlement provided opportunities for new relationships not usually available in the village."[23] This insight is given within the context of Naff's discussion of marriage norms, but we cannot be sure that marriages were the only relationships that grew out of these new circumstances. What kinds of relationships were these, and how were they different? Were these marriages or friendships or intimate relationships that blurred boundaries between the sexual and the platonic? Were they welcome changes, or did they chafe against the expectations of certain boundaries? And what of sexual violence? One of Naff's interlocutors described a house in Spring Valley, Illinois, where Syrian peddlers stayed when they came through town: "about two dozen at a time—both men and women, husbands and wives, single men and single women—slept there on the floor, two or three families to one room."[24] Presumably, children were present as well.

The opportunities for various relationships would have been abundant in a place with intimate and novel mixing of people, but what of other possibilities that may not have been imagined in heteronormative historical frameworks? What of nighttime explorations between eager friends? Or of the unwelcome advances from an older peddler upon a child? Imagining these possibilities removes the impetus to characterize a particular historical situation as positive or negative; instead it allows for the complexity of those situations and the possible unintelligibility of historical experience interpreted in our present moment, particularly with regard to sexuality and gender. This practice of historical-grounded imagining also creates space for the differences in community opinions about various relationships and intimacies, for the wide variation in participants' experiences of those relationships and intimacies, and for the reality of sexual violence and abuse also present in intimate encounters enabled by migration and the peddling economy.

Although all of the images in the Naff collection can have multiple meanings, the images I present here are particularly fruitful for thinking about the apparent lack of same-gender pleasure in the constructed narrative about early Arab American communities. Put another way, homosociality and homoeroticism function as present absences, traces of nonnormative connections that have been occluded within Arab American collections. I thus think about and with these photographs as "socially salient objects" in order to illustrate queer traces in Arab American history.[25]

The queerness here lies in several domains: in the possibility, which includes the reality, of homoerotic desire (homoerotic relationships and sexual acts were possible among peddlers on the road and among women who stayed home); in the impossibility of banishing from the archive nonnormative desires and intimacies (not limited to homoerotic intimacies); and in a methodological practice of "queer

looking" and "queer feeling." In this last regard, I am influenced by Kara Keeling's work in Black queer studies, visual studies, and affect, which asks us to track our awareness and responsiveness to things from the past, particularly through noticing things that are felt and perceived yet may be unrecognizable to "our current common senses."[26] Thus, as I produce knowledge about these photographs in the Naff Collection, I am looking not for a nonnormative sexuality or gender as an identity but for pleasures that can be sensed as queer—pleasures that were used to bolster the notion of Arabs' cultural and racial differences from normative ways of being, particularly in relation to white American cultural norms (in the context of this immigration) and to European cultural norms (in the context of colonialism and imperialism). I propose that the queer pleasures imagined and produced through this practice might allow us to undermine the racial, classed, and heteronormative assimilationist model readily encountered in archived personal collections.

PHOTOGRAPHY AND THE STAGING OF ARAB AMERICAN HETERONORMATIVITY

The Faris and Yamna Naff Arab American Collection at the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of American History was created by historian Alixa Naff over the course of her career. While it is known especially for extensive oral histories conducted with first- and second-generation Arab Americans from this older immigrant community, the collection also has more than two thousand photographs donated by Arab Americans from their personal family collections. Altogether, the Naff Collection contains abundant evidence of Syrians at work. The numerous accounts of laboring practices and photos of Syrians in front of their businesses, in factories, and on the road as peddlers make clear that this collection is an archive as much of labor as of the Arab American community's entrepreneurial contributions. These objects provide a framework of Syrians as proper laborers in ways that ready them for inclusion in the American nation.

When I first encountered these photographs as someone not yet familiar with studies of visual culture, I was particularly drawn to how they seem to stand as unmediated evidence of historical acts and how they recuperate the Arab family as a normative American unit. For instance, Syrian immigrants were pioneer peddlers with families depending upon them, using horses and carriages as well as packs on their backs and motorized vehicles. Syrian families owned and operated groceries, general stores, restaurants, and ice cream shops. Syrian families enjoyed time at the beach, drove cars, and had formal family portraits taken. One can interpret a thread of familial normativity that runs throughout these images, perhaps even more so because items in the collection are arranged by the families who donated those materials. Marianne Hirsch calls this the "familial gaze": the conventions and ideologies through which family members see themselves.[27]

Among these images, formal family portraits and images of Syrians at work predominate. Through their visual representation of heteronormative family structures and proper laboring practices, these photographs make a case for the respectability of the early Arab American community.[28] Sprinkled among this collection are other photographs—outdoor images, some posed and some candid—in which men or women are socializing together. These largely gender-segregated photographic spaces illuminate the homosocial bonds of Arab families and communities, and of Syrian peddlers in particular. Although they reflect the collection's focus on the United States (most of the photographs were taken of Arab Americans in the United States or abroad), the photographs span the reaches of the Levantine diaspora, including South America, Southwest Asia, North Africa, and other regions in North America. I focus my analysis on roughly eighty of these photographs and, in this chapter, give particular attention to a handful of them.

