

ARAB CHRISTIAN IDENTITY IN THE UNITED STATES

by

Randa A. Kayyali
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Fairfax, VA

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DEDICATION

For MOM,

who always signs off her letters, postcards and emails in capital letters and should.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Arab American Christian	AAC
American Federation of Ramallah-Palestine	AFRP
American Lebanese League	ALL
American Lebanese Syrian Associated Charities	ALSAC
American Task Force for Lebanon	ATFL
American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee	ADC
Arab American Institute.....	AAI
Arab-American University Graduates	AAUG
Council on American-Islamic Relations	CAIR
Critical Race Theory	CRT
Cultural Studies	CS
District of Columbia	DC
Detroit Arab American Study	DAAS
Department of Homeland Security	DHS
Institute of Arab American Affairs	IAAA
Middle East and North Africa.....	MENA
National Association of Arab Americans	NAAA
Office of the Director of National Intelligence.....	DNI
Office of Management and Budget	OMB
Office of Personnel Management	OPM
Roman Catholic	RC
Roman Catholic Church.....	RCC
Racial Formation Theory	RFT
United States of America	US
U.S. Census Bureau	CB

ABSTRACT

ARAB CHRISTIAN IDENTITY IN THE UNITED STATES

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Dissertation Director: Dr. Peter Mandaville

Christians from the Middle East and North Africa occupy a particular racial-ethnic-religious nexus in the US post-9/11: classified as white by race, sometimes Arab or Middle Eastern or North African by ethnicity and Eastern Christians by religion, but often conflated with Islamic culture and assumed to be Muslim. This study finds that Arab American Christians are deeply divided over the white racial category – some lay a claim to whiteness, some consider themselves persons of color and yet others are ambivalent. The contours of race and ethnicity change over time but the U.S. state remains hegemonic in its racial classification of Arab Americans, reclassifying those who answer Arab or Middle Eastern or country ancestries such as Lebanese or Palestinian on the Census form to the white population statistics. Secular and sectarian differences combine with national origins and political positions to create microspaces that fuel alternative self-identifications. Arab Christians in the Washington DC metro area, the focus of this study, reported high levels of mis-attributed religious affiliations as

Muslims, which reflects conceptual confluences of Arab and Muslim in state policies and in the media. Using ethnographic research methods, interviews, oral histories and archival work, this dissertation demonstrates that Arab American Christian identity is inextricably caught up in a broader politics and ideologies surrounding race, ethnicity/nation in a contemporary moment.

INTRODUCTION

This research is about the making of Arab American racial and ethnic classifications. It is also about the role of religion --- religious associations, ideologies and identities --- in the U.S. post 9/11. The intersection of these themes provides the focus for the dissertation. The analysis centers on the constructions of race, culture and power that take into account dominant or hegemonic ideologies that play a leading role in society. The main question posed is: *why are Arab American Christians (AACs) divided over their racial, ethnic and religious identifications?* Since the dominant ideology is that whiteness conveys privilege and status at the top of the racial hierarchies, it may at first glance seem surprising that AACs are not fully behind US state classifications that define them as white. Alternative narratives of multiculturalism and ethnic pride serve to counter the dominant discourses and bolster non-racial identities such as Arab, Middle Eastern and countries of origin in lieu of racial descriptors. Building on Gramscian ideological hegemony, critical race and racial formation theories, I argue that becoming and continuing to be racially ascribed as white is neither wholly consented to nor wholly challenged by AACs. In fact, AACs are *unable* to counter the state's hegemonic structures of race, due to three factors: (1) generational differences in attitudes towards whiteness, the value of multiculturalism and "a language of assimilation" that divide AACs into opposing positions on the race question roughly along age lines, (2) fractions

and divisions based on sect, national origin and politics towards the homeland creating *microspaces* of identities that mark divergences and ethno-sectarian differences that preclude a unified stance on an alternative identifier, and (3) a conflated Arab-Islamic cultural ascription within the US polity that leaves AACs marginalized by the clash of civilizations rhetoric - not Muslim by religion and yet subject to the negative discourses on Islamic cultures and heritage.

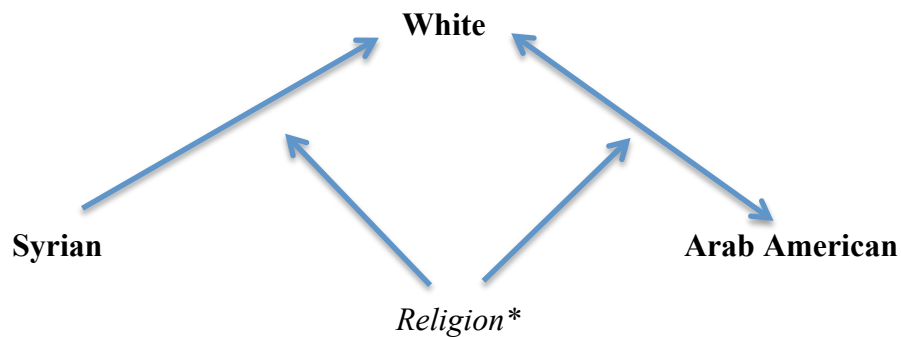
My approach expands the parameters of knowledge about the role of religion in the discourses and processes of racial formation. I find that becoming and continuing to be racially ascribed as white is not a unitary, unidirectional process. Attachments with whiteness shifted over time according to socio-political circumstances and today there are many counter narratives that are articulated by younger AACs and older activists who actively question the applicability and validity of Arab whiteness in the contemporary moment. I conclude that in the face of their inability to modify the official racial classification, many AACs employ alternative strategies to self-identify with ethnic Arab and/or city or country of origin identifications on official forms. These alternative identifications may explicitly or implicitly tag specific Christian sectarian identifications that are guided by transnational religious institutions – in this case, the churches based in the Middle East - that mold diasporic ethno-religious identities that divide rather than unify AACs as one identity.

Prejudice against Muslims and the hegemonic discourses on Islam in the US act to implicate Arab Christians in a form of collateral discrimination and yet further silences AACs because they are not the main targets of the bias against Arabs/Muslims. My

research points to the importance of religion in the discourses on ethnic and racial formations and in this dissertation I call for a more holistic approach to the study of identities that are consumed under a “white” racial rubric that is undifferentiated.

Why study religion as part of racial formation?

If religious and sectarian identifications are to be considered as an important analytic unit for the study of racial (and other) identity formations, then space must be open for exploring how religion is a factor in the conditions of hegemony. In studying Arab Americans, we find dialectical transformations of racial constructions when religion is inserted into the analyses. In this research the inclusion of religion and sectarianism added to the understandings of the evolution and devolution of Arab Americans racially, as shown in the model below:



*“Religion” here includes religious affiliations as well as secularism and sectarian political ideologies

Figure 1 Inserting religious affiliations into racial formations

Inserting religion broadly defined into analyses of racial formations allows the scholar and reader to see (1) the contribution of religious identities into the racialization

of the groups, (2) the location of ambiguities about race, and (3) the conflict and oppositional tension of racial and ethnic identities based on religion, secularism and sectarian political ideologies.

Religious identity can play a pivotal role in the hegemonic cultural discourses that determine one's position in the community. These religious identities may be real or imagined. For AACs, *assumed* religion as Muslim is a key factor in their racial ascriptions and, as such, must be considered in racial formations. In the post Cold War political and popular imaginary, the figure of the Muslim Other has ascended, fueling the ideological current of a "differentialist racism" – a racism based on cultural or civilizational difference (Semati 2010). Public policies and selective immigration laws have exerted a hegemonic and ideological control over a conflated Arab/Muslim grouping by targeting people from certain *countries* that are members of the Arab League and have Muslim-majority populations (Hagopian 2004). Thus, national belongings become inextricably tied to religious associations. The blurring of the ethnic, national and religious in a politics of identity makes the inclusion of religion in the resulting racializations imperative.

Theoretical backgrounds

This study contributes to the sociological and Cultural Studies (CS) literature of three distinct but overlapping fields: Gramsci's hegemonic theory, Critical Race Theory and Racial Formation Theory. The goal of this dissertation is to question, prod and test theoretical assumptions about power, race and identity in order to better understand how religion contributes to hegemonic ideological constructions in the US. By incorporating

the experiences of an unrecognized ethnic group into a combined analysis of US racial and religious identifications, I aim to provide a missing link in our understandings of the machinations and relationships between race and religion in the US today.

Antonio Gramsci developed Karl Marx's thinking about ideology to explain how the capitalist ruling classes continued to rule, despite manifest evidence of inequality. He suggests that hegemony is secured by a combination of coercion and consent because consent is required to maintain rule (Gramsci 1992; 2001). This conception of power and class offered a more complex analysis of ruling-class domination than older models of ideological domination and has been influential in CS since the 1970s. Like Stuart Hall (1986), I seek to expand Gramsci's notion of cultural hegemony from a class-based focus to *multiple* identities, including religion, race, ethnicity and national origin.

Gramscian analysis assumes the presence of a hegemonic agent (the state) and accompanying ideologies, such as Islamophobia. Gramsci's contention that ideology is assembled in discursive formation with currents, points of juncture and breaks in the complex interrelations of power between the state and civil society is a very useful theoretical tool for this study. Focus on the connections between culture and power help us to understand how dominant groups are able to organize their rule through consent when their political and economic power is not in the interest of the subordinated. It is not my contention that AACs are subordinated due to their economic class position. Rather, following Gramsci, I define a subordinated position as defined as much culturally as economically, and ideological hegemony as "the power to frame alternatives and contain opportunities, to win and shape consent so that the granting of legitimacy to the

dominant classes appears not only spontaneous but natural and normal” (Clarke et al. 1993, 38).

Building on Gramsci’s theories about hegemony, I ask how the modern state formed Arab American racial and ethnic categorizations with Arab American civil society institutions such as cultural organizations, churches, and political advocacy groups. In this dissertation I look at three points at which the US state is a hegemonic agent in the racial classifications of Arab Americans as “white”:

1. Judicial rulings on the race of the Syrians (1909-1915) and Arabs (1942-44)

2. Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and Office of Personnel

Management (OPM) definition of federally mandated racial categories (1977, revised 1997)

3. Decennial Censuses (1790-present)

State hegemony works most effectively through ideology and is often about what passes as “common-sense” --- the unquestioned backdrop of the workings of society that organizes groups, defines positions and shapes terrains of encounter and debate. The ruling groups incorporate the key interests of subordinated groups to secure their consent through what Gramsci calls “common-sense”: routine, flexible structures of everyday ideas and practices. Based on this “common-sense” model, how and when are Arab Americans implicated by pervasive ideologies such as Islamophobia and even by its reverse ideology, Islamophilia? I will ask how the state promotes the incorrect notion that Arabs are Muslims and Muslims are Arabs – a notion that casts AACs as Muslims or culturally Islamic.

The second body of literature that I engage in is from Critical Race Theory (CRT), which postulates that racial status is acquired through *legal* constructions and definitions. These legal theorists are part of critical whiteness studies that asks larger questions about the social and political constructions of race that name the agents (whites/elites) that shape and maintain the racial dynamics that prop up structural racism. I supplement CRT with critical whiteness studies that go beyond legal classifications to ask how these legal definitions of white are modified by religion.

I will start from a social constructionist position towards identity, which maintains that social, economic, and political forces *construct* race. To this end, I chose to engage with Racial Formation Theory (RFT) which defines racial formation as “the socio-historical process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed and destroyed” in certain contexts (Omi and Winant 1994, 55). Racial formation exists on micro and macro levels through the ascriptions of socially constructed meanings and qualities to characteristics, preferences, behaviors, attitudes and objects. These combine to create race consciousness and “racial common sense” that forms racial identities.

RFTists, Omi and Winant, built on Gramsci’s concept of hegemony and the role of consent in securing the acquiescence of subordinated groups, and on CRT’s emphasis on the importance of legal categories and the state’s role in creating and framing racial categorizations. In social constructionist theory, race is the dominant social category and ethnicity tends to denote a secondary group formation process based on descent and culture – a concept that includes “such diverse factors as religion, language, “customs”, nationality and political identification” (Ibid. 15). Although Omi and Winant critique the

dominant “ethnicity paradigm” for being too focused on white ethnics, and not identifying ethnicity among blacks, Asians, Native Americans and Latin Americans, I will focus on a white ethnic group here, Arab Americans.¹ For an analysis of RFT, I will ask how Arab American racial formations have changed over time when religious identities (including secularism) and assumptions of religious affiliations are inserted. I will note when and how religious identities are expressed and ask if personal identity markers such as names, gold crosses and food choices are answers to perceived racial-religious formations.

Both CRT and RFT assume that racialization moves in a predictable trajectory – away from whiteness through engaging in nonwhite racial formations. In reality, however, race and ethnicity are not the only identities and are not clearly separated or distinguished from religious identities – I will argue that in fact they are mutually constructed and interrelated formations, thus critiquing the social constructivist paradigm. I argue here that religious affiliations with Islam, sectarian differences, secular political activities and ethno-national combinations transform racial constructions and create microspaces of identity. Along with Muslims, AACs experience some collateral discrimination and benefits from their marginal position on the outskirts of Arab/Muslim racial formations. The merging of Christian and Muslim Arab identities is not done by the AACs themselves but imposed on them by members of the American public and the media. As a result, all Arab Americans continue to occupy a marginal location that looks

¹ Omi and Winant recognized that there is discrimination *between* whites: “Whites can at times be victims of racism – by other whites or non-whites – as is the case with anti-Jewish and anti-Arab prejudice” (Omi and Winant 1994, 73).

in on the white center (Samhan 1999; Naber 2000; Majaj 2000; Gualtieri 2001). This work contributes to the literature in Racial and Ethnic Studies by moving religious/sectarian/secular identities and religious affiliations to a position of primacy in contemporary racial formations.

Methodological Approaches

I construct an argument based on interviews, fieldwork observations and historical research to examine the processes through which religious, race and ethnic identities intersect and are discursively produced. Living in the Washington DC metro area since 1998, I made connections and observations long before my research officially began. The choice to ground this study in a locale was deliberate and begins with acknowledging that every place has a different environment which effects life and social relations. For example, DC is very different from Detroit, which is the focus of many studies on Arab Americans. As the nation's capital where the federal government is the largest employer, there is a strong emphasis on the value of US citizenship and belonging; not surprisingly all of those interviewed were US citizens. For those working in the federal government or for contractors with the government, security clearance is sometimes an essential work credential. There is a heightened awareness of the intersections of foreign policy, the perceptions of loyalty and the representation of identity vis-à-vis other cities and places in the US.

