

Little Egypt and the North African Community of Astoria, Queens



Astoria, Queens



This timeline has been assembled by members of Malikah and residents of Astoria as an exercise in community history. Drawing from various sources such as public records, oral histories, and information passed down from generation to generation, this non-exhaustive zine charts a history of the “Little Egypt” neighborhood in Astoria, Queens. It is a predominately North African community, with residents hailing from Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia, and Algeria. The establishment of the neighborhood parallels more widespread patterns of North African and Arab migration to the US, referenced here to offer context. Highlighting select events such as litigation affecting migration and citizenship and the mobilization of national civil rights movements, as well as community-led initiatives to ensure wellbeing for Astoria residents, this record offers a lens into a thriving Queens enclave amidst a moment of rapid change and gentrification.

- 1527 Mustafa Azemmouri, an enslaved Black Amazigh Moroccan, is the first known North African, as part of a Spanish expedition to Florida, to come to what is now the United States.
- 1892 Mohamed Juda becomes the first known Algerian person to immigrate to the US.
- 1915 “George Dow,” a Christian immigrant from Syria, argues to be categorized as “white” instead of “Asian” in order to receive US citizenship, responding to stipulations in the Nationality Act of 1790 that declared only white, male property owners were eligible for citizenship.
- 1934 The first purpose-built mosque in the US is built by Syrian and Lebanese immigrants in Cedar Rapids, Iowa.
- 1957 Sami Boulos becomes one of the earliest recorded Egyptians to immigrate to New York City (NYC). A doctoral student, he planned to leave the country once his visa expired, but it was extended after he was hired at SUNY New Paltz.
- 1970s Exclusionary racial quotas are repealed by the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act. A result of civil-rights organizing, this revision presents opportunities for working-class Egyptians, Algerians, and Moroccans to immigrate to NYC.
- 1979 Masjid El-Ber, a religious organization, is founded in Astoria, Queens. The masjid is led by Sheikh Mohamed Atef, a community leader who has founded many institutions in Queens, including the first Arabic language school, a Quran school, a pilgrimage service, and a halal butcher shop. The masjid remains very active today and serves a religious home for many Bangladeshi, Moroccan, Bosnian, Albanian, and Egyptian immigrants.
- 1983 Mahmoud Saber opens Mahmoud’s Corner, one of the first halal food stands in Astoria, which mostly serves Muslim cab drivers. Today, it still stands on the corner of 34th Avenue and Steinway Street.
- 1989 Ali El Sayed, an Alexandrian Chef, opens Kabab Cafe, the first Egyptian restaurant in Astoria, Queens. The restaurant remains filled with art, paintings, and photographs.
- 1990s Many working-class North Africans—including several of the women who collaborated on this exhibition—flee economic

- 2001 Attacks killing 2,996 people are carried out on the World Trade Center on September 11. In response to the attacks, the USA Patriot Act is introduced, targeting existing immigrant and non-immigrant Muslim populations and paving way to expand The Global War on Terror. These efforts lead to the US invasions of Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003.
- 2001 *Arab Astoria* is founded as the first Arabic language newspaper published and distributed in Queens.
- 2001 Masjid Dar Al-Dawah is founded as an important space serving the North African Muslim community in Queens. It offers services including Arabic classes, Quran lessons, and karate workshops.
- 2002 Restrictive immigration policies impede the migration of Muslims and Arabs to the US. Simultaneously, motivated deportations of Muslim immigrants occur. The average visitation to the US from people of majority-Muslim countries drops by 20%.
- 2002 The New York Police Department (NYPD) launches a mass surveillance program on Muslims and Arabs in New York, including those in Astoria.
- 2003 The US invades Iraq with airstrikes in Baghdad. The decision to go to war is met by the largest simultaneous protests around the world.
- 2010 Malikah is founded by Rana Abdelhamid, after she experiences a hate-based attack in Queens.
- 2010 The Tunisian Uprising, in response to police harassment of a street vendor, leads to The Arab Spring, a series of protests in several countries against repressive dictatorships.
- 2011 The Egyptian revolution begins in response to police harassment of Egyptian youth and working-class people. Astoria residents march in solidarity with Egyptian revolutionaries for economic and social justice in the streets of Queens, establishing Steinway Street as a hub for liberatory political dialogues.
- 2011 Working-class migration from North Africa to NYC increases due to violent crackdowns on uprisings taking place across the region.
- 2011 The Associated Press releases an investigative report about the NYPD’s targeting of Muslims since 9/11.
- 2013 The Black Lives Matter movement is mobilized after the killing of Trayvon Martin, inspiring important racial reckoning across communities in the US. These include increased conversations on racial identity and a push for solidarity within North African communities.
- 2015 The first Muslim Girls Scouts of Astoria troop is established.
- 2015 NYC officially recognizes the observance of Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha as holidays for public school students.
- 2019–2020 The NYC Department of Education (DOE) pilots a halal meal program across 32 schools identified with having a large