A photograph is a "certificate of presence" that invokes "an existential connection between 'the necessarily real thing which has been placed before the lens' and the photographic image."[29] Although heavily mediated by social processes of power, photographs function as the ultimate proof signifying "the real" or the authentic.[30] They are thus curated as essential items in the creation of archival collections. The idea that photographs are truth in representation continues to frame the way many of us think about photography. Walter Benjamin's proclamation that photography was "the first truly revolutionary means of reproduction" gestured toward the liberatory possibilities of this apparatus, one in which the knowledge produced from photographs could be democratic and multiple.[31] But this medium also seemed to harness the real and make it far more accessible than visual art forms had done previously, allowing that real image to pose as a representative image, even as mass production radically distanced the photo from its own contextual reality. Therein lies the contradictory nature of photography: photographic images, specifically portraits, can be both radically self-representative and essentializing, both honorific and repressive.[32] These paradoxes have been articulated as scholars have grappled with the expansive possibilities and varied meanings of photography—as an apparatus, as a visual archive, as text (what photographs mean), and as a pedagogical tool (what photographs do).

As an apparatus, the camera allowed a more rapid process of recording an image, as well as a closer resemblance to the actual figure or person in the image, than did mediums like painting or drawing. Because of the belief in the objectivity of Eurocentric science, the scientific processes used in photography lent support to the idea that photographs are unmediated representations of the real. Photographs thus function as visual documentation, always already existing as part of a terrain of biopolitical knowledge. Specifically, portraiture was used to establish the notion of a "knowable interiority" based on physical manifestations of the body—most frequently through immutable phenotypical traits of skin color, facial features, and head size, but also in material markers of class such as dress and decor.[33]

Photography was thus employed in creating a white, middle-class identity through the nineteenth century, while it was also implicated in eugenicist projects that pathologized nonwhiteness, poverty, criminality, and disability.[34] As mediated through these labored frameworks of representation, photographic archives are sites through which "narratives of national belonging and exclusion are produced."[35]

Photography first arrived in Southwest Asia and North Africa via colonial practices. European and American anthropologists, missionaries, and government officials produced photographs of the landscape and of the indigenous inhabitants which buttressed Orientalist ideas that Arabs were uncivilized and exotic. Photographs of Arabs either rendered them as part of the land's natural topography or highlighted their racial and cultural difference from Europeans and Euro-Americans. Harnessing the power of the camera's perceived documentarian capacity, these photographs also presented an image of Arabs as being anachronistic in comparison to Euro-American modernity.[36] Eurocentric photography of Arabs also depicts—as Sarah Graham-Brown writes of early Middle Eastern photography—"costume, particularly the costume of women," in a way that "became a form of visual identification for Westerners of races, 'types' and ethnic groups, and contributed to the imagery of the picturesque, the exotic, and the erotic."[37] European mythology cast the head covering of Middle Eastern and North African women (of all religions) and the space of the harem as modes of patriarchal control, in contrast to the supposed freedom of European women. European male sexual fantasy was central to this mythology because veiling and seclusion within the harem blocked male colonizers' access to Middle Eastern and North African women's bodies (but also provided an opportunity for women to gaze without being fully seen).[38] Still, Orientalist paintings tried to offer Westerners "a stolen glance," a peek inside the blocked view of the harem.[39]

Photography built on this Orientalist tradition, making nudity and various stages of undress a prominent feature in early Western photography of Middle Eastern women.[40] Americans, too, participated in this Eurocentric imaging of the Middle East and North Africa, and particularly of the regions' women inhabitants. For instance, the bodies, movements, and dress of Arab women dancers at the 1893 Chicago World's Fair became a focal point of white American fascination and revulsion. The photographic legacy of these dancers crystalized them as "mythological figures through which to trace contemporaneous US engagements with the disorienting processes of modernization and expansionism."[41]

Toward the end of the nineteenth century, cameras became accessible to the Arab upper class through the production and circulation of "press and shoot" Kodak cameras. These cameras were first available in the Ottoman Empire in 1888 and were mass-produced in simpler and cheaper form (such as Kodak's Brownie cameras) beginning in 1900.[42] These cameras greatly enabled family photography practices that did not rely on a formal studio or a professional photographer. Upper-class Arabs in particular used photography as a means to claim

modernity, delineate national and class identities,[43] and establish a site for resisting the Orientalist framework that had been imposed on them. Photography was also configured as a medium "that would make visible the social aspirations of the family."[44] Thus the visual portrayal of proper family structures, class status, and a national Arab identity was central to these images.[45]

As the camera became more accessible and families were able to take photographs themselves rather than in a formal studio, other domestic intimacies could be visualized. The portraiture that documented family respectability continued to exist alongside these newer forms of domestic, amateur photography. Photography thus emerged as a site through which oppositional images could be produced. Because the advent of photography worked in tandem with European and American white supremacist and colonialist ideologies, photography has often been used to counteract those damaging reproductions. As access to photography spread across class lines, it further enabled the oppressed to have ownership of and to participate in making images of themselves.[46]

Within the Naff collection photographs, I paid attention to any images of peddlers and other Syrians engaging in laboring activities. These photographs include peddlers pictured with their peddling packs, a horse and buggy (see figure 3), or a motorized vehicle. Some peddling photographs show peddlers with their goods spread out in front of customers while the customers also pose for the camera. Other photographs show Syrians standing inside or in front of their brick-and-mortar stores: groceries, dry goods stores, dress shops, restaurants. Most photographs of peddlers show adult men, and the majority of the photos of Syrians at work show men working. This overrepresentation of laboring men connects to Eurocentric gendered and classed delineations of separate private and public spheres. Here, Syrian men appear in their apparently rightful place, working outside the home, so that their wives remain home and care for children.