For this study I have employed three methodological strategies: interviews, archival research and ethnography. For the interviews, I used two non-probability sampling strategies - snowball sampling and convenience sampling - to find subjects. In

snowball sampling, the researcher starts by identifying individuals who are relevant to the study, interviewing them and asking them to locate other useful subjects for the study. One informant leads to another, offering good introductions and connections for the next interview. Thus, the researcher delves into the social networks of the index cases. Aware of these dynamics, I chose to create many different entrances into the community through finding and reaching out to new index cases throughout the course of the project. Since social networks inevitably have power dynamics and social capital, my research used the convenience sampling method that gives credit to those who act as go-betweens by vouching for the researcher and encouraging others to be interviewed or at least supportive the project. My path was guided by two key informants or “stranger handlers” (Agar 1996) in particular who will remain anonymous. Although chain referrals drive both sampling methods, the researcher may correct or adjust the sample selection through choices. I deliberately kept the gender ratios roughly equal and was sure to include people of Lebanese, Syrian and Palestinian backgrounds as well as both secular and church-going AACs from Maronite, Melkite, Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Protestant backgrounds. Although nonprobability approaches ensure that this study is not representative of the population as a whole, it would be very difficult to execute a valid probability study of AACs.

For the historical research component, I explored the archives in the Faris and Yamna Naff collection at the National Museum of American History, which is a part of the Smithsonian Institution, but did not find a great deal on the history of the churches or on the religion of the Syrians and Lebanese, as they called themselves at the time. I

therefore sought out information on the early settlers through reading the early newspapers and community publications, collecting oral histories, searching records in the DC archives and in the library of the Orthodox Church. These archives are partially available online but are located in full at the Antiochian Village and Learning Center in Ligonier, PA, which I visited in summer of 2012. In addition, legal case rulings, a donated stash of many decades of the Orthodox Church publications, and the Census Bureau Archives were valuable sources on the official classifications on race in the first half of the twentieth-century.

Finally, I employed ethnography as method because first-hand experiences in the social and cultural settings of the informants are invaluable to understanding lived, discursive realities. Steeped in the critical approaches to ethnography (Marcus 1998; 1999), I became more aware of the constructed nature of texts, ideas and objects when I “wrote up” my ethnographic notes during and after social events, political activities, and church services. With the women of the church, I rolled baklava and chopped parsley for the tabbouli that was sold at the church food festivals. I talked with the men of the church over games of backgammon at the festivals. Throughout I was acutely aware of how my gender and background as a Palestinian Arab American played an active role in the textual and visual information I received. For example, I found that the Maronites clerics were hard to access --- the priest would not return my phone calls and even some of the Maronite congregants were suspicious of my credentials as a researcher of Palestinian heritage. I thus interviewed more secular than church-going Maronites. By recognizing the limits of representation, I acknowledge the politics of knowledge production and how

the scholar is involved in all phases of the research process.

Limitations of this Study

Due to the limitations on the scope of any dissertation, I cannot cover all Arab Christian groups. This dissertation omits Chaldeans, Assyrians, and Copts, among others. The table below pairs the various Christian identities with their countries of origin in the MENA region.

Table 1 Christian Religious Sects and National Origins

Religion	Associated MENA Countries
Greek and Antiochian Orthodox	Palestine, Israel, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Iran, Iraq & Kuwait
Melkite (Greek Catholic)	Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, Israel, Jordan, Egypt & Sudan
Maronite	Lebanon, Israel, Syria & Cyprus
Assyrian	Syria, Iraq, Iran, Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan & Oman
Syriac	Lebanon, Syria & Iraq
Chaldean	Iraq, Iran, Turkey, Jordan, Israel & Egypt
Coptic Orthodox	Mainly Egypt, Libya, & Sudan
Coptic Catholic	Egypt
Protestants & Roman Catholics	Throughout the region

As this table well illustrates, Arab Christians are not a monolithic group and the intersections of national and religious sectarian identity are too numerous to cover in any one qualitative study. Thus, I will focus on the Christians from Lebanon, Israel, Syria, Palestine and Jordan who reside in Washington DC, with an emphasis on the Orthodox and Melkite Churches in the US.

Case Study Selection

I selected AACs as the subject of my research for four reasons. First, Arab Americans are classified as white in federal mandates and yet many report feeling nonwhite – meaning that there is a possible clash between ascribed state identities and lived realities. Second, the US separation of church and state have meant that religion is often left as an unacknowledged factor in racial and ethnic classifications – once again, an interesting disconnect between ascribed state identities and lived realities. Third, I am interested in Arab Americans in general and wanted to write on the subject of Arab American identity. Fourth, while there has been much literature on Arab American Muslims post 9/11, there is a paucity of studies and qualitative data on AACs.

In the post 9/11 literature on Arab Americans, religion is explicitly referenced as a major factor in the racialization of Muslims *only* (Cainkar 2009; Jamal and Naber 2008; Naber 2009; Alsultany 2012). On an empirical level, this dissertation contributes to the literature through its focus on AAC racial identifications. In two quantitative studies, Christians were recorded as subjects when in comparison with Muslims. The largest of these was the 2003 Detroit Arab American Study (DAAS) which surveyed about 1,500 eligible adults (18+) in Wayne, Oakland and Macomb counties and posed a question drawn from the US Census: “What is your race? (Check all that apply); (1) White; (2) Black, African American or Negro; (3) American Indian or Alaska Native; (4) Asian; (5) Pacific Islander; (6) Other (specify)” (Detroit Arab American Study Team 2009). The authors of the survey found that over 90% chose (1) White or (6) Other. The DAAS authors concluded that there were two zones of people: in Zone 1 the 64% majority that

identified as white “were more likely to be Christians and to live in middle- and upper-middle class suburbs, interspersed among a white majority population” (Shryock and Lin 2009, 56). In Zone 2, the 33% of those surveyed identified as Other who were more likely to live in the heavily concentrated Muslim enclaves of Dearborn, Dearborn Heights and adjacent neighborhoods” (ibid.). Obviously the place of residence (and its socio-economic make-up) was significant for racial identities in Detroit but the authors found that religion was a significant factor - Arab Christians were reported to be more likely to identify as white at 73% than Arab Muslims at 50%.

In a much smaller study based on a mosque and a church in Texas, Jen’nan Ghazal Read (2008, 312–3) found that only a small number of Muslims (approximately 5 percent) felt that others perceive them as “white” whereas one-third of Christians reported that other people consider them “white.” Both of these studies, though not comparable in size or scope, concluded that (1) Muslims experienced more discrimination and marginalization than Christians, (2) Muslims were more likely to identify as Arab and (3) Muslims felt less white than Christians. The conclusions of these two studies point to a correlation between religion and race.

Chapter Synopses and Premises Tested

The three working paradigms on race and identity outlined above are tested through the case study of Arab Christian identity in the US. The first two chapters of this dissertation are based on the local DC community in the context of local and national ecclesiastical changes. The second two chapters spotlight racial, religious and ethnic formations in the contemporary period. The conclusion will pull together these chapters

with an engagement of theories into an analysis of how the overall findings contribute to our understandings of race in the US.

Chapter one centers on the assimilation processes that created a hybrid religious/racial/ethnic identity for the Arabic-speaking immigrants as white by race, Syrian by ethnicity/national origin, and Eastern Christians by religion. While CRT scholars have used the Syrians as an example of how the white race was legally constructed in the early twentieth-century, they simply write that religion was a side factor in their determination and quickly assert that the Syrian moniker referred to the province of Syria within the Ottoman Empire (“Bilaad As-Sham”) before moving onto an analysis of *racial* formations. My research asks how Syrian became the term of choice for the ethnic group in the early 1900s, consolidated from the town and village, Arab, Syro-Arab and Arabian appellations. In this chapter, I will ask what role the ethnic churches played at the transnational, national and local levels to bolster the ascription of a Syrian, Christian and white identity to the community. My findings suggest that Orthodox Church leaders were active agents in the legal and social constructions of the Arabic-speaking people before 1965 when the immigration quotas were removed. While CRT has accounted well for the racial changes that assume an assimilatory model for whites, the role of religion and sect has been omitted in whiteness studies. This chapter uses the case study of Syrians before 1965 to illustrate that this model is over-simplified and neglects to account for the complexities of interrelated identifications.

Chapter two focuses on the period of 1965-80 and the dawn of an Arab American identity as a moment that initiated the creation of multiple communities along multiple

national, political and religious lines. The influx of new immigrants after 1965 and pan-Arab ideologies created ethnic re-formations that was mostly *political* and related to US foreign policy and ongoing events in the Middle East. The politics of these changes was often based off of secular and sectarian divisions as well as competing nationalisms, creating three types of clusters of people and politics: (x) Orthodox, Arab and pro-Palestinian, (y) Lebanese, Maronite and right-wing/conservative/Republican and (z) secular, Arab, pro-Palestinian and left-wing/liberal/Democrat. This finding indicates that religious identifications (or non-identifications) played a pivotal role in creating the intra-group divisions and socio-political constructions of Arab Americans after 1967 – divisions that formed the battle lines that had a lasting impact on the composition and positions of Arab American and Lebanese American organizations. These divisions lead to a weakening of community identity and a lack of voice when the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) defined racial categories in 1977 in which “white” was defined as the people of Europe, the Middle East and North Africa.

In chapter three, I examine religion as a factor in both non-Arab views of Arab Americans and in the internal Arab American differentiations of identity. Building upon my own research, I find that most AACs in my study reported that they have been assumed to be Muslim. I suggest that origins in the MENA region is so intrinsically tied to Islam in the American imagination that some of the strains of Islamophobia impact AACs. In this chapter, I ask how national organizations headquartered in DC have differed on identity issues and how these have affected local lived realities and political outreach efforts by the White House and by national intelligence services. The centrality

of politics to AAC identities and churches after 1965 has divided those for and against Palestinian human rights and Arab identity. The Orthodox Churches tend to be more welcoming to Palestinians, but have Lebanese and Syrian members. Lebanese Maronites tend to more closely identify as Catholics and by country of origin or a regional “Middle Eastern” moniker whereas Syrian tend to self-identify by country and as Christians. Ethno-national, sectarian and generational identities mark differentiations that I call microspaces of identity because they are interior, small spaces that often not seen from outside the community. Visual cues such as a large crosses or familiar Biblical names do not override the pigeonholing of all Arabs as Muslims.

In this chapter, I call for RFT to include religion as central factor in the discursive formation of many types of identity – identities that include religious, sectarian and secular affiliations as well as ethnic and racial identities. While CRT theories focus on the state’s classifications of Arabs, racial classifications become a moot issue when no ancestry data is taken. However clash-of-civilizations ideologies form what Gramsci calls “common-sense” racial knowledge that in the US have molded ongoing hegemonic discourses on Islam, which make Eastern Christians little understood and positioned as straddling two cultures. On the ground, this tension has translated into many microspaces of identity that make it difficult to challenge state racial classifications, even if that was a desired goal.

In the final chapter, I pose the question about reactions to the CB’s white racial classification and ask what factors – age, national origin, religious sect, ethnic identities – are related to racial preferences and what understandings of “race” are among AACs. I

find that the younger cohort and older political activists expressed more reservations about white racial status, finding that their racial position is relative, often misunderstood and indescribable in the current racial structures. This latter group sees the ideological machinations at work and disputes the hegemony of the state in pigeonholing them as white. Through considering how the state re-classifies MENA peoples into the white box in the Census, I concur with Gramsci that the state and its racial classification system retain a hegemonic discursive position in Arab American racial classifications. However, even the CB conflates Arabs and Muslims in its outreach efforts, thus drawing a full circle between the socio-political lived realities and state-led racial classifications, which indicate that AACs are classed with MENA, Arab and Muslims by the state. This finding expands and applies Gramsci's theories on ideology to the intersections of AAC identifications.

In summary, this dissertation sheds light on the role of religion and religious institutions in racial and ethnic contestations, showing how constructions of identity have shifted over time, according to changing socio-political climates, particularly in the post 9/11 era. Frameworks of national interests, transnational racial paradigms and global events have contributed to the shaping of racial and ethnic identities for Arab Americans. This dissertation contributes to current theorizations in three significant ways:

- Race reversals are possible – younger Arab Americans feel less white than their older counterparts
- When religion, sect, and national origin are combined, microspaces of identity are formed

- Political ideologies about cultural-religious affiliations can play a major role in racial and ethnic formations of groups tangentially related to that religious group

This dissertation calls for the inclusion of actual and perceived religious and secular identifications as part and parcel of the matrixes of racial identifications.

CHAPTER 1: SYRIAN, WHITE AND EASTERN CHRISTIAN: 1895-1965

An 1895 *New York Times* article estimated that there were 150,000 “Syrians” in the US, and 10,000 in New York state alone (“Minister for Syrians: Christian Church to Be Filled by a Damascus Preacher” 1895). The first half of the article referred to “the Christians of Syria” who lived and worked in the “Syrian colony” located on the tip of Manhattan on Washington Street. The religious identity of these Syrians as Christians was central to the article, as the title indicates, but their exact sectarian affiliations were perceived as important information to the readers of the *New York Times*. The article continued, “nearly all of them are Christians, either Maronites or members of the Orthodox Church.” These religious identities were paired with Syrian ethnicity in the first half of the article but in the third paragraph they are referred to as “Syrian Arabs” and the colony as “the Arab quarter”, instead of the “Syrian Colony.” Although Christian by religion, this community was divided between Maronite and Orthodox sectarian affiliations, and name for the ethnic group and its enclave changed from Syrian to Syrian Arab to Arab within this short article. Throughout the period of 1895 to 1965, the religious, sectarian and ethno-national identifications of this group oscillated but the one constant after 1915 was that Syrian and Arabs were white by race according to legal classifications.

CRT theorists have laid the groundwork for understanding how the courts and legal actors (plaintiffs, lawyers, judges and rulings) played a critical role in how and why race acquired its current manifestations. The historical legacy of the rulings on Syrian racial ascriptions in the courts in the early twentieth-century is clear. Determined in 1915 to be fit for naturalization in racial prerequisite cases, today the peoples of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) are still classified as white. Historians and CRT scholars have examined the case study of the Syrians and their journey from “Asiatics” to legal acceptance as whites (Haney-López 1996; Gualtieri 2001; Gualtieri 2009a; Beydoun 2007; Beydoun 2012). However, Questions arose beyond race about how their whiteness interacted with social constructions of the Syrians.

Even though Gramsci did not write about race or racism, his writings are concerned with the modern state’s pivotal role in the construction of hegemony and on the periodization and historic specificity of domination/leadership and coercion/consent. Stuart Hall, a CS scholar, added that Gramsci’s view of the conflict between the state and civil society can be expanded to include “schooling, cultural organizations, family and sexual life, the patterns and modes of civil association, churches and religions, communal or organizational forms, ethnically specific institutions, and many other such sites play an absolutely vital role in giving, sustaining and reproducing different societies in a racially structured form” (Hall 1986, 26). I heed Hall’s call for expanding the parameters and understandings of civil society by focusing on a critical social institution in this context and era: churches.

This chapter investigates the period of early migration from the *Mashriq* – an Arabic term for “the East” – when Arab migration to the U.S. was mostly Christian and began to collectively identify under the banner of “Syrian.” I will ask three questions: (1) how Syrian was adopted as the “national” origin for the immigrants, (2) how they framed their ethnicity as not Asian, and not Ottoman/Turkish and as Caucasian and white, and (3) how religious identity as Eastern Christians became paired with Syrian, creating a “racial common-sense” that framed a racial consciousness which explained future certainties of whiteness.