- 2020 Muslim student constituency. The first COVID-19 case in the US is reported in NYC. Working-class immigrant neighborhoods in Queens experience the most severe impacts of the pandemic in the country.
- 2020 The Astoria Halal Fridge is founded by Rana Abdelhamid, Bryant Silva, and Nonya Khedr to address the realities of food insecurity impacting the Muslim community in the neighborhood.
- 2021 Rana Abdelhamid runs for US Congress as the first Egyptian from Queens do so.
- 2022 The Halal Food Program is offered in all NYC DOE schools, following advocacy from local Muslim community groups.
- 2022 Organizers host the first Eid al-Fitr Festival at Astoria Park to bring together Queens communities in celebration.
- 2022 Rent prices in Astoria increase by 34% on average, the highest change in all of Queens, as gentrification, luxury development, and displacement of immigrant working-class communities continues across NYC.
- 2022 Malikah Muslim Women’s Center is established, after receiving community funding from City Council District 22 through participatory budgeting—a process in which New Yorkers, regardless of their immigration status, directly decide how to allocate a portion of the city’s budget to address local needs.
- 2023 The New York State Legislature introduces laws to disaggregate “North African” from a white ethno-racial category on data-collection forms across the state.
- 2023 New York Muslim Organizing Collective receives sound permits to play the *athan* from four mosques in Astoria during the month of Ramadan, the first time the call to prayer is allowed to be amplified on streets in Astoria.

114 Pct. (Astoria, Queens)

The 114th Precinct is located in the northwestern portion of Queens patrolling the neighborhoods of Astoria, Long Island City, Woodside, and Jackson Heights. This area houses the second largest Egyptian community within New York as well as a large strip of commercial establishments. The businesses are concentrated primarily along Steinway Street between. These business locations are in close proximity to the following Mosques and Islamic Schools: Al-Iman Mosque, 24-30 Steinway Street, and Omar Ibn Al-Khattab School for Girls at 2555 Steinway Street.

Community Population 6 Square Miles
220,740 Compiled by the 2000 Census

Housing Complexes

1. Astoria Houses
2. Queensbridge Houses
3. Ravenswood Houses
4. Woodside Houses

Notable Areas/Points of Interest



Kebab Cafe: 25-02 Steinway Street

- o Business: Take-out restaurant.
- o Owner: Egyptian.
- o Information of note: Owned and operated by an Egyptian male. Local flyers and community events posted inside.
- o Ethnic Groups: Egyptians, Palestinians, Syrians, Moroccans and Lebanese