Figure 4 exemplifies this vision of the proper labor of Syrian immigrants. It shows the interior of Joseph Grocery & Meats, an Arab-owned store in Drumright, Oklahoma. The picture is dated circa 1916–25. Pictured, from left to right, are Chic Fogaley, proprietor Henry Joseph, and George Elias. This photo is the image of the respectable Syrian American capitalist: the owner and operator of a business, one with a physical and permanent storefront. Such photographs, through their explicit framing and staging as well as their inclusion in a national ethnic archive, enact an affective equation with white, middle-class Americans; they "[naturalize] claims of sameness through an appearance of familiarity."[47] Nothing visual indicates a deviation from white American masculinity. Understood in this way, these photographs are building blocks of the Arab American inclusion narrative, which says that Arab Americans are, and have been, worthy of belonging in the (white) American national family.

Women and children also show up in photographs of family businesses, usually as they pose with their male relatives inside or in front of their stores (see figure 5).

FIGURE 3. Peddlers near Louisville, Kentucky, at the turn of the twentieth century. Faris and Yamna Naff Arab American Collection, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, Series 2, Box 67.

Only the rare photograph features child peddlers or women working in a factory setting, despite the statistical prominence of the latter.[48] Photos of women working threatened to contradict the respectability of the men-at-work photos. Yet such photos could also demonstrate the liberation of Syrian women within the context of their migration to the United States. Despite the numbers of Syrian women who peddled, they are rarely pictured in ways that connect them to that work (with peddling packs or displaying their wares, for instance.)

In studying these photography archives, I also noted the plethora of photographs of leisure. For instance, photographs from the 1910s through 1940s depict Syrian Americans showing off their cars: posing in front of, on the hoods of, or inside their vehicles (see figures 6 and 7). Figure 7 also provides another instance through which to index the active curation of Syrian American modernity in the Naff archive. This image, dated around 1919, shows a woman driving a car, with another woman next to her and three children in the back seat. The image bears a notation on the reverse: "Independent woman, drove her own car." Many of the Naff archive photographs have two sets of notations, one belonging presumably to those who donated the images and the second to Naff herself, who wrote notes and added details as people handed these images over to her. Based on a comparison of the handwriting to other photographs' notations, these words appear to be Naff's editorial voice. The image itself offers a glimpse of how Syrian immigrant life could be multiply interpreted. In this case, the Western dress

FIGURE 4. Interior of Joseph Grocery & Meats, Drumright, Oklahoma, circa 1916–25. Faris and Yamna Naff Arab American Collection, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, Series 2, Box 64.

FIGURE 5. Interior of dry goods store, Oklahoma, circa 1915–16. Faris and Yamna Naff Arab American Collection, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, Series 2, Box 64.

FIGURE 6. Girl and young woman posing with car, Detroit, 1942. Faris and Yamna Naff Arab American Collection, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, Series 2, Box 72.

FIGURE 7. "Independent woman, drove her own car," circa 1919. Faris and Yamna Naff Arab American Collection, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, Series 2, Box 64.

and hairstyles, as well as the use of the automobile, might signal that these Syrians were engaging with sartorial and technological registers of modernity. Yet, as discussed in chapters 2 and 3, the presence of Syrian women in public spaces, particularly without men, clashed with those same Eurocentric registers, which produced a gendered and classed distinction between public and private domains. Naff's notation functions as a palimpsest of these historical engagements with discourses of modernity.[49] Her recasting of the driver as an "independent woman" hints at the instrumentalization of women's lives in this history, as well as Naff's own feminist consciousness.

In addition to Syrians with automobiles, some photos marked special occasions and holidays when young Syrian women wore furs and pin-curled their hair, and Syrian men dressed in their finest suits. Other photos of gatherings showed events such as lamb slaughter in preparation for large community meals and family picnics. A number of photographs marked moments of rest and pleasure during peddling trips, moments in which peddlers toured landmarks of the area they were visiting or dipped weary feet into a stream or a lake. Although informal family gatherings and lamb slaughters do not automatically fall into this categorization, displays of leisure time are often demonstrations of class status and upward class mobility. The photos of cars and of Syrians posing in fine outfits are evidence of a claim to a normative class identity (that is, a middle-class identity).