The Orthodox Church’s role in determining official classifications

The choice of community label was political and strategic and distinctly in response to the hegemonic ideological discourses of the day. In Central and South America, the migrants from the Mashriq and their descendants were and are still called “Turcos”, meaning of Turkish origin. However, in the US, the *Mashriqi* migrants (people from the Mashriq) actively resisted and rejected Turkish and Ottoman identifications. The motives for this push derive from the hegemonic ideologies of the US state and immigration authorities. In official immigration records at the turn of the twentieth-century, migrants from the Mashriq were recorded as “Ottoman” or from “Turkey in Asia,” and sometimes from “Palestine” or “Syria” at the points of entry. Arriving from the lands under the control of the Ottoman Empire, the Mashriqi immigrants were often asked about their religion and their loyalty to the Ottoman Empire. The state wanted to re-assert its hegemonic position over its new subjects and asked the Mashriqi immigrants to again sign a pledge that they no longer had allegiance to the Ottoman Sultan or Empire

before becoming US citizens. Then, as now, politicians and immigration officials were concerned about incoming migrants' loyalties to empires and states that could undermine their loyalty to the US. When the Ottoman Empire became a wartime enemy before and during World War I, the urgency for the migrants to publicly proclaim their distance from all Ottoman and Turkish associations doubled.

In the immigration records in the late nineteenth-century, the Arabic-speaking immigrants were originally classified as from "Turkey in Asia" at their port of entry. In 1899, classifications as from "Syria" and "Palestine" were beginning to be used at ports of entry – a trend that continued as colonial mandates were created and established in ex-Ottoman lands (Kayyali 2006a, 46). The change in classifications attributed by federal agencies to this group is reflected in CB categories. Whereas in 1899, the US Census called the Mashriqis "Asiatic" and part of "Turkey in Asia," the 1910 and 1920 censuses listed Syria separately as a separate birthplace. Thus, "Syrian" became a recognized group within the population statistics of "foreign-born whites" in official US population counts (IPUMS 2011).

Although media articles and public discourses on race inevitably were a key factor in the Syrians becoming white, there were behind the scene machinations that involved the churches and religious identity. Letters indicate that the Eastern Churches took an active role in the matter of racial classification (Issa 1991). In 1909, the US Commissioner of Immigration wrote a directive to the whole of the immigration agency to put the naturalization of some groups whose "race" was possibly Asiatic on hold – a group that included Syrians. The US Syrian Orthodox Bishop Raphael wrote to the

various church leaders to garner their support. He wrote to Cardinal Gibbons, the Catholic Archbishop of Baltimore, to Stanley White, the Secretary of the Presbyterian Mission, and to Daniel Tuttle, the Episcopal Archbishop explaining to them that Syrians were not Asians and that the “the term ‘Asians’ in the Federal Law no. 2169 was meant to refer to the Chinese and the Japanese, it did not mean the Syrians” (Issa 1991, 74). Bishop Raphael used the term “Syrian” without reference to “Arab” here to ask for support from these Catholic, Presbyterian and Episcopal leaders based on their shared Christian identifications. The recipients of the Bishop’s letters responded by offering their assistance - Archbishop Tuttle even wrote a letter to his personal friend, Charles Nagel, the Secretary of Commerce seeking advice. Although I could not find if this ecumenical plea affected the Commissioner of Immigration’s directive, it is clear that Bishop Raphael strongly objected to the classification of Syrians as Asians and emphasized that the Syrians were Christians. By inference he asked for support based on being co-religionists, i.e. being Christian, and through this plea, he successfully secured the support of ecclesiastical leaders, including an Archbishop.

The State as Hegemonic Agent: The Racial Classifications of Syrians

The legal prerequisite cases acted to solidify the community in a defense under the name of “Syrian” and with the purpose of a white racial classification. Claiming whiteness was a tactical move by the community to not be classified as black or Asian. The challenge for the Syrians was to navigate a careful strategy *for* the only racial option that gave them citizenship rights amid the xenophobic discourses and state-led immigration laws through legal prerequisite cases in which the courts – and by extension the state - ruled on their

race. In 1909, the United Syrian Society brought forward evidence to secure the right to US citizenship. When the court found that George Dow, a Syrian, was not white, the Syrian Society for National Defense (SSND) launched a letter-writing campaign to “defend our [Syrian] historic, civil and social rights” (as quoted in Gualtieri 2009a, 71). The SSND Secretary appealed for money to support the Dow’s legal defense case which, he wrote, was “at the center of an attack on the Syrian honor” (ibid.). Historian Sarah Gualtieri wrote that their claims to whiteness were “framed explicitly against other racialized groups, namely blacks and Asians,” and aimed at securing white privileges, especially the rights to citizenship and voting (ibid., 72).

In the court cases there were traces of what one scholar has called a “Juridical Orientalism” which placed US citizenship in “diametric opposition to immigrants from the ‘Arab-Muslim’ world during the Naturalization Era” (1790-1952) (Beydoun 2013). As such, the Syrians had to prove that they stood on the US citizenship side of the structural binary to be classified as white – and this meant that they had to over-emphasize their Christian heritage and de-emphasize their Arab roots. This is how the Christian + Syrian pairing began – as a strategy to gain white racial classification.

The Syrians – as they called themselves – were conscious of the fact that aligning with Muslims would not help their bid for whiteness in the courts. At first they played up their Christianity as not being Mongolian or Asiatic. In 1909 California court hearing the defendant, George Shishim is reported to have countered the claim that Syrians were from the Mongolian race with the statement, “[I]f I am a Mongolian, then so was Jesus, because we came from the same land” (Haiek 2010, 28; Beydoun 2012). This claim that

Jesus was the same race as the people from the “Holy Land” was again echoed in the Shahid case (Ex Parte Shahid (205 F. 812)) in which the judge denied him naturalization and found the defendants’ arguments that his origins “from the very cradle of the Jewish and Christian religions... are of the emotional *ad captandum* order, that have no place in the judicial interpretation of a statute.” The judge determined that the Syrians are of mixed “blood” (Jewish, Turkish, Greek, Egyptian, Abyssinian, and Sudanese). Although there had been “European habitancy and descent”, the “Semitic conquest in the shape of the Arabian Mahometan eruption, then again overlaid by the Mongolian and Turkish conquests...” became the basis for the denial of his application. Nativity and descent from lands that had been conquered by Arabs and included a majority of Muslims was brought up repeatedly in the court cases by the judges. The judges’ focus on racial ascriptions, and origins or proximity to Europe underscore that there were *civilizational* binaries drawn between the US citizens/European origins/whiteness and Eastern/Muslim/non-European origins.

The Syrians themselves well understood this binary. A book published in the middle of the Dow case, *The Origin of the Modern Syrian* by Kalil A. Bishara (New York: al-Hoda Publishing House, 1914) aimed to present evidence on the racial identity of the modern Syrian: specifically to prove Syrians were of Caucasian and not Mongolian origin. In the English language version, Bishara left out the name of the Prophet Muhammad as evidence that they were Semitic and therefore Caucasian. However, in the Arabic version, Muhammad was included. Why? Gualtieri proposes that “like others

before him, Bishara stressed the Syrian connections to the Holy Land, Christianity, and ‘Western’ civilization” (Gualtieri 2009a, 73).

While the emphasis lay on being Christian in the Syrian bid for whiteness, the Eastern Christian-ness of the applicants for naturalization stumped the courts and judges. The defendants’ sectarian identities were mentioned in some of the cases. Ellis was referred to as “a Maronite”; Shahid was described as “a Christian”; in the 1914 Dow, the judge said, “He is a Maronite- a Christian” but ultimately determined that religion was not the issue – “the test imposed by Congress is not a religious one.” (In the 1915 Dow ruling that finally overturned the lower courts’ denial of most Syrian naturalization cases, no mention of the defendant’s religion was made.) The appellation “Maronite” clearly needed to be qualified with “a Christian” to be understood by the court stenographers and future readers of the rulings. Eastern Christianity, and Maronite identity in particular, was little understood and discussion about their exact sect was avoided by simply stating that religion was Christian.

The distinctions made by the judges between Syrians and Arabs, and the link they made between Christians and Syrians on the one hand and Arabs and Muslims on the other hand was highlighted by the re-emergence of racial classification in the courts in 1942 and 1944. In the first of these cases (re: Ahmed Hassan 48 F. Supp 843) the judge determined that the petitioner for US citizenship “is an Arab and that Arabs are not white persons within the meaning of the act.” As Yemeni Arab, his application for citizenship was denied. In the second case (ex parte Mohriez 54 F. Supp 94), Mohamed Mohriez was described as “an Arab born in Badan, Arabia” – rather than suffering the fate of Ahmed

Hassan, the judge in this case affirmed another judge's opinion that "the Arab passes muster as a white person" because Arab people were one of the chief channels of the transmission of knowledge between the ancient Greek traditions and the Renaissance. It is not a coincidence that both defendants were not covered by the earlier Syrian determinations of whiteness because they were Arab and Muslim as well as from Yemen and Saudi Arabia which were further from Europe than the Mashriq. Ultimately, however, Mohriez - an Arab Muslim - was determined to be white.

CRT scholars have covered the Syrian legal prerequisite cases and this era well (Haney-López 1996; Gualtieri 2001; Gualtieri 2004a; Gualtieri 2009a; Gualtieri 2009b; Beydoun 2007; Beydoun 2013). What was obliquely referred to as religion and how the Syrians were framed as Christian and then determined to be white. Then how the two Saudi and Yemen were framed as Arab and Muslim then determined to be white, Beydoun argued because it was in US national interests (Beydoun 2013). This angle adds to understandings of racial formations and how names – Syrians and Arabs – carry hidden religious identities.

There was little internal dissent over the white racial category but the community differed on the relevance of the Syrian moniker. In the 1920s, Lebanese began to be used as an identity by some within the community. Many of those who referred to themselves as "Lebanese" were Maronite but the Maronite community was divided over the political role of the Church. Some of the US-based identifications often explicitly referenced a particularism and politics towards the Syrian revolt and other the events in Lebanon and Syria (Bailony 2013). Na'um Mozarkil, the influential owner and editor of *al-Huda*

newspaper held a minority position in the Maronite community: pro-clerical, “Lebanese” nationalist that advocated for French imperial power over Lebanon, For Mozarkil, “Lebanese” was tied to a diasporic Maronite identity that was, in turn, tied to the Maronite Church in Lebanon (Fahrenthold 2013). Some Maronites preferred to identify as Syrians, such as Naum Mozarkil’s brother, Sallum because they were critical of the Maronite Church’s political stances and involvement. The Orthodox held a gamut of positions on the politics of Syria and Lebanon but tended to identify as Syrians. Despite these divides, the court cases posed an external threat and an imperative to stand united and behind *one* name. The name chosen was Syrian and it was coupled with a Christian – oftentimes Eastern Christian – identity.

Emigration Stories

On the local level in DC, there were no naturalization cases that were disputed but there were many stories of departure that featured anti-Ottoman and anti-Turkish narratives that served to socially construct and underline a Syrian Christian identity in contrast to its opposite, an Ottoman Muslim identity. The emigrants from the Ottoman Empire left harsh economic conditions where poverty and starvation was rampant, particularly on Mount Lebanon during World War I. The Ottoman administrators had begun to impose harsher taxation and conscription on Christian as well as Muslim men in 1909-1910, further strengthening the impetus for departure from home for the younger men (Kenny 2010, 27). Some contemporary historians call emigration narratives that feature Ottoman *religious* persecution a “myth, as it were, developed originally by some of the newcomers themselves, particularly those of Maronite background” (Khater 2001,

49). Whether these were myths or not, I don't know, but I heard many stories of Ottoman brutality and inhumanity in which emigrants left due to impending military conscription or for financial reasons due to the pervasive poverty and lack of educational opportunities.

These narratives had been passed down through generations. In one family, their grandfather left because he had seen an Ottoman soldier molesting a young Christian girl and hit the soldier to protect her; he was told by his parents to leave the country to avoid the Ottoman army's retribution --- escape through emigration was his only safe option. In another family, the grandson and granddaughter hung a framed photo on the hallway wall of their *tata* (grandmother) sitting in a chair with her hands in her lap. At least one of their tata's hands had been tattooed with crosses, which indicated her Christian identity, and other shapes "to fool ignorant kidnappers into thinking this was a meaningless design" (email communication 04/18/12). Below is a photo of Khouriya Debey Saloom who was the wife of the Orthodox priest at St. George's Syrian Orthodox Church. You will note the tattoos on her left hand..



Figure 2 Tattooed hand
From the collection of Elias N. Souri

One woman in her eighties said that her parents left their village near Damascus because they were “very, very poor and they did not have the luxury of going to school or doing things like that . . . they just felt that maybe if they came to this country they could make something of themselves and their family” (#115). Without education, the chances for upward mobility were minimal and the choice to migrate was based on an assessment to improve their financial lot. Another woman in her 90s recalled her parents’ emigration as more due to mischievousness:

My mother came in 1903, I think it was... and my father came afterwards. They were under Turkish rule where they lived. And he was kind of devilish and he would take hot stones and put it on the camel’s stomach and the camel would go nuts, you know – and all their wares would go all over the place, the Turks’ [wares]. So my grandmother - his mother, and father, wrote a letter to my uncle, who was his brother [and] who was here and they said take your brother over to the US because he’s getting into trouble and they’ll [inaudible] to kill him. So he sent the money and he brought him over here and he took care of him like a father would, you know. (#117)

These stories reinforce and reiterate traditional immigrant accounts in which ancestors left dire poverty and persecution to come to the US, where they succeeded and became wealthy. Underneath this narrative, for the Arabic-speaking immigrants, was a story of fleeing oppressive Ottoman rule because they were Christian in a Muslim-majority empire. The photos and emigration stories serve to justify the choice of Syrian in opposition to Ottoman, and by extension, Turkish and Muslim affiliations. Upon a closer reading, however, the stories ignore the prevalent anti-Ottoman sentiment and the political value of not being identified as Ottoman or Turkish or even Asian in the US at that time.

Syrian was the race, ethnicity and national origin that the people themselves used to describe their community. One of the key ways in which “Syrian” became the racial formation of choice was through the Orthodox Church. The descendants of Orthodox Syrian-Lebanese immigrants in DC reported that in their childhood they commonly used the term “Syrian” as a self-identification. They referred to their church and their families as “Syrian” in contrast to their Jewish, Italian, and Irish neighbors (See Leone 2007; Souri 2002). Beyond people “Syrian” was regularly used to describe foods, music and dress. Interviewees in their 70s, 80s and 90s from areas that are now in Lebanon described the bread in their lunch bags as schoolchildren as “Syrian bread” and their mother’s cooking as “Syrian foods” (in contrast with the dishes that were “American foods” or the “Italian food” of her neighbors). In an autobiography of Eli Abraham Busada, who moved to DC in 1919, after becoming a US citizen, recalled a meeting in 1932: “After I met the Smith family they asked my nationality. I told them I was Syrian”

(Marinaro 1982, 49). While Busada and others may or may not have seen themselves as “white” (there are no records of this), Syrian was their nationality and the way they possibly described themselves by race. This local history and the autobiography of Eli Busada backs up the claim that race and religion were discursively formed, and that identity is not static.