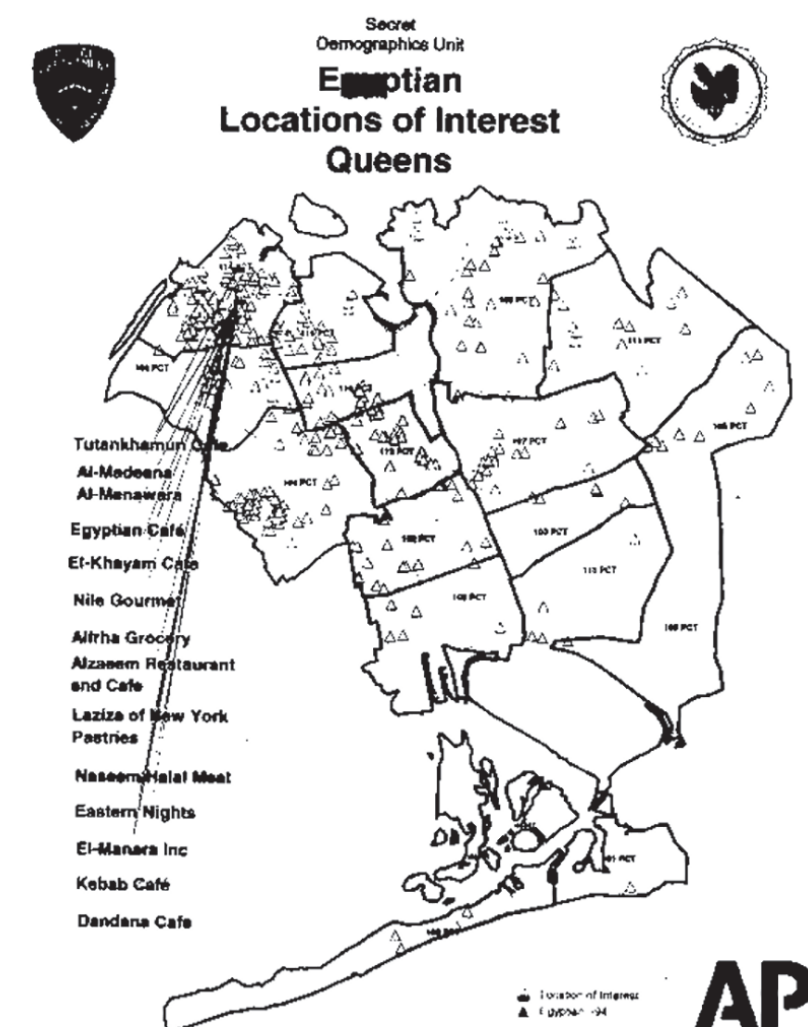
MoMA PS1

Malikah is organized by Elena Ketelsen González, Assistant Curator, MoMA PS1, with Janggo Mahmud, Public Programs and Community Engagement Fellow, MoMA PS1, in collaboration with Rana Abdelhamid, Executive Director, Malikah.

Homeroom activations are supported by funding from the Mellon Foundation.



Established in 2020, Homeroom is a dedicated exhibition space that embodies MoMA PS1’s commitment to community-centered practices with artists at the core. The program serves as a platform for activations by partners and collaborators, who author each presentation to amplify the work of artists affiliated with their respective organizations. Published on the occasion of *Malikah* (May 4–October 9, 2023), this zine accompanies the collective’s intergenerational storytelling project in Homeroom, concluding their eight-month residency at MoMA PS1.



Join the Malikah movement today!



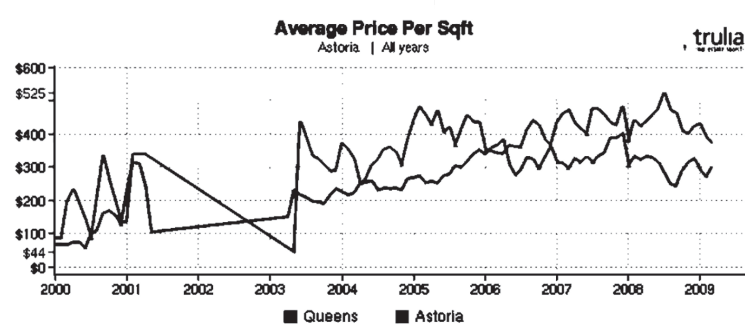
Masjid Al-Iman

Al-Iman translates to "the faith" in Arabic. This mosque is one of Astoria's largest Muslim houses of worship and will soon host a school. During Fridays on Steinway Street, several hundred men leave work and make their way to the jammed mosque to pray with their fellow Muslims. After 9/11, the mosque became a sanctuary for Muslims on Steinway, but it also became a site of police surveillance.