Closely related to the leisure-time photographs as a marker of class, the numerous formal studio portraits in the collection registered a family's or individual's class status or class aspirations. The studio portrait visually describes its subject and inscribes within it a social identity; "it is also a commodity, a luxury, an adornment, ownership of which confers status."[50] These photographs include young children in matching outfits, men in suits and top hats or *tarabish*,[51] and women in fine dresses and hats. For example, figure 8 shows a Syrian family whose members were maternal relatives of the person who donated the photograph. The photo is undated, but the family's dress and hairstyles date it to the early 1930s. The nuclear family emerges in this image, with the father and mother seated at the same level and the two children nestled protectively between them. The backdrop indicates it is a studio portrait, a particular marker of middle-class status or middle-class aspiration. The family's clothing also points to financial well-being; note the children's matching outfits and their shoes. This photo is typical of posed family portraits included in the Naff Collection. They represent the Arab American family as a productive unit, a corporation,[52] and portray its members as productive individuals, worthy of belonging in the national US family. The configuration of these families, and the identities of the people included in the photos, affords rich sites of meaning related to competing spheres of kinship, nationalism, and modernity.

In the Arab context, particularly toward the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, the bourgeois family was the symbol of this modernity in portraiture. The bourgeois family portrayed the father as the "productive head" of the family and the mother as the "reproductive base."[53] Many photographs showed the fathers standing while mothers and children were seated or at least positioned at a lower sight level than the father. A man's wearing of a tarboosh signified that he was educated and part of the Arab elite, while Western clothing aligned the upper-class Arab family with modernity. The bourgeois family portrait included only one set of parents and children—that is, just two generations—thus severing the full extent of Arab familial intimacies from the frame. The bourgeois family thus excluded grandparents, aunts and uncles, and cousins—"those who [were] peripheral to the modern vision of self and family."[54] These portraits of the bourgeois family, however, did not simply replace representations of the "extended" family (the term "extended" is itself a construction that signals a marginalization of certain forms of kinship). For instance, figure 8 features one set of parents and their children. The photo showed the donor's relatives in the extended family, and not the donor of the picture themselves. Presumably, when asked to offer things that were important to the history of their family and migration, this donor included a studio portrait of extended family members. The inclusion of this photograph signals the tension in this transition from conceptualizing the family in more expansive and indigenous terms to depicting the family using the Eurocentric bourgeois model. The family was another axis upon which racialized conceptions of modernity turned.

FIGURE 8. Studio portrait of parents and children, circa 1930–34. Faris and Yamna Naff Arab American Collection, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, Series 2, Box 72.

FIGURE 9. Studio portrait of large family, circa 1920–24. Faris and Yamna Naff Arab American Collection, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, Series 2, Box 68.

FIGURE 10. Family gathering at unknown beach location, circa 1935–39. Author's personal collection.

FIGURE 11. Group photo after a large family dinner at Christmastime, Louisville, Kentucky, circa 1960–66. Author's personal collection.

In the Naff Collection, the later the photographs go into the twentieth century, the less visible the bourgeois family structure becomes, with the father standing as the head and the mother and children as the base. Later family portraits might be more identified as modeling the nuclear family, showing the mother and father as one unit and the children as the fruitful products of their labor. Julia Hirsch writes that this kind of family photograph, whether formal or amateur, represents the family in three ways: "as a state whose ties are rooted in property; . . . as a spiritual assembly which is based on moral values; and . . . as a bond of feeling which stems from instinct and passion."[55] Most often, Hirsch says, the father symbolizes the family as state and spiritual assembly, and the mother is the emotional bond.[56] Many of the family photographs in the Naff archives, especially family portraits, fall into these representations of the bourgeois or nuclear family model, in which the family is bounded, unified, and properly reproductive.

Still, a few formal family portraits exceed the bounds of the bourgeois or nuclear family, such as figure 9. These images often show three generations and adult siblings, along with a married couple and their children, or they show multiple related married couples and their children. Still staged in a formal portrait studio, they are markers of class status, but they gesture toward an Arab, Syrian, or other indigenous frame for modernity. Figures 10 and 11, which are not part of the Naff

Collection, are historical images of Arab America and provide a useful counterpoint to these family portraits. Figure 10, undated but probably from the 1930s, shows a group of twenty-five adults and children gathered on a rocky beach and posing for a group photo. Figure 11, from circa 1960–66, shows a Christmastime gathering of more than forty people, adults and children, posed around a train of dinner tables inside someone's home. Both are photos of Arab American families—my own ancestors and relatives, to be precise.

Images like these, showing an entire or extended Arab family grouped informally or even in formal studio portraits, serve as fissures in the narrative of Arab familial normalcy (Arab modernity) and gesture toward the expansive affective ties of the Arab family. I am reminded of two competing anecdotes about Arab American life from this history. One, from a government report on immigration in 1901, says, "Unlike the padrone system, the Syrian immigrants bring with them the primitive clan organization of the family, so that it is not strange that a score, or even a hundred, may claim relationship."[57] Government officials were particularly concerned about contract labor systems among immigrants, often referred to as "padrone" systems because of their strong association with Italian immigrants, but these comments also echo concerns about the "coolie" labor system among Chinese and some other Asian immigrants. This language indicates an anxiety about the large kinship networks that animated Syrian life, their incommensurability with Eurocentric norms of family relationships, and their assumed threat to white, US-born labor. The second anecdote, from the interview with Francis Slay, opens this chapter; Slay discussed the importance of maintaining bonds of love and affection within a family, what he called "the teaching to love another." He remarked about the frequency with which his family gathered: "We have all of our family over to the house; I have my brothers and sisters over all the time, not once a year, but summer, spring, fall, all the time together; I just had 65 [family members] over [at] my house."[58]