The Autobiography of Eli Abraham Busada

In the library at the Antiochian Village, I found a small, light blue unpublished biography of Eli Abraham Busada (1892-1986) that was compiled and edited by his granddaughter, Elizabeth Marinaro (1982). Eli was born in 1892 “in a village called Mohiatha, in the province of Rachia El-Wadie, then called Syria. Now known as Lebanon.” Upon arrival in the US in 1905 from the Ottoman Empire, Eli reported that he and his mother only spoke Arabic and identified as “Arabic-speaking.” Eli became a US citizen in 1913 and served in the military, which transferred him to Anacostia in DC in 1919 by which time he identified as an “American.”² He described his community in DC in religious and ethnic as well as linguistic terms *through* St. George’s Syrian Orthodox Church, which only used Arabic in its services and, in his words, had “a small *Syrian* community near the priest’s house on Florence Street” (my emphasis, 35). In 1932, he answered that he was “Syrian” when asked about his “nationality”, referring to the Syrian province of the Ottoman Empire although the village he was from was then actually located in the French mandate of Lebanon (ibid. 49). Eli continued to call himself Syrian

² Eli first moved to Worcester, Massachusetts and his autobiography is quoted in *Arab-American Faces and Voices: The Origins of an Immigrant Community* (Boosahda 2003).

even as others with a similar background updated their national identities to Lebanese in the 1940s when Lebanon gained independence. Eli travelled with the Eastern Federation of Syrian-Lebanese Speaking People on two trips in the 1950s.³ The first trip was to “to the ‘Old Country’” including Mohiatha, his hometown village where he felt a language barrier since he spoke an outdated dialect of Arabic. The second trip was to the “Holy Land” to visit the Tomb of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem, the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem and the Garden of Gethsemane (ibid. 61). These trips and the title of the organization itself indicate that there was a feeling of socio-cultural camaraderie between Lebanese, Syrian and Palestinian immigrants.

Back home in DC, Eli and his family identified as Orthodox and Arabic speaking through the 1960s. The family took road trips to the Syrian Orthodox Church Archdiocese conventions in Louisiana, San Francisco and Texas and where they ate “Syrian bread” and food; listened to “Arabic music” and watched belly dancers (ibid. 129). Eli does not mention the Church’s name change from Syrian Orthodox to the Antiochian Orthodox in his autobiography – rather, the family seamlessly continued to go to the church and attend church events, even as the church building moved from Florence Street to 16th St NW, uptown. Eli wrote that he was “disappointed” that the third generation began to identify with other Christian denominations as he realized that the Orthodox Church played a key role in fostering his grandchildren’s identification with their heritage. He wrote, “I had not expected them to leave our Orthodox Catholic

³ Though this is terminology used in the autobiography, the actual name of the organization was the Syrian and Lebanese American Federation of the Eastern States (Hagopian 1969).

Church” (ibid. 74), and he harbored “hard feelings” for thirteen years when his granddaughter was baptized as Roman Catholic.

In 1972, like other Syrians and Lebanese in the area, Eli and his wife sold their house in the District and moved to Maryland to be near his son. In that same decade, his identifications began to shift and expand. He told his granddaughter that he was “Lebanese” by nationality and attended conventions organized by the American Lebanese Syrian Associated Charities (ALSAC) as well as the National Association of Arab Americans (NAAA). Prior to the early 1970s, he had only been exposed to Christians from the Middle East, but in 1977, he attended his first Muslim wedding, which he described as “especially nice because it was so different” (ibid.157). The DC Syrian Christian community was expanding to include new immigrants from the Middle East --- Muslims as well as nationalities other than Syrians/Lebanese/Palestinians. Indeed, by the time that Eli Busada died in 1986, the term Arab American was popular in some circles although Eli does not explicitly self-identify as Arab in the autobiography. During his lifetime, however, Eli identified as Arabic-speaking, Syrian, American, Orthodox Christian, Lebanese and possibly Syrian-Lebanese.

The example of Eli Abraham Busada illustrates well one of the main purposes of this research: that identifications of Arab Americans shifted and changed over time, adopting new labels configurations and combinations. The earliest immigrants from the Mashriq identified not as Turks, but by village/town/city of origin and as Arabic-speakers. The location of their places of origin in the Syrian province of the Ottoman Empire gave rise to settling on Syrian as an ethnic group identifier and by religion. *Rum*,

meaning Greek or Byzantine Orthodox Christians in Arabic, became Syrian Orthodox in the US in English and though church remained an important socio-cultural institution as well as a religious institution, sometimes after a few generations in the US some of the descendants of immigrants became Roman Catholics or Protestants.

Religious Composition of the Immigrants

Religion was not recorded and so estimates of the religious breakdowns of the Syrian migrants are highly problematic. Alixa Naff estimated that as much as 95 per cent of the immigrants from Syria were Christian before World War II while Philip Kayal (1973, 409) calculated that nearly 90 per cent of all-Arabic speaking immigrants arriving in the U.S. before 1924 were Syrian Christians from Mount Lebanon. According to these historians, the percentage of the U.S. immigrants can therefore be assumed to hover at 90 percent Christian, with a small minority of Druze and Sunni Muslims.⁴ As a result of the Ottoman millet system, the immigrants from the Mashriq broadly identified as Christian and more specifically, by sect.

“Syria” was actually a 50,000 sq. mile *province* in the Ottoman Empire known in Arabic as *Bilad as-Sham* (Greater Syria) that included “the Alexandretta District in present-day Turkey, all of present-day Syria, all of present-day Lebanon, all of Palestine (present-day Israel, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip) and part of Jordan” (Hooglund 1987, 3–4). Most of the “Syrian” migrants before World War II were from the *vilayat* of

⁴ However, the proportion of Muslim emigrants from the whole of the Ottoman Empire, including Eastern Anatolia, was higher. According to Kemal Karpat (1985, 183), Muslims constituted 15 to 20 per cent of the total emigration. If one juxtaposes these figures, two possible conclusions can be made: either the Muslim emigrants were mostly Turkish-speaking, or a larger proportion of Christian Ottoman emigrants came to the US than to other countries in the New World or Africa.

Beirut as well as towns and villages surrounding Mount Lebanon (Masters 2001; Makdisi 2000).

In some areas of the country, such as in New York City and Detroit, Muslims, Druze and Christians lived in proximity to one another in the same city. In contrast, have only found traces of the existence of Arabic-speaking Christians in DC – mostly Orthodox – before 1945. Although the Maronites established a seminary in Washington DC in 1961 and the Melkites a church in 1972, only the Orthodox had institutions in the District before 1945. This was not reflective of the national sectarian composition. On a national level, the Orthodox were almost equivalent in numbers to Maronites but Melkites only had 21 churches, as the table below indicates.

Table Statistics of the sectarian breakdowns of churches in the US in 1920

Sect Name	Numbers of		
	Members	Churches	Pastors/Priests
Maronite	90,000	37	46
Orthodox	85,000	30	32
Melkite	10,000	21	23
Protestant	5,000	3	3
Total	190,000	91	104

Source: Philip Hitti 2005[1924], 104-5

Syrian Protestants

Hitti reports that there were only three Protestant Syrian churches --- two Presbyterian churches in Cleveland and St. Louis, as well as the Trinity Church in New York. Most Syrian Protestants probably did not attend churches that were ethnically

defined as Syrian or Arab in orientation (Hitti 2005, 111–112). The dispersion of Syrians into non-ethnically tagged churches made it difficult for Hitti, and for scholars and statisticians after him, to count the number of Syrian Protestants and Roman Catholics with much accuracy. Indeed, it is assumed that without living in ethnic neighborhoods and without ethnic institutions, such as churches, many of the early families have lost much of their identification with their heritage. In both these and the Eastern Churches – Maronite, Orthodox and Melkite alike – the dominant ideology of assimilation served to dilute the ethnic and linguistic components of the church and its congregations.

Maronites and Melkites

Though some churches continued to practice Eastern Christian traditions, the *rum catholique* (literally Orthodox Catholics in English but translated as Greek Catholics, colloquially known as Melkites) and the *maron* (Maronites) became Roman Catholics in the US before the 1960s. This was because the Maronites and Melkites fell under the jurisdiction of the Roman Catholic Church (RCC), which had its own hierarchies and religious discourses. The U.S. Catholic hierarchy had the blessings of the Vatican and the Pope in Rome to create uniformity in the “American Catholic Church” and they did so. The RCC hierarchs in the US promoted Western or Latin Rites and suppressed other ethnic traditions, such as Syriac in the liturgy or the ancient Byzantine rites of the Eastern Catholics.

Rather than founding their own churches, many of the Melkite and Maronite immigrants joined Latin-Rite RCC or were members of the Eastern Catholic churches that willingly became “Latinized” (Kayal and Kayal 1975, 149; Macke 1993; Kayal

1973). Eastern Christian symbols such as icons, bearded clergy, traditional liturgical garments, matins and vespers were eliminated or downplayed. As one historian of American Eastern Catholics wrote,

Anything unfamiliar to Western Christians was downplayed or eliminated. Icons were replaced with statues and Stations of the Cross. Bearded clergy shaved to look more American and adapted their vestments to Western patterns. Servers were dressed in cassocks and surplices instead of their proper liturgical garments. Choir members donned robes like their Methodist neighbors. Parishes replaced liturgical services like matins and vespers with Western devotions, such as novenas or the recitation of the rosary. As new churches were built, they were constructed on purely American (that is, Western) lines. (Saato 2007, 88)

The 1930s-50s were therefore characterized by an “Americanization” of Eastern Catholic customs and traditions. The first U.S.-born Melkite priest explained in 1951, “They [Melkites] wanted to be more ‘American’ in all aspects of the word... Some unfortunately, overzealous in their good intentions, confused the word ‘Americanization’ with ‘Latinization’” (Maloof 1951, 238). By 1965, the lack of distinctive Eastern traditions in the churches affected the identifications of the early immigrants and their descendants who tended to mostly self-identify as American by nationality, RCC by religion and I would add white by race. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, both the Melkites and Maronites were each able to establish a church parish in metro DC area where they could worship with their Greek and Syriac rites.

Orthodox

The Orthodox, however, managed to retain some of their Eastern customs and identity as Eastern Christians until (and after) 1965. This was mostly due to the historical development of Orthodoxy and Syrian Orthodoxy in particular in the US. In 1895, a

“Syro-Arab” mission was formed by the Synod of Russia, which appointed Archimandrite Raphael “a native of Damascus, in Syria... to the Church of New-York for the Arabians, emigrants from Syria, who live in America” (“Minister for Syrians: Christian Church to Be Filled by a Damascus Preacher” 1895). The Bishop of Alaska, Bishop Nicolas, replied to the Synod’s letter that he was in agreement with their decision: “I am happy that God has blessed this, my long desire, to give to the American Arabians a native Arab pastor!” In 1905, the “Syrian Arabic Diocese” of the Orthodox Church founded a “Syrian Arabic Magazine,” *Al-Kalimaat*, which was published in Arabic. This exchange of letters and the founding of the monthly magazine *Al-Kalimaat* displays that “Arabian” and “Arab” were used to describe people and language in the 1890s and early 1900s.

In 1895, the New York-based Syrian Benevolent Society requested that the Russian Orthodox Church send them an Arabic-speaking Orthodox priest. As a result, Father (Fr.) Raphael Hawaweeny was sent from the Orthodox Theological Seminary in Kazan, Russia, where he was the Arabic professor, to head the “Syro-Arab” mission (Garrett 1984). Raphael Hawaweeny’s appointment was part of Bishop Tikhon’s vision for the US Orthodox church in which “chiefs of the same nationality” governed each national or ethnic group – at the time, Russian, Serbian and Greek. Rather than trying to make the Orthodox Church heterogeneous or modeled on Russian Orthodoxy, Bishop Tikhon concluded, “their peculiarities in canonical order, the office ritual, and in parish life” between nationalities within the Orthodox Church “are dear to each, and altogether tolerable from a general Orthodox point of view” (Orthodox Church in America 2012).

The chiefs, or bishops (auxiliary or otherwise), were tasked with preserving the peculiarities of their national-ethnic churches and handling the massive influxes of immigrants who were Orthodox by birth. Under this rubric, the national-ethnic group of immigrants was described as (1) Arabic-speaking, (2) Syro/Syrian and (3) Arab.

Under Bishop Tikhon's guidance, a multi-ethnic Orthodoxy flourished and had 350 parishes by 1917. This was partially due to a 25,000 percent growth between 1906 and 1916 in adherents to Eastern Orthodoxy according to the US Census of Religious Bodies (as quoted in Stokoe and Kishkovsky 1995, 33). This drastic increase was mostly due to huge influx of Greeks and the establishment of Greek parishes, but Syrian Arab parishes did increase fourfold between 1905 and 1915; from 6 in 1905 to 24 in 1915. Clearly, the model of tolerance and even encouragement of ethnic churches within an Orthodox American immigrant church rubric suited the Syrians.

The identity of the Arabic-speaking Orthodox became more affiliated with "Syrian" after the death of Bishop Raphael in 1915. The Russi-Antacki split occurred and half of the church moved to be under the jurisdiction of the Patriarch of Antioch, which was located in Damascus. The "Russi" faction, based in Toledo, Ohio, fell behind Raphael's assistant and eventual successor who continued to support the Russian Orthodox Church. The "Antoki" or "Antacky" faction derived its authority from the Patriarch of Antioch instead of a US-based Orthodox hierarchy. This placed an emphasis on the ecclesiastical lineage and connections to an Arabic-speaking Mother Church in Damascus (The church had moved from Antioch to Damascus in 1531 AD due to an earthquake (Gabriel 1996, Appendix VII, ccxxx).) Although in Lebanon, Palestine and

Jordan, Orthodox Christians were under the jurisdiction of the Greek Orthodox church in Constantinople/Istanbul, when they moved to the US, they found the Greek Orthodox Church to be geared toward those with Greek ancestry, so they joined their co-ethnics and became *Syrian Antiochian* Orthodox in the US. This move indicates that church choice reflected a faith decision as it intersected with ethnic/cultural heritage even in the early twentieth-century. Religious and ethnic formations occurred in tandem.