Established: 1988
Location: 24-30 Steinway Street, Astoria, NY 11103

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Masjid Dar Al-Dawah

Dar Al-Dawah translates into "home of invitation to God." This mosque is significant to the North African community for housing many social, spiritual, and educational programs, including girl scouts meetings, as well as karate, Arabic, and Quran classes. This mosque has hosted community gatherings in the happiest of times and in times of mourning. Many young people spend several hours here on weekends and during Ramadan.



Established: 2002
Location: 35-13 23rd Ave, Astoria, NY 11105



Little Morocco

Little Morocco is a Moroccan-owned restaurant on Steinway Street that serves primarily Moroccan dishes. It is known for its Friday couscous special, which many North Africans are accustomed to eating as a celebratory meal occasion after they are done with Friday prayer.

Established: 2006
Location: 24-39 Steinway St, Queens, NY 11103



Masjid El-Ber

As one of the oldest and most iconic mosques in Astoria, Masjid El-Ber serves as many people's first connection to the Muslim community in NYC. It also hosted the first Arabic school in Astoria.

Established: 1980
Location: 3605 30th St, Astoria, NY 11106



Mombar

Mombar is a restaurant run by Chef Moustafa El Sayed known for its iconic artwork and stunning exterior. It took Chef Moustafa seven years to complete the artwork on its door. Inside, there is a range of his work that extends from chairs, sculptures, and paintings to the ceiling and floor tiles. Every part of the experience at Mombar, from the music to the food, is a testament to Chef Mostafa's brilliant artistic exploration.



Established: 2000
Location: 25-22 Steinway St, Queens, NY 11103



Islam Fashion

Islam Fashion is the first Muslim clothing store for the North African community in Astoria. It has carried hijabs and long dresses long since it was almost impossible to locate these items in NYC. The store allows many women to find the clothes that feel authentic to themselves and their traditions.

Established: 1996
Location: 25-31 Steinway St, Queens, NY 11103

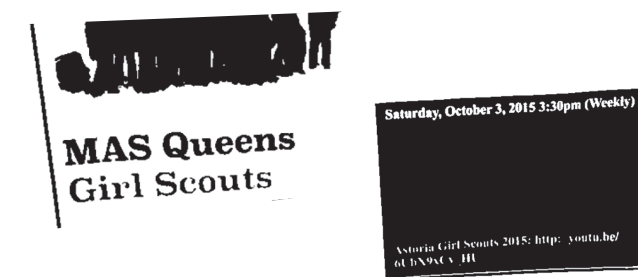


EGYPTIAN COFFEE SHOP قهوة ليالى الحامية WOOD & LOUNG

Mahmoud's Corner

Mahmoud's Corner is regarded as one of the first halal carts to serve New Yorkers. Chef Mahmoud immigrated to New York from Egypt in the early 1980s and has been serving beloved halal bites in Astoria for decades.

Established: 1983
Location: 32-90 34th Ave, Queens, NY 11103



Kabab Cafe

Kabab Cafe is the oldest restaurant in the community. It specializes in Egyptian cuisine and is run by Chef Ali El Sayed, a friendly and eccentric Egyptian chef who will tell customers everything about the history of Egypt and its food if they let him. It's a pretty small restaurant, but it's also filled with art, paintings, and old photographs.

Established: 1989
Location: 25-12 Steinway St, Queens, NY 11103