In these anecdotes and photographs, we find an insistence that the bonds of cousins and grandparents and aunts and uncles are just as significant as those of parents and children. Indeed, the Arabic language has many terms that can be used to describe a family, suggesting the importance of family as an organizing unit of Arab societies and the different units and scales of family relations.[59] These archival artifacts challenge the rise of the nuclear family model. They also form pictorial evidence of an Arab "intimate selving" that prioritizes connectivity through networks of biological kin over the "bounded, autonomous, and separate self" that has been universalized in Eurocentric models of human development.[60]

American photography has also been linked to the disciplining of immigrant populations. A small handful of photos in the Naff collection connect to that disciplinary practice. Photography was central to the development and implementation of US immigration policy, particularly regarding Chinese and Asian exclusion. Chinese women migrants were the first to be issued photographic identification cards at the border, followed by almost all Chinese and Chinese-descended people, those crossing the US-Mexico border, and all other immigrants

in the early twentieth century.[61] Family photographs also became evidence of Asian immigrants' whiteness and Americanness when the state sought to strip them of their naturalized citizenship. These photographs included shots of the inside of defendants' homes to show that "we live just like American people."[62] As a result of these and other measures of anti-Asian state violence, Asian Americans have a long history of using photography to produce evidence of their own civility, a requirement of US citizenship.[63] The Naff Collection contains a small selection of photos that represent the state or of the state's gaze. These were passport and naturalization photographs, portraits of enlisted Arab Americans in military uniform, and photos that Arab American service members took while on tour.

A QUEER ARAB AMERICAN IMAGINING

To account for pleasure and power in these photographs, I track my own pleasure in looking at them, and I imagine the possible pleasures of the individuals captured within their frames. Following scholarship on photography and affect, I center the idea that affective response to (not just pleasure in) visuality carries important meaning and builds on the foundations of materialist visual culture scholarship, without reproducing a binary of "thinking" versus "feeling."[64] Here, I also think of Gayatri Gopinath's work, which shows how "the visual serves as a portal to other senses and affects."[65] My tracking of pleasure also follows Roland Barthes's assertion that "the image launches desire beyond what it permits us to see."[66] Barthes refers here specifically to the "punctum" of a photograph, a fundamentally affective response that one adds to an image. Whereas the "studium" of a photograph is "that very wide field of unconcerned desire" that registers, for instance, whether one likes or dislikes an image, the punctum spurs the spectator of a photograph to imbue that image with something more. For Barthes, the punctum is "what I add to the photograph and *what is nonetheless already there*."[67] Finally, in thinking of the physicality of photographs, as well as our embodied senses of photographs when they are in our possession, I am indebted to Tina Campt's theorization of "haptic images." Rather than referring singularly to the tactile, Campt says that haptic images accrue three senses of touch: "an indexical touch, a physical touch, and an affective touch."[68]

Using these photographs, I conceptualize the queer ecology of peddling through an attention to pleasure for the people pictured in them and for me as a queer Arab American spectator. I consider the tropes surrounding US immigration stories, Arab cultures, and the people who provided the material forces for those tropes, and I imagine other possibilities of what the archival traces they left behind might mean.

The photographs in the following discussion were donated to the Naff Collection by two of the subjects within them: Nazha and Budelia, whose recollections of homosocial gatherings are discussed at the beginning of this chapter. Nazha and Budelia (also known as Bud) were cousins and are shown together in two of the

photos. Also pictured are Daher (Nazha's husband), two men named George and Khalil, Bud's mother, and several other, unnamed people. Nazha and Bud were both interlocutors of Alixa Naff and were also interviewed for her research. Given the known relationships among some of the people in these photographs, I proceed with Emma Pérez's caution to "confront and rearrange" the privileging of certain relationships (and our assumptions about those relationships) and to imagine other possibilities stemming from the intimacies created in and by these images.[69]

The first photograph, figure 12, was dated to the early 1920s and shows Daher and another man, named Khalil. A notation on the back of the photo tells us that the two men are "friends and fellow peddlers of oriental rugs and imported laces and linens singing in Ottowa [Illinois]." The caption offers a "redirected look" that opens further possibilities for meaning here.[70] That they are "friends" tells us that their bond is intentional, willing, and nonfamilial. The indication that they are "fellow peddlers" may mean that they peddled together, perhaps procuring items from the same supplier, dividing up routes, and providing mutual protection and companionship on the road. The two men sit together, gesturing and, it appears to me, laughing, but the notation indicates that they are singing. I wonder which song this might have been. An American tune? An Arabic folk song? The latter is unlikely given the sheet music they hold in their hands. A wedding ring is visible on each man's left hand; and in the far-right edge of the frame lie two hats, ostensibly belonging to the subjects of the photograph. Because they are not wearing their suit jackets, the scene feels casual. It is possible that this photograph was taken during a peddling trip. In the focal point of the image, the men's postures are animated, and their gazes are fixed on the booklet that one of the men holds, rather than being directed at the camera. This suggests that this is a candid shot. However, the synchronicity of their poses—the right arm of each man bent at the same angle, their index fingers pointed simultaneously in exclamation—could indicate that the photograph is staged or could simply point to rhythmic movements that accompanied their singing.