The subsequent divisions in the Orthodox Church are summarized in the table below:

Table 2 Church Names and Bishops in the Russi-Antoki Split, 1915-1966

<u>Category</u>	<u>Russi (allied with the Russian Orthodox Church)</u>	<u>Antoki (allied with the Church of Antioch)</u>
1915-1935 Name of Bishop	Aftimos Ofeish	Victor Abu-Assaley
Name of Church	American Orthodox Catholic Church*	Syrian Orthodox Church
1936 Name of new Archbishops	Samuel David	Antony Bashir
Name of Successor - Archbishops (later called Metropolitans)	Michael Shaheen (1962)	Philip Saliba (1966)
Base of Operations	Toledo, Ohio	Brooklyn, New York, later Englewood, NJ
Name of church in 1966	Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese of Toledo, Ohio and Dependencies in North America	Syrian Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese in New York

*Shortened from The Holy Eastern Orthodox Catholic and Apostolic Church in North America

State Endorsements of Orthodox Religious Hierarchs

The state asserted its hegemony and preferences in the splits in the Syrian Orthodox Church. On June 2 1936, Bashir met with the US President, Franklin Delano Roosevelt at the White House with the Archbishop of Tyre and Sidon. A high-level official meeting acknowledged that the Antiochian See recognized Archbishop Bashir's legitimacy and created a vision of transnational ethnic, religious solidarity. In the White House diary, Archbishop Bashir was called the "Head of the Orthodox Syrian Church for North America", and when he again meet with FDR on February 18, 1937, he was recorded as "Archbishop of the Syrian Antiochean [sic] church of North America."⁵ As these entries indicate, the external recognition by US authorities enforced, or reinforced Archbishop Bashir's hegemonic position vis-à-vis the Russi faction but additionally implied a claim to being an ethnic and diaspora church, with connections to the Middle East. It was exactly these roots with Syria that made the Antiochian faction of greater interest to the US President. Here the translocating frames and US-Syrian relations were pivotal in creating power structures and hierarchies, which favored the faction with stronger ties to the Patriarchate in Antioch.

By the mid-1950s, the Russi-Antoki split had become a full-fledged New York-Toledo chasm. Both archdioceses lobbied heavily for the exclusive support of the See of Antioch as verification that *their* Archdiocese should be the only recognized Orthodox Church for the Syrians in the US. This division became even more contentious and divisive in the 1960s when the Toledo group waged lawsuits to gain control and

⁵ FDR Library online research tool (www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu).

ownership over specific churches, particularly over one in Canton, Ohio. Toledo was seen by New York to be “more ethnically and regionally defined ... a small and insular group” (Orthodox Wiki 2012) that catered specifically to immigrants from Rouchiya in the Beka’a Valley in Lebanon. New York was probably seen by Toledo as over-catering to broader American identifications.

The division among the members of the Antiochian Orthodox in the US lasted four decades, which Metropolitan Philip called “forty years of wandering in the wilderness of dissension” (Saliba 1975, 7). Archbishop Michael stepped down in 1976, when he signed and ratified an agreement at the Holy Synod that the two Archdioceses united to form one Archdiocese called “the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America.” In this new structure, Metropolitan Philip (of the New York faction) was called the “Primate” and later Metropolitan of the Antiochian Orthodox Church for the whole of the US (Gabriel 2012 Appendix 4.2.9).

Living in the District

In DC, like in other cities in the US, most of Arabic-speaking immigrants were poor, uneducated and illiterate or mostly illiterate, and either unskilled or semi-skilled in trades such as mechanics. When the first settlers arrived in DC in the early 1900s, the men (such as the Rizik brothers) pack peddled within the city or in nearby Virginia or Maryland countryside – sometimes sleeping in barns or fields. In the transition from a sojourner to a settler mode, the men, with the help of their wives and children, opened small family outfits. In 1908, there were 23 Syrian-owned businesses in DC – seven vendors of tobacco and fruits, six grocers, five vendors of fruits and confectionery, three

retailers of Oriental goods and laces, one barber and one restaurateur (Moses 2001, 41). Of the men whose history survives through oral histories that I collected, one opened a butcher's shop with a partner in Cherrydale, VA that was short-lived, while another had a dry goods store that sold clothes, costume jewelry, shoes, etc. Another family sold a shoe store and bought a grocery store in its stead. Others who had earned enough money from pack peddling, or had had enough of the itinerant lifestyle, turned to work as employees in restaurants or as tradesmen in the 1920s and 30s. Although historical scholarship has found that women worked as peddlers and were a valuable economic asset to families (Gualtieri 2004b), in DC Syrian women helped in family businesses and/or stayed at home, cooking, cleaning, taking care of the children and sometimes making items in their homes that could be sold.

The dispersal of the small number of Syrian residents throughout DC made it difficult to gather enough people to form a parish, but as early as 1908, "a small group of men organized themselves with the intent to gain the strength to further the cause of Orthodoxy in Washington DC and to obtain the services of a permanent priest for this small group of Lebanese and Syrian people" (Younes n.d., 1). The first church services were held in the parlors of homes and were occasionally administered by itinerant or visiting priests. One such priest, Father Dumaney, served 15-20 people on Sundays in the home of Mr. George Hillow for five months (December 1908-April 1909) before he moved onto a position in Texas (Younes n.d.). In these services, the priest's background was similar to his congregants – all the services were in Arabic and the worshippers and priests alike were from the Syrian province of the Ottoman Empire. The new church was

explicitly “Syrian” in its name and its congregants seemed to self-identify as Syrian Orthodox even if they attended other churches nearer to their homes and the Orthodox Church only on special holy days.

The institutionalization of the small D.C. Orthodox Syrian community was made more complete in 1912 when Bishop Raphael assigned a young deacon from Philadelphia, Reverend Job Salloom, to the nascent DC parish. Reverend Job was recently ordained and moved to DC with his wife, called a *khouriya* (priest’s wife). Rev. Job conducted services in a rented room on the third (and top) floor of a row house on Indiana Ave and 7th NW. In 1913, the DC congregation chose St. George as their patron saint and received their church charter. At that time there were only ten Syrian Orthodox parishes with resident pastors, making DC one of the top ten cities that pioneered the establishment of Syrian Orthodoxy in the US (Younes n.d., 1). According to the Diocesan Chronicle kept at the time, Bishop Raphael visited DC in January 1914 and “met the community and decided to found an Orthodox Society and build a church. He visited their houses and blessed them with holy water” (quoted in Issa 1991, 94).

There were no ethnic enclaves that had a concentrated group of Syrian grocery stores or commercial establishments. As a result, the community gathered at the church and home of the priest, Reverend Job Salloom and his wife Debey. The grandchildren recounted that the priest’s life was hard on their grandfather and particularly difficult for their grandmother, Khouriya Debey, who was expected to always welcome church members into their home, which was located at 1330 Maryland Ave NE. Some Syrian families lived in multi-generational households in Georgetown and some lived near the

priest's house on Florence St. N.E. between 11th. & 13th Streets (Marinaro 1982, 35; correspondence with Eli N. Sourì). One family moved to Lincoln Park in 1927 but was the only Syrian family in that area.

Women, including the *khouriya*, were not allowed to be priests or participate in the services but were expected to participate in church life in addition to their domestic duties of cooking and cleaning and taking care of children in the family home. In DC, there was a women's group called the Ladies' Myrrh Bearing Society and a Sunday school that was headed by Mrs. Bahia Scordos, established in the 1920s. The Syrian Girls' Club collected money and packed a box for orphans in New York City (original document from the Elias N. Sourì collection). This latter group met every week and elected (adult) officers – Helen Keart as President, Rose Amouri as Vice-President and Mary Salloom as Secretary-Treasurer (ibid.). As such, women fulfilled expected gender roles at home and bolstered their positions outside of the home through volunteering at the Sunday school or working for church-related charities.

In 1922, Reverend Salloom and his wife bought two frame houses on 8th St NW in their own names. Above the doorway joining the two houses a simple cross was placed that was the home of the “St. George Syrian Orthodox Church” in DC for 34 years (Deed in the collection of Elias N. Sourì). In 1936 Reverend Salloom died and the church building was bequeathed to the congregation in a quick claim deed. Once the ownership of the property was settled, the frame houses were torn down and a custom-built church was constructed in its place. Reverend Benjamin Hoffiz presided over the parish in the

new custom-built church building in downtown DC. Shortly thereafter, Rev. John Khoury became the resident pastor and during his term a choir was assembled.

Perhaps the 1936 brouhaha over the ownership of the church led the lay leaders to structure the church better. According to a document filed at the DC Archives, the St. George's Syrian Orthodox Church Society changed its by-laws on February 7, 1938 ("Certificate of Election of Trustees, St. George Syrian Orthodox Church Society" 1938). Charles Kogok attested that the document was in accordance with the records of the Church Society and that two men and one woman – Charles Kogok, Michael Asha and Bahia Constantine Scordos – were elected as the trustees of the church "until one or more successors are elected or removed from office by a two-third vote of the society's members in good standing" (ibid). As the church-owned property and responsibilities expanded, the financial contributions of the members were recorded and became more important for the functioning of the church. This is the moment – the 1938 document – that raised interest among many of the older members of Saints Peter and Paul Church. My discovery of this document led to much speculation by the priest and by the descendants of Charles Kogok (via his brother, Jack Kogok) and by a prominent lawyer-parish member, Albert Mokhiber. After much discussion, we decided that this document was "normal" for non-profit organizations at the time, simply naming the lay founders, and marking the start of the official recognition of St. George's in terms of DC bureaucracy.

The increasing organization and institutionalization of the church, greater financial resources in the community, and the growth of the congregation combined to

create a need, desire and ability to build a larger church. How the laity experienced this growth is not fully known but the church-affiliated clubs– the St. George’s Men’s Society, the Ladies’ Myrrh Bearing Society and the St. George Social Club continued.

However, there were internal Lebanese-Syrian divisions. From the 1930s-1950s, nation-wide many community organizations changed their names from “Syrian” to “Lebanese” or “Syro-Lebanese” as the term “Syrian” referred instead to *Bilad as-Sham* as the Ottoman Syrian province which no longer existed. In 1934, the Syrian American Federation of New England changed its name to the Syrian and Lebanese American Federation of the Eastern States (Hagopian 1969). Some of the older interviewees recalled the tension between the two identifications. One older woman said that as a young teenager, an adult member of her parish in Houston, Texas corrected her after she said she was Syrian. She recounted, “I remember that incident. One of the little old ladies [at church] tapped me on the shoulder and said honey, don’t use the word Syrian, use the word Lebanese” (#130). Although she didn’t question what that meant or why at the time, she now reasons that there are many reasons why the American-born no longer use Syrian and prefer Lebanese, pointing out that her family was from Lebanon but referred to themselves as Syrian “because it was part of the Ottoman province of Greater Syria.”

In 1941 before the US entered the war, George Kaley, the national chairman of the “Pilgrimage to Washington for Americans of Syrian Descent” called upon his fellow Syrians to “assert our Americanism” and through assembling large delegations to march in Washington, he wanted “to publicly assert our loyalty and love of for our country” and to publically say that “we, Americans of Syrian descent, appreciate this land of liberty

and are willing and anxious to WORK, FIGHT and even DIE, if need be, to protect and preserve these great United States of America” (as printed in the St. George Antiochian Orthodox Church 2011 Bazaar booklet, 24). World War II gave them that chance. The men left for the front. Their service is still remembered fondly by their ancestors – in one office I was shown black and white photographs of male relatives that had served in World War II and told proudly that this was the moment that they became truly American. The camaraderie and shared experiences on the home front boosted a sense of patriotism and national belonging. With men gone, some of the women of the parish began to work outside of the home, temporarily taking the jobs of military men. One woman recalled how she had worked in an office for the first time after she was called upon to fill a serviceman’s position while he was away at war – she said that doing that job was her patriotic duty. The surviving men and women came out of the World with an enhanced US patriotism and a stronger identity as Americans.

All of these organizations and developments in the local DC setting indicate that the Arabic-speaking community preferred to self-identify as Syrian or as Orthodox, often as both since many of the organizations were formed as part of the church. Although their official racial status was white – as CRT would note – RFT would better account for religious and ethnic/national identifications, which were inseparable for the Syrian Orthodox. However, I could find little information on Maronites in DC prior to the creation of the church in the late 1960s – perhaps this indicates that the CRTists are correct to exclusively focus on their white racial classifications.

Post World War II: Moving Uptown and to the Suburbs

In their desire for upward mobility and assimilation, the immigrant generation had not preserved its cultural heritage. By the end of World War II, the descendants of the early settlers “had only selectively retained the elements of their Syrian upbringing that accorded with their American perspectives” (Naff 1995, 76). Most of the community only spoke English, for the most part neglecting their village dialects of Arabic, as well as the more formal spoken and written Arabic. What remained of their culture were the Orthodox Church and the community that formed around that faith-based identity but that identity too had shifted over the years from Syrian to American. Before World War II, joint Orthodox initiatives led to gaining the same draft-exempt military status for Orthodox clergy as the Catholic, Jewish and Protestant clergymen. “EO” for “Eastern Orthodox” was created as a stamp on individual identification tags worn by servicemen in the Armed Services. When the US Senate recognized Eastern Orthodoxy as a major faith in all agencies and branches of the Federal government in 1957, the acceptance of Eastern Orthodox as a recognized group of Christians was celebrated (Orthodox Spirit, September 1957). The Orthodox had moved from being a minority group of Christians to being accepted as a mainstream Christian faith.

In the postwar years, government jobs attracted new people to the area at unprecedented levels. By 1950, the District's population reached 802,178 residents (Census 2002). The proportion of “whites” in relation to “blacks” changed in the following decade: in 1950, 64 percent of the DC population was “white” and in 1960, 45 percent of DC’s population was “white” (in comparison today it is about 29 percent)

(ibid). Many of those tabulated as “white”, including the Lebanese and Syrians, moved to the suburbs of Virginia and Maryland in the 1950s and 60s, where they were increasingly perceived as part of a broader, more multi-ethnic “white” racial group that broadly-speaking was middle-class (see Brodtkin 1998 for a discussion about how the Jews became white in the same period). Many still owned businesses located in the Capitol Hill area or Georgetown. For example, the Neams owned a grocery store that is now Marvelous Market on Wisconsin Ave in Georgetown or the Rizik Brothers, an upscale clothing and bridal boutique on Connecticut Ave NW. These businesses grew and many of the DC-based Syrians became wealthy and successful.

In the post World War II era, greater affluence afforded them the ability to move their residences out of the city and finance the building of a bigger church. In 1947, Reverend Father John Nicholas became the resident priest of St. George’s, then at 1009 8th St NE (near Gallaudet University). The small community on Florence Street had long ago disbanded and parishioners could no longer walk to church. There was a decision made to buy land and move St. George’s Syrian Orthodox Church of Washington DC uptown. Land was purchased at the corner of 16th and Webster St. NW --- a larger, more prestigious location that was on the same street as the White House, but still in the District. To finance the building of new church, St. George’s sold their 8th St. church and, for fifteen months in 1954 and 1955, St. George’s was without a church building.

Although churchless, the St. George’s parish was not without prestige. At the invitation of the National Cathedral, which falls under the auspices of the Episcopal Church, St. George’s held its services in the Cathedral’s Chapel of St. Joseph of

Arimathea. This was indeed a statement about the current state of the Syrian Orthodox Church. The National Cathedral is steeped in U.S. history – it was the location for President Theodore Roosevelt’s 1907 speech, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s last sermon, and the state funerals of many past US presidents. It is the second largest cathedral in the US and represents the (High) Church establishment and as such, is associated more with a White Anglo-Saxon Protestant identity than an ethnic Syrian one. If the EO stamp did not prove it already, the Syrian Orthodox were being accepted and even embraced as a Christian sect in the US. When the new 16th St. Church on December 4, 1955 was consecrated, the Bishop of the Episcopal Church attended and assisted the Metropolitan Archbishop Antony Bashir. The Syrian Orthodox Church in DC had *arrived* in socio-religious terms and Syrian Orthodoxy had become accepted by the powerful, mainstream white Episcopalians.

Conclusion

At the turn of the twentieth century, the Arabic-speaking immigrants wanted to avoid certain identifications– namely, Ottoman, Asian, Muslim – to counter hegemonic ideologies of anti-Ottoman US foreign policy, xenophobia towards Asians and other immigrant groups and a general anti-Muslim bias. When the Mashriqi’s racial classification threatened to put their citizenship in question, the Orthodox Church’s Archbishop employed the term Syrian exclusively and reached out to more powerful Christian religious leaders for support. Syrian became a strategic choice that was paired with Christian and later with white in the racial prerequisite cases.

Syrian become the dominant name for the community, at the local, national and transnational levels. On the local level in DC, the community worshipped at the Syrian Orthodox Church, volunteered with Syrian charities and socialized together at Syrian clubs. According to the writings of Angela Tehaan Leone (2007, 40), the term “Syrian” as an identification of a place of origin was used in DC until the 1950s. At the national level, the Arabic-speaking Orthodox church was called the Syrian Orthodox Church and its leaders called the community Syrian in correspondence about race. There were federations and associations of Syrian societies and charities such as Syrian Ladies’ Aid Society.

In this chapter, I indicated that although CRT and RFT account for many factors in the racialization process, religious elements are part of racial formations. An ecumenical Christian religion identity was mobilized as an associative strategy in the discourses on racial formations. The judge deliberately mentioned the defendants’ Eastern Christian identities and then dismissed them as irrelevant because race was ostensibly not judged by religion. However, this highlighted that in fact these Christian sects did veer away from the Protestant center considered most associated with whiteness. Racial and religious ideologies were at play during legal and social racial formations that took place in courts and communities across the US in the 1900s, 1910s and then again in the 1940s.

Both before and after the war, there was an active Syrian identity and community that revolved around the church, but no substantial ethnic enclave in DC. The lack of a Maronite or Melkite Church had perhaps contributed to the erosion of a unique Eastern

Christian identity in all but the Orthodox Church. After the war, the Syrian Orthodox Church moved and grew with the wealth of its congregants who self-identified as Americans and had served in the war. The common narrative of patriotism and service to the nation, and the later moves to the suburbs, allowed for a cementing of a white racial consciousness and identity, perhaps with Syrian or Lebanese roots. The presence and absence of the church at the local level therefore did not disrupt an assimilation process but did nurture an ethno-religious consciousness among the descendants of the first immigrants.

CHAPTER 2: IDEOLOGICAL SPLITS BETWEEN ARAB CHRISTIANS: 1965-80

Religion continued to play a crucial role in the creation of ethno-national groupings even as all peoples from the MENA region were considered racially white by the state. CRT theories provide little basis for understanding the ways in which Arab Americans were framed by socio-political constructions during this period but RFTs acknowledge fluidities and fractures both within and between and ethnic communities. Omi and Winant explicitly reference the neoconservative discourses and “the right’s rearticulation of the meaning of racial equality as a matter of individual rather than group or collective concern” (Omi and Winant 1994, 130). More pertinent for this period are socio-political analyses of how US foreign policy and popular cultural politics affected a white ethnic group in the US.

In this chapter, I ask how race and ethnicity are created and redefined in sectarian, ethnic and political terms, particularly in the major historical conjuncture, 1965-1980, before the major Arab American organizations were established and positions were institutionalized into their current configurations. In this truncated period, the ongoing events in the Middle East and US foreign policy positions on the MENA region created hegemonic ideologies that profoundly impacted the present-day associations and linkages. Religious and ethnic identities as well as political positions within US political discourses on race as well as hegemonic ideologies in the US towards the Middle East

became intertwined --- one could not be understood without the other. It is a Gordian Knot, to be sure, but there are linkages between ideology and ethnicity and religion. The combinations of the three factors caused three general trends in identifications:

- Orthodox - pro-Palestinian - Arab
- Maronite - Lebanese – conservative/Republican
- Arab – secular - pro-Palestinian - liberal/Democrat

Through research from Orthodox Church publications, oral histories and obituaries, I present an illustration of how profiles of identities were lived and how the local activism and articulations of identity interacted with national institutions..I conclude that the major divisions in the community were not Muslim-Christian, but based on the secular-religious and ethno-national sectarian divides between those who identified as Arab and those who identified by national origin, especially some of the Lebanese. Though less pronounced than this era, these divides stayed with the community and are present today in the identifications of churches and organizations so the interconnections made between 1965-1980 help contemporary cultural studies scholars better understand internal community divisions.

The 1970s witnessed the passing of the OMB legislation previously mentioned. This was a Gramscian moment in which the state re-asserted the cataloging of all peoples from the MENA region as white and continued its role as a kind of hegemonic agent in racial classifications. Rather than gaining legitimacy as an ethnic group, Arab Americans became politicized and oppositional to the media and state's political objectives. Engaging the state's ideological objectives did not create the ideal conditions for

challenging the racial classifications – in fact this era witnessed a splintering of the community that made any challenges to the status quo more difficult and it continued as a consenting population(s). Since there was no action for minority or nonwhite racial status, in this section I will focus on the arrival of the second wave of immigrants and the ways in which the community fractured.

The New Migrants Arrive!

The passage of the Hart-Celler Act of 1965 eliminated the national origins quota system that had structured American immigration policy since the 1920s, replacing it with a preference system that focused on immigrants' skills and family relationships with U.S. citizens or residents (Daniels 2004, 134). Immigrants from Asia, the Middle East and Central and South America were admitted to the U.S. in greater numbers due to the reforms. Some of the immigrants who arrived from the Mashriq in this second period of Arab American history came with stronger Arabic identifications in addition to being Palestinian, Lebanese, Syrian, Iraqi, Egyptian, Jordanian, Yemeni or elsewhere by nationality.

The largest percentage of Arab Americans today are from Lebanon and arrived during and after the civil war there (Hourani and Shehadi 1992, 5; Labaki 1992, 605–606). For the Lebanese, the countries of North and South America and Australasia were also destinations due to their economic and social development, as well as the presence of family and friends who could aid their transition.

Palestinians arrived in the US in greater numbers in the Americas and Australia after becoming refugees in 1948 and again in 1967 (Nakhleh and Zureik 1980). Many

had left places that Christians had lived in since Biblical times such as Jerusalem, Bethlehem and Nazareth – their departure meant that the Christian population numbers in these areas dramatically decreased. For example, in 1944 Jerusalem had 29,350 Christians; by 1998, no more than 10,000 Palestinian Christians resided in the city (Sabella 1998, 135). According to a study on Palestinian residents of Jerusalem, Bethlehem and Ramallah, there are clear trends of preferences for countries of destination that fall along religious lines. While Muslims and Christians alike are attracted to the US and Western Europe, Christians prefer the migration destinations of Latin America, Australia and Canada, while Muslims prefer to go to Jordan and the Gulf states (Sabella 1998, 141).

The USA was a country of preference for Palestinians from Ramallah, the main city in the West Bank that is historically Christian. In 1952 a group of Wayne State University students in Detroit, MI came together and began the *Hathihe Ramallah Magazine* (This is Ramallah) that was a newsletter for fellow Ramallahites living all over the US (Interview with Nadim Ajlouni 07/08/11). Later, in 1959, the families of Ramallah that descended from six brothers formed the American Federation of Ramallah – Palestine (AFRP). Due to the high numbers of Orthodox in Ramallah itself, the AFRP leadership often overlaps with the lay leadership in the Orthodox Churches. The AFRP is now a major national association, which holds an annual convention that attracts thousands from all over the US on July 4th weekend (AFRP 2012). 26 cities have AFRP local chapters referred to as Ramallah Clubs. In DC, the Ramallah Club is based in Vienna, a northern Virginia suburb. While Ramallah's religious composition has changed

since the 1950s, this story and the people I met at the AFRP convention in Washington DC in 2011 indicate that there is close pairing of older Ramallah origins and Antiochian Orthodox faith in the US.

Metro DC Parishes: A Period of Rapid Expansion

After 1965, the small Syrian Orthodox community of DC experienced an exponential growth in numbers and diversity as the descendants of the first immigrants and new immigrants from the Middle East settled into the metropolitan area. Both generations moved to fill jobs in the expanding federal government as well as in other growing sectors including international banking, medical research, law and lobbying firms, and in non-profit organizations. The new immigrants brought with them a desire to form civil associations, including churches, where they could gather and celebrate their ethnic and religious heritages.

The churches changed drastically in this period. As a result of changes within the RCC church and the influx of new immigrants from the Middle East, Maronite and Melkite Churches were formed in DC. Although there had been a Maronite Seminary called Our Lady of Lebanon Seminary for some years in DC, in 1962 a parish community began to form that established a parish under the Maronite Apostolic Exarchate in 1966. This Parish grew and dedicated a new church and hall in 1976 next to where the old church stood in NW DC.

Around 1970, a few Melkite families who were from Syria and Lebanon began to meet every Sunday in the garage in the home of Fr. Armand, a Melkite priest, at Varnum St NE & 12th in DC. As the number of Sunday regulars increased, they moved matins and

vespers to nearby Providence Hospital, and then to a space in a girls' school, Ursula Academy, in Bethesda for a while (Interview with Fr. Joseph Francavilla 03/31/12). Through raising money as the hosts of the annual Melkite convention in 1971, the DC suburban congregation managed to buy a church on Route 7 in Virginia that they later shared with the newly forming Coptic (Egyptian) community. This new church used the traditional Byzantine chanting and liturgy and was called Holy Transfiguration Church (HTC) because the priest wanted a name that was Biblical but that reflected its Eastern Christian origins. His successor, Fr. Joseph, explained that an ethnic moniker was not part of the new Church's name because the focus of the church was based on their ancient Byzantine roots: "We're not Roman Catholics, we're Greek Catholics, following the Byzantine tradition and so we wanted a name that was consistent with our tradition and our self-identity" (Interview with Fr. Joseph Francavilla, 03/31/12).

In 1980, the HTC moved into their current structure - a purpose-built Byzantine Church with an iconostasis - in Vienna, VA. They obtained the land from the RCC church that donated five acres of land to them to build a new Melkite church. In 1980, this piece of land was considered very far outside of DC but today is located in a wealthy, upper-middle class suburban neighborhood, just beyond the Beltway. With only one Melkite church in the area, some parishioners travel from as far away as Warrenton to attend church. There are only 42 Melkite parishes in the US (Catholic-Hierarchy.org 2012) overall.

Between 1965 and 1980, the number of Orthodox churches doubled - from one to two. Today, there are 36 different Orthodox congregations in the Metropolitan

Washington Orthodox Clergy Council that covers the area from Annapolis, MA to Winchester, VA, but there are only 6 Antiochian Orthodox churches – three Eastern Rite Orthodox and three Western Rite Orthodox (email communication with Fr. Nicholas Alford, 5/22/2012). The two Eastern rite churches that I focused on in my fieldwork were in uptown NW DC and suburban MD.

The rapid demographic growth of Arabic-speaking Orthodox in the 1970s had caused a need for a bigger church, even though the current church building was only two decades old. The parish of St. George's purchased a large plot of land at 7917 Montrose Road, Potomac, Maryland – about a half-hour's drive Northwest of the 16th St location. They began to build a church with arches but as the construction was underway, it was becoming clear that the church would have to sell the old church on 16th St in order to finance the rest of the construction. The 16th St church was put up for sale. The interested buyer needed to obtain a loan – a second mortgage – from the church in order to finance the purchase of the property and so the loan issue was turned over to the parish council. In the ensuing heated debate two main camps formed: those who wanted to stay at 16th St and those that wanted to move the church to the suburbs of Maryland. Among the former group were those with strong familial and emotional ties to the 16th St church and those who lived in the District, including new immigrants. In the second group were those who preferred a church located closer to home – the DC “old-timers” who maintained businesses in the District but now lived in the suburbs, and newer immigrants who rented or bought homes in the suburbs. The church council voted down the proposal to extend an offer of a second mortgage to the buyer. Fr. George recalled,

At one decisive meeting they argued over and over again and they couldn't get a majority vote so... they kept taking the vote over and over until they got what they wanted. Well, people walked out of the meeting and, of course, took their vote with them, and those that remained were of course those who wanted to stay downtown, so it was decided that they would stay downtown and they would forfeit the property, with that beautiful building on it – can you imagine? (Interview 6/20/12, 20:13, 1)

The ensuing foreclosure and seizure of the Maryland property and the half-built building⁶ made those who had financed the purchase of the land livid. Many parishioners were upset by this and one said to me, over thirty years later, “I felt very bad... it's like a bad divorce; there's still ill-feeling up to today” (#135).

The break away group resolved to create a new church and after meeting with both groups, the Archbishop granted them approval to create a mission church. Eventually Fr. George was assigned to its pastorship and the first Sunday liturgy was celebrated on August 10, 1979. Although services continued, the break away parish struggled for two years, renting spaces in school basements, firehouses and hotels for Sunday services with a makeshift traveling altar. Hyper-aware of the long commutes in the DC metro area, Fr. George pinpointed the homes of parishioners on a physical map in his office and fundraised. When he found a disused firehouse for sale on Braddock Blvd, he realized that “it was almost the center of the people [and] I said this is it!” The parish bought the firehouse in 1981.

Fr. George chose not to name the parish St. George's – the most common name for Antiochian Orthodox Churches and the name of the DC parish – and instead chose Saints (Sts.) Peter and Paul Antiochian Orthodox Church after the patrons and founders

⁶ After much searching, I found the property – it is now a Persian language K-12 school. The pointed arches remain the main architectural features of the building.

of the church in Antioch and because “it’s my desire to create a shrine here in this parish dedicated to those who brought the church from Syria here to the United States – our ancestors” (Interview 06/20/12). As such, the choice of name underlines the transnational Antiochian identification of the Church. The church community then renovated the firehouse and built a hall for wedding and baptism receptions and began holding an annual bazaar or food festival. They worshipped there for twenty years until the parish outgrew the small sanctuary. A new and larger plot of land was bought in Potomac, Maryland. After leveling the existing structures and building a large social hall and church, they celebrated Christmas in their new church in 2002. The interior of the building has since been painted with icons and parish-sponsored programs have expanded.

My focus here on the buildings and locations is to better understand the centrality of demographics within particular Arab American Christian communities. Like other “white” ethnic groups, some Arab Americans (and many in the DC area) have become middle-class suburbanites. Within the last fifty years have sought to re-locate their institutions to more accessible points in the suburbs. As one parishioner put it “to move to a better quarter” (#135) and to ensure that their institutions are upgraded and stay in close proximity to the community they propose to serve. The small attendance that I witnessed at St. George’s on 16th St in DC for Sunday services may not give a full picture of the health of that church community but it does stand in contrast to the bustling suburban church of Sts. Peter and Paul where Lexus’ and BMWs and Mercedes flow in and out of the parking lot.