But the bottom half of the photograph may tell a different story. Daher's leg is draped over Khalil's, as if he is approaching sitting on the lap of his friend. And somewhat obscured at the top of the photo, we can make out the image of this same man's arm wrapped around the body of his friend, and his hand is curled into his friend's hair. Curling, not curled—it feels active, as if it is happening now. In executing this embrace, Daher is in the midst of a grin, his eyes nearing shut, while Khalil's mouth is open, carrying the song. Their closeness resembles what Glen Mimura has called "frontier homosociality," the ease and casual intimacy born by the sharing of domestic and leisure responsibilities in the absence of women.[71]

The second photograph (figure 13) pictures Daher on the right and another man, named George. The picture is undated, but notes indicate that it was taken in Canton, Ohio, where Daher and Nazha lived at the time. Based on the time frame indicated for these photos, the earliest it could have been taken is the early 1920s. What I notice first about this photograph is the way that their figures dominate and

FIGURE 12. "Friends and fellow peddlers" Daher and Khalil singing together, 1920s. Faris and Yamna Naff Arab American Collection, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, Series 2, Box 72.

FIGURE 13. Peddlers George and Daher on steps in front of house, 1920s. Faris and Yamna Naff Arab American Collection, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, Series 2, Box 72.

fill the frame. The two men are outdoors, in front of a house, and their positions indicate a candid nature—the uneven height of the two men as they are placed in the frame, the movement of the Daher's arm upward or downward, the grasp of George's arm around the neck of his fellow peddler. Candid, but not casual, the two are dressed in three-piece suits. Whereas the previous photograph suggests animation and movement, the figures in this image are largely still, perhaps also suggesting hesitation and awkwardness. The rigidity of the two figures might be also reinforced by the suggestion of the house behind them and by the ways in which domestic space was often a space of regulation with regard to sexuality.[72] Daher's gaze is directed toward the photographer, and George's gaze is slightly below the lens of the camera. The look of both is one of interruption. But what strikes me about this photograph is the intimacy it also relays. There is a faint, blurred, almost imperceptible boundary in between the two. The close proximity of their bodies—they are literally pressed against each other—suggests an unclear delineation between where one man's body ends and the other begins. While the tone of the previous photograph is jovial and flirtatious, the enmeshed bodies and intense stares of the second photograph suggest a more serious tone.

Daher is also pictured in the third photo (figure 14), a blurry image of him with five other unnamed men. Taken in 1920 in Petoskey, Michigan, the picture shows the five men standing behind Daher in a line staggered by their differing heights. The second man from the left sinks even lower; he is embracing Daher, who awkwardly squats and reaches his arms backward to join in the embrace. Daher's eyes are closed or cast downward. The unnamed men are dressed in suit jackets and ties, save for Daher, who wears dark pants and a button-down shirt. Among the others, some wear hats, and all but one have soft smiles on their faces. The notation on the back of the photo describes this scene: "drunk & happy, Daher horsing around with brother and fellow immigrant peddlers." These photographs and Nazha's interviews provide evidence that Petoskey—a coastal resort town off Lake Michigan—was on Daher's peddling route. Potentially, the first and the last photographs discussed here were taken during the course of peddling trips, blurring the distinction between work and leisure.[73]

As I look at these photographs, the possibilities of what life as a peddler may have enabled loom large. The impetus of movement, of circulation, prompted a reorienting of relationships for those Syrians who had not previously led nomadic lives. I imagine what it might feel like, in my own body, to be in such proximity to someone else, a friend, a family member, a lover, who also shared this migratory experience—an experience of migration different from the transatlantic one that had already taken place. I imagine the feel of a loved one's hair curled in my fingers, the pulse and vibrations quickened from singing in unison, the warmth generated from the movement of two bodies, from the length of our bodies joined together. I imagine feeling grateful for my companion, for someone to be at ease with after a week of walking, of making the pitch over and over again, of separation from those of whom I make part.

FIGURE 14. Daher with five other men peddlers, Petoskey, Michigan, 1920. Faris and Yamna Naff Arab American Collection, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, Series 2, Box 72.

Once this past week, I feared for my life when the husband of a customer took offense at something I did—I'm not sure what—and got his shotgun. This was not the first time, but it does not get easier with repetition. You were too far away to intervene, but you heard the commotion. Although my cheeks were burning from embarrassment and anger at these people who are so quick to assume the worst about us, I was able to ignore those feelings and feign humble apology in order to defuse the situation. For hours after, I thought I would break down, but your hand on my back steadied me as we walked, reminded me that I was not alone in this life. I cannot tell my wife; she has too much to worry about while I'm gone, but at least there is someone who understands me without having to speak about it. For you, I am grateful.