The establishment of new Melkite and Maronite parishes and the suburban expansion of the Orthodox Church, tells us that this community is wealthy and supports its institutions. Since the suburbs are now very multi-cultural, this now says little about racial or ethnic classifications. While the founding of new Eastern Churches in the period between 1965 and 1980 is positive, the creation of new churches institutionalized the rifts in the community, creating communities. The next section focuses on the histories of three of the ideological-national-religious pairings that still exist among Arab Christians from the Mashriq in DC.

Three Emerging Communities and Identities

Type X: Orthodox + Arab + pro-Palestinian

According to oral accounts of people I met, who lived through this period, the U.S. television news and newspaper coverage of the June 1967 War was pro-Israeli and anti-Arab. This caused many people with Middle East origins in the U.S. to mobilize as a community and reclaim the term Arab as positive. The major socio-cultural institutions in existence at the time, the churches, played a pioneering role in the formation and subsequent introduction of an Arab-American identity. On June 19 1967, the heads of the New York Orthodox, the Toledo Orthodox, the Armenian Church, the Maronite and the Melkite Churches worked together to form the Emergency Relief Committee of Near East Bishops in the United States. In a joint pastoral committee statement, they sent a telegram to President Johnson to urge “a just and honorable peace”, siding with the Arab countries because, in their words, “we cannot remain indifferent to the suffering of our brothers, the victims of the war” (The Word 1967 and The Word 11(8):18). Without

mentioning countries by name, including Israel, they were for “the territorial integrity of all nations in the Near East” (ibid). They were for protecting the “Holy Land” and its surrounding areas – specifically, the recently Israeli-occupied lands in Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza. The Syrian Orthodox Church went a step further and Metropolitan Philip expressed his “concern over the status of Jerusalem and unilateral action taken by Israel in annexing the Holy City” in person to President Johnson at a meeting on August 18, 1967 (Haje 1967).

After June War of 1967, “Arab-American” as a term was used in Orthodox Church publications, activism and outreach to describe Syrian Americans. In September 1967, the Very Rev. Fr. James Meena wrote an impassioned article published in *The Word*, the monthly publication of the Syrian Antiochian Orthodox Church, to fundraise for the Arab Refugee Relief Fund of Western Pennsylvania, which he chaired. He pleaded with the readers to “take a closer look at ourselves as members of an ethnic culture – Arab-Americans.” Although I do not have all copies of *The Word*, this was the first time in *The Word* since the 1950s that I found the term Arab to describe *people* – and not as an adjective for language affiliations, food, dancing or music. Fr. James explained:

For as long as I can remember I have been taught to be proud of my Arabic-Syrian-Lebanese roots. I have been proud. I have also been taught that we here in the United States are a part of the majority which is the United States. We have all been taught the same thing. As a result we, Americans with Arabic origins have resisted the “minority group” syndrome as have most of our fellow Americans of other ethnic backgrounds. (Meena 1967, 6)

Prior to 1967, Americans of “Arabic-Syrian-Lebanese roots” had embraced “white” as a racial identification without modifying that identification with ethnicity because they had sought inclusion into the majority and what they perceived as the

mainstream of the US population. Fr. James further asserts that this was why *The Word's* readers – the Syrian Orthodox faithful – had resisted seeing themselves as minorities and the “minority group syndrome.” In the following paragraphs, he wrote that resisting the “minority group image” was coupled with the beginning of a loss of *ethnic* identity and an accompanying lack of objection “when someone with anti-Arab views, or even those who just wish to be ‘cute’ or ‘funny’, cast aspersions on the character of Arabs as a whole” (ibid). Fr. James wanted better media portrayal of Arabs but additionally was asking “Americans of Arabic extraction” to give money to the refugees, speak out and defend the “cause of justice and the fair distribution of information” (ibid. 7). The political cause of supporting the new Palestinian refugees created urgency – an impetus for the community in the US to change the labels and perceptions of their own ethnicity and status as minorities. It is notable that religious leaders initiated a pro-Palestinian political agenda and that, as in the passage above, priests appealed to Orthodox Christians *as an audience* to defend the image of Arabs in the US. *In other words political events and ideologies created an Arab American ethnic consciousness.*

Like the secular Arab-American organizations, the first of which was the Association of Arab-American University Graduates (AAUG), established in late 1967 (Suleiman 1994, 47), this ethnic consciousness was born out of a frustration with the negative media portrayal of Arabs. The adoption of Arab and its combination with American was deliberate and motivated by a desire to reclaim an identity term that was seen as derogatory. In the 1970s the US media continued to stereotype and defame Arabs in the Middle East with the October 1973 War, the 1970s oil embargo, then the 1979

Iranian revolution, which increased the negative stereotypes of Middle Easterners as rich oil sheiks, terrorists and Islamic fanatics. Over a decade, these media portrayals reflected a transition or a “reassessment of attitudes towards “Arabs” by the American people, their organizations and their government” (Maria 1975, 22).

According to the current literature, between 1967 and 1975, identification as “Arab-American” (oftentimes used without the hyphen) was popular among the third generation of immigrants who identified as Syrian or Syrian-Lebanese as well as among the “politically sophisticated immigrants” that were first generation Americans (Suleiman 1999, 10–11). Here, I argue that Orthodox clergymen were among the first to advocate Arab American as an identity. Lest this may seem that the Orthodox Church’s Arabic identity was totalizing, in 1969, the Church dropped the word “Syrian” from its official title, becoming “plain Antiochian” (Syrian Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese 1969, 27 Section 19). There were three main reasons for this change of name.

1. To give an example to the other Orthodox churches – particularly the Greeks and Russians - to not be divided by nationalistic divisions. In his *State of the Archdiocese Message* to the convention attendees, Metropolitan Philip said, “... we are the least nationalistic among the Orthodox Jurisdictions in this country, but if we can not convince the rest of our Orthodox brethren to rise above their ghetto mentalities and face the challenges of this cosmic era, I cannot see any Orthodox unity in the foreseeable future” (ibid , 26).
2. Syrian was not adopted originally as a national label but more as a default

choice that was anachronistic by 1969. By the 1950s, most descendants of the Syrian immigrants now more closely identified as “American” but still connected to the “homeland” as heritage. However, *Bilad es-Sham* had become five countries, creating a confusion and realignment of ethnic-national identities in the U.S. among the Arabic-speaking populations. Many “Syrians” with origins in Mount Lebanon and the Bekaa Valley had already begun to identify as Lebanese but when Lebanon achieved its independence in 1943 from the French mandate, there was a stronger identification as Lebanese. The Palestinians, too, who came to the U.S., especially those who arrived as refugees with travel documents from the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) after 1948 personally identified as Palestinian. Other nationalities from Bilad es-Sham including Arab Israelis, Iraqis and Jordanians did not relate to the label “Syrian”.

3. Identifying as “Syrian” was fraught with political problems: Syria was Baathist, left-leaning and not an ally of the United States. This gave the impression that the Orthodox Church might be antagonistic to the US – and the image that the Church wanted to convey was pro-American.

Certainly members of the Orthodox clergy spoke out more forcefully (and politically) as *Arab Americans* in support of the Palestinian refugees. The New York Orthodox Archdiocese was explicitly pro-Palestinian and had *Project Loving Care*, which helped “the children of occupied Palestine” and was headed by Fr. George Rados, now the priest at Sts. Peter and Paul in Maryland.. In 1975, Fr. Rados then the Director of the

Project explained to the faithful at the National Convention of the Archdiocese, “It is in my humble opinion that the Project offers this Archdiocese a great opportunity to minister to none other than the Lord himself in the persons of the poor, the orphaned, the handicapped, the aged and the mentally retarded. For to serve one of these is, indeed, to serve Him” (Rados 1975, 20).

The Church did not shy away from taking political stances. For example, the Near East Committee introduced a resolution to the National Council of Churches that supported recognition of the PLO in 1974/5 (Maria 1975). The Chairman of the Antiochian Archdiocese’s Department of Near East and Arab Refugee Affairs, Dr. Frank Maria, appeared on NBC in 1974 and 1975 in what he described as the “first national network, in-depth exposure of the Arab American viewpoint” (Ibid. 23).

Type Y: Lebanese + Maronite + Right-wing

Identification as Arab American became more problematic for community leaders and members with the onset of the war in Lebanon in 1974/5. Events in the late 1970s, pushed those for an independent Lebanon further towards an exclusivist Lebanese identification that was associated with the Maronite Church and with Lebanese nationalism. By the 1980’s US-Lebanese organizations used the elevated socio-economic status and resources of some Lebanese Americans to place their ideology in a dominant position that became hegemonic, defining what it was to be Lebanese in America. Like the Lebanese nationalists in Lebanon, some Lebanese in the US saw Palestinians and later the Syrians as the cause of the violence and destruction in Lebanon. Those of this political viewpoint, became more disdainful of Palestinians and conscious about

identifying as Syrian or Arab and to them, there was urgency to prioritizing an exclusivist Lebanese identity.

Some Maronite Lebanese Americans nurtured transnational political-religious linkages between the US and the Mother Church. Lebanese-American political associations were generally organized on a sectarian basis and connected to a political party in Lebanon, while economic initiatives cut across Lebanese sectarian and political divides (Marinova 2010). In the 1970s the prime example of a Lebanese political association was the American Lebanese League (ALL), which stated its goal to be the preservation of the independence of Lebanon. Its founder, Elias P. Saadi, often travelled from Youngstown, Ohio to DC to meet with the Carter administration and, in 1978, to plant a Cedar of Lebanon tree in a ceremony on the White House grounds (Saadi n/d). According to a *Washington Post* article, ALL's efforts were coordinated with the American Israel Public Affairs Committee and "with considerable help from pro-Israel lobbyists to win support for the Christian struggle against Syria in the war that is devastating their homeland" (Cody 1978). Their alliance, while not tight, was based common interests and enemies - Syria and the Palestinians.

In the US, ALL did not see the Americans of Syrian or Palestinian heritage as allies or co-ethnics – and distinguished themselves as Lebanese by heritage. As their alliances in the US indicated, ALL supported particular right-wing Christian, sectarian positions and parties in Lebanon including the Lebanese Front, the Kata'ib party, the Lebanese Forces, the National Liberal Party, and other Christian parties (Correspondence with Guita Hourani in Marinova 2010). In the early 1970s, the Lebanese Kata'ib Party

that was against pan-Arab nationalism, considered Muslims as representatives of Arab culture and at odds with Maronite Christian identity (Entelis 1973). This stance was echoed by ALL's founder in a forum on Capitol Hill in 1989 in which Elias Saadi, one of ALL's founders called on those of Lebanese descent to

Identify yourselves...as what most of you are – you are Lebanese-American; you are not Arab Americans... don't cover it by Americans of Middle East background – first and foremost, from this day forward, identify yourselves as Lebanese-American. (C-SPAN 1989)

ALL did not want to be classified as anything other than Lebanese by heritage and resisted an Arab ethnic classification as well as later a Middle Eastern classification. Class was a part of this equation since ALL's members were “generally wealthy and conservative individuals with ties to the Maronite clergy and Christian parties in Lebanon” (Marinova 2010).

The Maronite clergy in the US supported the political positions of Maronites in Lebanon through their churches and ALL. Religion, sect and politics were intertwined in the personhood of Monsignor Elias el-Hayek, who was pastor of Our Lady of Lebanon Maronite Church and rector of the Maronite Seminary 1961-67, and later headed ALL's office in DC (Basil 2000).

Although ALL's membership was estimated to be 10,000 individuals in 1978 (Gates 1978), ALL did not represent all of the Maronites living in the US. Senator James Abourezk (D-SD) wanted the media and the US public to understand that there was a diversity of viewpoints within the Christian, and even Maronite, communities on the politics of the Middle East:

They [referring to ALL] don't represent all the Maronites and the certainly don't

represent all the Christians. What they represent is a small right-wing minority with a lot of money who are determined to use the money and their alliance with Israel to restore themselves to power.

As Sen. Abourezk, who is of Lebanese origin from a Greek Orthodox family, many Christians, including some Maronites, strongly objected to ALL's stances and claim to represent the Maronite Lebanese in the US. This politics of this period, divided the secular and the religious Maronites into two different camps. Although many Arab Americans, including Christians, made calls for unity in the 1970s and even 1980s, the Lebanese civil war created divisions among Arab Americans that remain today.

Type Z: Secular + Arab + pro-Palestinian

There is a strong strain of secular Arab Christians who chose to not go to church or mosque and do not identify with religion at all, perhaps other than as something that they were born into. Within the US, secular Arab nationalist tendencies have existed for decades – at the very least since 1945. The Institute of Arab American Affairs (IAAA) predated the arrival of the post-1965 immigrants and little is known of its history or activities. Founded in New York City in 1945 it led a determined lobbying and educational effort for Palestinians between 1917 until 1932, possibly until 1948 (Davidson 1999, 229). As IAAA's name and its cause indicate, the earliest iteration of the term "Arab American" was linked to advocacy of US foreign policy positions. After the loss of an entity called Palestine, the Institute "temporarily" suspended operations in 1950, never to be re-opened.

As previously mentioned, the AAUG was established in late 1967 by intellectuals and professionals and set forth an ambitious agenda that ranged from bringing together

the community to countering the hegemonic Zionist ideology. In a retrospective of their first decade, the tenth president, Michael Suleiman, reflected that their initial goals were:

- Contribute intellectual and professional skills to “the fundamental transformation and development of the Arab world”,
- Develop “an accurate and scientific alternative literature, and an educational-informational program to challenge Zionist distortions and misinformation”,
- Create a viable national organization that would bring together Arab Americans, leaving “the individual Arab-American less vulnerable, less isolated”,
- Promote cooperative efforts among the community that eliminated the structural divisions of the Arab world,
- Reflect the potential of an Arab nationalism that could “cast an exemplary shadow” on the Arab world, and
- “Improve American and Arab relations by mutual respect for the just rights of both nations” (summarized and quoted from Association of Arab-American University Graduates and Suleiman 1977, 5–6)

To create community, the AAUG leaders initially wanted an ethnic organization with “an Arab-American membership of professionals and academics” but almost immediately after its founding, opened up membership categories to non-Arab Americans. There was a greater desire to engage in AAUG’s ideological objectives than dwell on a person’s ethnic identity. The AAUG ideology of helping Arab society, contributing to better American-Arab relations and furthering knowledge about the Arab world in the US took precedence.

These goals were set within two hegemonic discourses: Arab nationalism and American freedom of expression. In his inaugural address to members, the first AAUG President, Fauzi Najjar explained the purpose of the organization: -

The decision to operate as an educational and cultural association and not as a political lobby was, however, made with the clear recognition that our educational

and cultural activities would and should have significant political implications and consequences. The pluralistic nature of American society, the constitutional guarantees for freedom of association and expression, and the dynamics of American culture provide us ample opportunities to pursue our goals and achieve our objectives” (quoted in Association of Arab-American University Graduates and Suleiman 1977, 6)

Although AAUG was not a political lobby, it was established with political implications and consequences in mind. AAUG was ostensibly secular in its outlook – a stance that was framed by Arab nationalism which framed it as pan-Arab and pro-Palestinian (Khalidi 1991) --- political stances that were interwoven with the right to speak out in the US as Americans. Even though non-Arab Americans were permitted to join, it was in a separate membership category: AAUG mobilized an identity politics that merged ideological, political, ethnic, and secular identities. But it was not a strategic identity politics aimed at political or ethnic representation in the US. When Congress approved post civil rights legislation that placed all peoples from the Middle East in the white category, there was not a peep of objection or comment by AAUG (see Association of Arab-American University Graduates and Suleiman 1977).