Finally out of danger and off duty, here, we take off our jackets, worn so that customers see that we are respectable, so that wives and daughters do not fear our strangeness. Here we take off our hats, finally feeling the full warmth of the sun before it sets. Soon, ties will be loosened, sleeves rolled up, and perhaps belts unbuckled, after the abundance of dinner. Soon we will tend to our families, but for now the time is just ours, for joy and rest with someone who knows what my everyday is like.

The next two photos (figures 15 and 16) were also taken in Canton, Ohio, and depict Nazha and Bud. The relationship between these two is known in one sense: they are cousins. This fact neither substantiates nor invalidates any claim of erotics or intimacy between them. First, although we know the familial relation between them, we do not know the substance of that relationship. Second, intimate and sexual connections between cousins were common, particularly through the endogamous marriage system that was prevalent in Syrian communities.[74]

Taken outdoors like the first two photographs discussed here, both photos are clearly staged. In the figure 15 photo, donated by Nazha, the two women are pictured standing in front of a house. There is a great distance between the photographer and the women. At first glance, the women are diminutive, overshadowed by the house behind them and sent to the background by the expanse of lawn in front of them. But their poses are aggressive in the frame, as if they have made themselves take up more space to compensate for their smallness in the photograph itself. Julianne Hirsh has offered that "the simplest way of suggesting spatial mastery outdoors is to show a housefront or a stoop, symbolic pieces of territory."[75] Bud juts her leg out from behind the bushes, extending it long and angled out from her body; and Nazha is placing her arm upward against the trellis, above her cousin. They gaze directly at the camera, but in ways that subtly mitigate that directness. Nazha has turned her face toward the side, while still keeping her eyes toward the camera's lens. Bud faces the camera completely but angles her head downward, in a move that feigns a kind of coyness—an attitude her eyes betray. The punctum here shifts constantly. It is Bud standing behind—no in—the bushes. And, or maybe instead, it is Nazha's hand poised above Bud's head. It is the odd, long distance between the photographer and the photographed. The women are partially hidden by the foliage around them, as if to keep something from the camera's eye, as if to suggest that there is something for themselves, between them-

FIGURE 15. Cousins Budelia and Nazha, Canton, Ohio, 1920s. Faris and Yamna Naff Arab American Collection, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, Series 2, Box 72.

FIGURE 16. Budelia and Nazha in front of store, 1923 or 1924. Faris and Yamna Naff Arab American Collection, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, Series 2, Box 74.

selves, that they have deemed beyond the view of this photographic gaze. The distance between them and the photographer also achieves this. Their stances and gazes—particularly those of Bud, on the left—are assertive. The tilts of their heads acknowledge the norms of decorum that they are supposed to uphold as women; the position behind the bushes defiantly blocks the complete access of the photographic (and audience's) gaze. This interruption of the gaze both invites curiosity and speculation—my curiosity and speculation—and refuses any full knowing. The photograph forces me, as a desiring consumer of the photographic image and as an Arab American scholar of Arab American history, to grapple with the unknown and the unknowable.

In the figure 16 photo, Bud and Nazha appear with a storefront in the background. They have some space between them, and they are connected by a loose interlacing of their fingers. Bud, on the left, is dressed in dark colors with long sleeves and a wide lace collar. Her face is solemn, but she is perhaps beginning to smile or being photographed mid-sentence. In contrast, Nazha is in a light-colored dress with short sleeves and a broad smile. Not all of the writing on the back of the photo is legible, but it indicates that the photograph was taken in 1923 or 1924 on Bud's "first trip" to Canton, presumably to visit her cousin.

The first photo was donated by Nazha; the second, by Bud. They wear the same dresses and hairstyles in both photos, offering the possibility that these images were taken during the same visit. One kept one photo, and the other kept the other. The physicality of these images as objects is striking; both photographs show the marks of attachment. The edges of both photos are worn with creases, and one has been torn. When I contrast them with the images of Daher and other male peddlers, I am struck by the evidence of how much these two images of Nazha and Bud have been touched, kept in pockets or wallets, and stored within reach to gaze at or to show others. The reciprocity of attachment to each woman's photograph here provides some hint of the bonds between the two, this touching evidence perhaps suggesting longing, fondness, or regret.

Budelia was born in 1903 in Rachaya Al-Wadi—a town in the southern Beqaa Valley of present-day Lebanon—and came to the United States with her parents when she was one year old. She lived in Spring Valley, Illinois, which was then a hub for Syrian peddlers. Bud's mother, pictured in the next photo (figure 17) and discussed at the beginning of this chapter, was a peddler and was related to Naff. After her mother was widowed, Bud was raised in a home with her mother and two maternal uncles, who were also single. Most of the images that Bud donated show her and other women and girls. Aside from her uncles' presence, Bud's life may have been surrounded by women, like those standing with her mother in the photo. In her interview with Naff, she noted that because she was an unmarried girl and woman, a lot was forbidden to her. Her uncles were very attentive to her activities and to those with whom she associated. This life of women—if indeed her photographic legacy is representative of such—may also have been a

FIGURE 17. Budelia's mother and five other women peddlers, World War I era. Faris and Yamna Naff Arab American Collection, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, Series 2, Box 74.

protective one. Equally so, it may have been a pleasurable one, as Bud's recollection of women eating and crocheting together may indicate. This life with women was both homosocial and homoerotic. It is echoed in the photo in figure 17, in which Bud's mother is grouped in an embrace with a number of other women; and it echoes in Bud's memories of kitchen spaces of work, joy, and sensuous connection among women.

Nazha's own life as a peddler took her throughout the Midwest. She donated to the archive many images of her and Daher taken on their peddling trips. But unlike Nazha, Bud was not a peddler. She completed a grade-school education and then went on to work in a garter factory and in department store sales. Bud seemed a private person and did not want to disclose much about her personal life to Naff. Naff's notes say that Bud told her, mid-interview, that "she didn't want too much of her personal life in this," whereupon Naff reassured her that she should only tell what she was comfortable revealing.

Bud had another means of evading the direct probing of the historian-cum-ethnographer: she would not sit for an interview on her own but rather acted as intermediary for Naff with other women. She mediated Naff's access to at least three other women interlocutors. On one hand, this information from the historical record makes me concerned about the ethics of centering my analysis on someone who valued so intensely her privacy (even just looking at photographs of her, even by way of an imagining). On the other hand, this detail returns me to the first photograph of Bud and Nazha (figure 15). Together they form an

image of inherent privacy, a blocking of view, perhaps mirroring the ways that Bud controlled access to information about her own life. Making meaning out of this mediated access cannot be an endeavor of certainty. I am reminded of Stephanie Rogerson's remarks upon looking at a picture of her great-aunt's lover: "My sense is that I both know her and that she is unknowable to me."[76] Martha Vicinus's ruminations on lesbian history also present the possibility that "perhaps this was not a failure to know, but a refusal to know."[77]

Because these histories, this imaginary, and this research are not separate from me as the author, I am also compelled to analyze my relationship to this archive and these photographs. What am I asking these photographs to do, and what does it mean for the subjects that they have been immortalized in this visual form? I acknowledge that, as I looked through these photographs, I wanted to find evidence of queer desires and intimacies in the early Arab American community, particularly ones that would be legible as such today. Despite this desire, I cannot name any individuals in the photographs I discuss as queer subjects, and I have proceeded with caution regarding the information about these individuals in the historical record. I long hesitated about researching their actual lives and identities beyond these images, because doing so would shift the focus back to the impetus to name, categorize, and identify in ways tightly linked to state power. In some cases, the historical record would frame these individuals as explicitly heterosexual. Regardless, the disciplinary regime of heteronormative white supremacy (and its imbrications with discourses of modernity) affected, and continue to affect, entire Arab American communities irrespective of actual sexual identity, desire, or behavior.

Patricia Holland writes that "snapshots contribute to the present-day historical consciousness in which our awareness of ourselves is embedded."[78] As pictures that were part of a family collection, the photographs I discuss in this chapter are part of the historical memory of that particular family. Yet as images that were also included in the Naff Collection—photographs taken from the family album and placed in a national ethnic archive—the images have become part of the historical memory of the Arab American community. As a result, they are implicated in a larger narrative of assimilation and belonging; they have been put to use for perhaps different purposes than those of the family. But the relationship between the individual and the family, and between the individual and the community, does not dissipate with the transfer of images from the family album to the ethnic archive. By asking after my own relationship to these photographs and to this analysis, my intention here is to center the way that family photographs "can operate at this junction between personal memory and social history, between public myth and personal unconscious."[79]

I read these photographs of Syrians who participated in the peddling economy to imagine the intimate bonds that were created through the migratory experiences of peddling, as well as the relationship of other family and community members

to the queer ecology of peddling. Specifically, I see each image as providing an archival trace of the homosociality and homoeroticism of Syrian migrant peddling communities. A danger lies in this analysis and this imagining. The danger lies not necessarily in its homoerotic subversiveness but rather in the central problematic of the photograph itself: the naturalized relationship between the photograph and the real thing or person it displays. This relationship persists stubbornly in the face of the many attempts to sever it. Considering what I desire to do with these photographs and what I try to do even against that desire, my direct reference to them, and to the archive in which they reside, will always call us back to wondering about the real: the "real" identities of the subjects within, the "real" relationships between them, the "real" desires, dreams, and fears that their lives contained. Despite this nagging desire for definitive answers to questions of who, what, when, where, and how, we must also come to terms with the finite and ultimate limits of the historical record. State and family documents will never contain all of the answers we seek as inheritors of these legacies. As gender-segregated images of Arabs, these images can also be read in a way that reinforces the Orientalist stereotypes of heterosexism and patriarchal norms in Arab cultures. Yet doing so forecloses the reality—not just the possibility—that these were spaces wherein homosociality and homoeroticism were constitutive of Arab American identities in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. There is pleasure in my relationship to these photographs—in the knowledge that they cannot be fully consumed by heteronormativity, and even that their apparent normativity enables my pleasure. This pleasure lies in imagining the homoerotics and homosociality among the photographs' subjects, as well as in knowing that those intimacies can never be fully eradicated from the historical record.