While the AAUG was headquartered in Detroit, in 1972 the National Association of Arab Americans (NAAA) was founded in the District because it had the goal of influencing decision-makers and lobbying Congress and the State Department on issues of interest to Arab Americans. Two-thirds of the membership and leadership in NAAA were Lebanese (mostly Christians), and the majority of the founders were wealthy, self-made businessmen that grew up in the US according to Khalil Jahshan, Executive Director of NAAA (Interview 07/13/12). While they were proud of their national origins, they were reportedly very comfortable in the US, involved with the US political system

and secure in their identity as Americans (Ibid). They were active in the communities and some were members of St. George's Orthodox, Our Lady of Lebanon Maronite or the HTC Melkite mission Churches.

According to Khalil Jahshan, Executive Director of NAAA at the time, those who identified solely as Lebanese “viewed Palestinians as a parties to the negative developments in Lebanon” (ibid) and only wanted to focus only on issues regarding Lebanon. At first, NAAA accommodated both groups and set up the American Task Force for Lebanon (ATFL) as a group within the organization, creating an office space earmarked for them. In the late 1980s, ATFL became its own organization, filing its first tax return in 1990 (Guidestar Nonprofit Directory 2013). ATFL is cross-sectarian and still exists, now “comprised primarily of prominent and dedicated Americans of Lebanese heritage who share a common interest in Lebanon” (American Task Force for Lebanon 2013).

In 1976, a group Lebanese-Americans broke off from NAAA and started ALL as a new organization that more stringently aligned with a Maronite identity and Church in Lebanon, as discussed. ALL became inactive in the early 1990s and its some of its members, including Elias Saadi, joined the Council of Lebanese American Organizations (Marinova 2010), which no longer exists, and others formed the Lebanese Information Center in 2010 which is currently headquartered in Alexandria, VA (Lebanese Information Center 2013). The strong Lebanese and American dimensions of the identities of the organizations, and presumably its leaders and members, is clear in all of the titles chosen.

Domestic party affiliations sometimes fell along an axis of political positions on the Middle East. The bulk of the ATFL and ALL leadership were Republicans and identified as of Lebanese heritage whereas those who identified as Arab tended to be Democrats and stronger advocates of civil rights in general and Palestinian human rights in particular. For the latter group, their position on civil rights was extended into a self-identity of Arab as a legitimate separate ethnicity in pluralist/multiculturalist America within the white racial rubric (see Kayyali 2013). However, to the outside, these distinctions were not always understood and even internally, they were not always neat-and-tidy differences, as an analysis of the local obituaries proves.

Analyzing Obituaries for Identities

Washington Times and *Washington Post* obituaries on Arab Americans from 1980-2000 highlight how identities intersect and are presented to Washingtonian readers. Obituaries (obits) generally note the deceased's jobs, volunteer work and church memberships and other contributions to society posthumously. If born outside the US, they note where the deceased was born and lived. All of these give clues to the deceased heritage, their political causes and religious affiliations, leaving it up to the reader to piece together their racial, ethnic, religious, class, gender and political identifications. In the obituaries that I was able to find through Lexis-Nexis, the mapping of identities expressed some of the patterns of affiliations that I have outlined in this chapter: -

- Helen Haje. Helen was headlined as “74, helped Arab-American causes” and was called “one of the pioneers and founders of the Arab-American movement in the US” and the “mother of most of the Arab-American

organizations in this country” in her obituary. The *Times* obit describes Helen as one of the founders of NAAA which it incorrectly posits as “the first national Arab-American organization.” Helen was described as active in ADC and the AAUG, the latter of which was, according to the *Times*, “a think tank of students and intellectuals.” Born in Pennsylvania to “Lebanese-American immigrants”, her American-ness is not questioned because she is described as a conduit between the Middle East political figures and American television producers through her work as a consultant on the Today Show. Her American-ness is further underlined through her fundraising for Democratic Party candidates. Although she is not mentioned as being active in the church, visitation was held at Sts. Peter and Paul Antiochian Orthodox Church in Bethesda with a funeral service at St. Sophia Orthodox Church and burial at Arlington National Cemetery. Flowers or donations were requested to go to ALSAC which stands for the Americans Lebanese Syrian Associated Charities (ALSAC) that funds St. Jude’s Children’s Research Hospital, though the reader may not know that from the acronym alone. (The *Washington Times*, 01/14/98, C6). *Helen fits into type Z because the Arab ethnic identification that is matched with a pro-Palestinian/pro-Arab politics and falls closer to secular than Orthodox religious convictions (though this is hard to definitively discern from the obit).*

- The Baroodys. There are three obits on the Baroodys: William J. Baroody Sr., his wife Nabeeha Baroody, and their son, William J. Baroody Jr. The obits on the men heavily emphasize their work in the Republican Party and the conservative think tank, the American Enterprise Institute. The 1980 obit on William Sr. does not mention any references that could lead to any other conclusion than he was a white, Catholic Republican. His wife Nabeeha, however, was mentioned as an active member of a Catholic parish in Alexandria and a member of the Holy Transfiguration Melkite Greek Catholic Church in McLean, indicating that she was Melkite and in combination with her name, one could conclude that she had heritage in the Middle East. When Bill Jr. died in 1996, there was a similar lack of evidence of any ethnic heritage and stronger indications that he was white, Republican, Catholic and a Navy-man, like his father. At the end of his long obit, there was a stint on his volunteer work with volunteered with the ATFL (spelled out) and the Khalil Gibran Memorial Foundation – thus making oblique references to his family’s Lebanese roots. (*Washington Post* 06/09/96, B06) *The Baroodys fit more closely into type Y: the Lebanese, Republican and Catholic models, but differ in holding more moderate positions on Lebanon (i.e. not Lebanese nationalists) and being Melkite and RCC instead of Maronite.*
- Hanna Ayoub. Hanna was the “Head of Oriental Rug Firm” and moved to DC in 1929 but was “born in what was then Ramallah, Palestine.” His

birthplace is not accompanied with any pro-Palestinian or pro-Arab political activities but the *Post* mentions his belonging to three churches: Sts. Peter and Paul in Bethesda (now in Potomac), St. George's (the DC Antiochian Orthodox Church) and St. Ann's Catholic Church. This tagged him as both Orthodox and RCC. The multiple church affiliations indicated that one religious ascription is often not enough – people could attend and be active in more than one parish (*Washington Post* 12/08/82, C14). *Hanna seems to simply be Palestinian and Orthodox and so could be Type X although it is impossible to tell his politics from the obit.*

- Victor Abdow. Like Hanna, Victor's entrepreneurial abilities are emphasized when he was tagged as a business owner and a "florist." Born in Massachusetts, Victor moved to DC with the Army when he was 16. Later he moved to Bethesda, MD. His ethnic background was marked by his religion and volunteer work - he was a member of Sts. Peter and Paul Antiochian Orthodox Church and a volunteer with the Amara Civic Club and ALSAC (spelled out) (*Washington Post* 01/19/00). *Victor does not fit into any of my three rough models. He was Syrian-Lebanese Orthodox but not political. This points to the missing combinations in my model and the fact there are some who identify as Eastern Christians and volunteer for US-based charities that are neither political nor Middle East-related.*

The collective impression given by these obituaries is of people who are Christian Americans that serve in the military, are active in their churches as well as in public life

as business owners, volunteers and activists. Only one mentioned “Arab” – the obituary for Helen Haje – leaving the reader to surmise what race the rest were (white being the default, I suppose). While these leaders in the community are celebrated in the DC press, it is with a “language of assimilation.” The florist and rug firm owner reflected an American rags-to-riches tale of immigrant forefathers coming to the US in search of wealth, and their children’s entrepreneurial spirit triumphing with financial success. The spouses in these obituaries have non-Arabic sounding names and their children are called everyday American names such as Jeffrey, Alice, Michael, Rose and Lorraine. Although perhaps this is the nature of obituaries, Arab ethnicity is downplayed and religious identifications are emphasized – and their Christian religious identification as members of churches helps to make them more mainstream but the Eastern-ness of the Orthodox Churches serves to remember their heritage as somewhat unique and different.

Conclusion

In this chapter I illustrate that between 1965 and 1980 there were new ethnic formations and divisions. On one end, some identified as Arab and pro-Palestinian and at the other end, some identified as Lebanese, non-Arab and anti-Palestinian. There were Christians – including members of the clergy – in both camps and so these divisions profoundly impacted churches and congregations in the US. The Maronite Church in the US became more politically aligned with an exclusivist Lebanese identity and the Orthodox Church became a more welcoming place for Palestinians in addition to its existing Palestinian, Syrian and Lebanese base of membership. I indicated how these positions discursively formed socio-political identities for the faithful.

The establishment of national organizations that existed at that time – NAAA and AAUG for example – served to highlight the growing importance of civil society institution that were not religious, but were political. These two organizations used a pan-Arab narrative and ideology to argue for secular Arab American identities that were politically oriented and pro-Palestinian and pro-Arab. To that end, I signaled that ethnic, political and religious formations were intertwined in different profiles: (1) Orthodox, Arab and pro-Palestinian, (2) Lebanese, Maronite and Lebanese nationalist and (3) Secular, Arab and pro-Palestinian. However, with the analyses of the obits, I indicated that these were simply profiles and that in real life the divisions in the community were less clear cut.

These ethno-national constructions dialectically transformed the community from one that was invested in white racial status to one that had elements that alternatively saw themselves as an Arab American ethnic group and a Lebanese ethnic group. According to Gramsci, the modern state derives its authority with coercion or by consent. Consent to the state's hegemonic position is obtained through bestowing prestige or advantages onto disadvantaged civil society institutions. Arab Americans did not ask for recognition by the state because they were more concerned with US foreign policy and the events and ideologies of the Middle East --- events that bitterly divided them, particularly during the Lebanese civil war.

CHAPTER 3: FINDING ISLAM IN CONTEMPORARY IDENTIFICATIONS

One of the patients at the hospital, I was doing an individual therapy session and he, I guess, I don't know what we were talking about, but it got onto religion. He's Jewish and he had told me that last week or on Tuesday, and he's like can you guess my religion? And I said, you're Jewish. And he was like, how'd you know that? And I said, you told me. And he said, oh yeah. And he was like, what are you? Are you Muslim? And I said no. And he goes oh yeah, I guess people just sort of assume. And so he even just said it. And was like, yeah they do assume, actually but, nope, I'm Christian. (#122)

The woman in the quote above was in her 20s and wore a 2" long Orthodox cross around her neck and was very clear about her Christian identity – she went to church regularly and was a member of the youth group there. Even so, she *expected* this patient of hers to assume that she is Muslim. She later explained why she was not surprised that her patient had not noticed her cross, “I think that you know, they hear the word Arab and they think Muslim. That's what this world –this country at least - has been trained to [do] – to associate the two together.” The logic runs that if a person is of Lebanese, Palestinian or Syrian descent, then they are Arabs (or Middle Eastern) and if they are Arabs, then they must be Muslim. This assumption is from a dominant ideology in the US that has a long lineage but is often articulated in a clash of civilizations-cum-Islamphobia discourse post 9/11.

In this chapter, I build on the argument that conflation of ethnicity and a MENA regional affiliation with one religion, Islam, were made by Orientalists and later adapted into a “clash of civilizations” thesis which morphed into a hegemonic ideology that there

are *innate cultural differences* between the Occident and the Orient. Religion was at the very heart of this hierarchical cultural discourse with the West/Christianity as the Self and the East/Islam as the Other.

AACs don't fit well into this civilizational framework – they are they half of each binary (East/Christian). Their religious and ethnic identities clash to make their position equivocal – are they on the “side” of the East and Islam or are they on the “side” of the West and Christianity? This research finds an ambiguous flexibility in cultural and religious formations that is deeply contextual and nuanced. The dominant ideologies on cultural differences are articulated by various government agencies that prompt further conflation of Arab and Muslim identities. There are various forms of resistance to this master narrative. How communities and individuals address this master narrative differs. Religious and sectarian specified identities as non-Muslims, Orthodox Christians or Lebanese Maronites often lie at the crux of the counter narratives. This chapter argues that religious identities and self-expressions through names, clothing, architecture, and gold crosses position the AAC vis-à-vis and US perception of Islam and vis-à-vis other AACs.

“Good” and “Bad” Muslim interposed on AACs

Post 9/11, there has been a rise in anti-Muslim sentiments in the US, most recently after the Boston marathon bombing. The media has used the term “Islamophobia” to denote “a generalized fear of Islam and Muslims” (Shryock 2010, 1). The term originated in the UK in the 1990s and most aptly describes a sentiment that flourishes in Europe and North America but can be found in other places, including

among Muslims themselves (for more on the history of Islamophobia, see Shryock 2010). It draws its ideological origins from Orientalism and the “Clash of Civilizations” thesis set forth by Samuel P. Huntington (1993; 1996). Orientalist writings set a binary of “East” versus “West” that focused on Islam as the cause for cultural difference (Said 1994; 2003). Huntington’s “civilizational model” put forth the idea that post-Cold War conflicts would be not state-based but would rather be culture-based. He delineated seven (possibly eight) civilizations, including “Western” and “Islamic” cultures that would rift and collide. Huntington’s controversial emphasis on the *religious* nature of culture-empires gained more cache after 9/11 and became a socio-cultural justification for the wars and occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq (Wheaton 2008).

At the heart of Islamophobia is a culturalist ideology. Arab Christians are implicated in Islamic culture by their MENA origins alone. Edward Said, the late well-known Palestinian-American cultural critic and theorist, once noted that he was Christian by faith, Muslim by culture. The lines between simplistic faith-based civilizational binaries blur in Arab Christians, though they are not the only ones being collapsed into a nonwhite Islamic cultural stereotype. When President Barack Obama is called Muslim by his political opponents it “is widely perceived to be a slur, not simply a mistake – and never a compliment – because of the suspicion, prevalent among even the most tolerant of bourgeois multiculturalists, that Islam is somehow antithetical to democratic values” (Shryock 2010, 2). By positing that Islamic culture holds values that are against the US, it places Muslims (and associated others) as automatically holding values that are antithetical to core American (or British) principles.

When multiculturalist and Islamophobic ideologies collide, the result is a bifurcation in the classification of Muslims. The “good” Muslim is “moderate”, harmless and uncritical of the US state. The “good” Muslim participates in multicultural fairs, food festivals, parades and events, showcasing cultural-religious differences in ways that valorizes diversity and contributes to the image of the US as a tolerant society and a multicultural state. The “bad” Muslim is critical of the US, particularly its foreign policy, and prioritizes a religious identity above a national US identity. In contrast to the “good” Muslim who is a friend, the “bad” Muslim is untrustworthy and a foe (Mamdani 2004).

These binaries extend into perceptions of “good” and “bad” AACs. In Washington DC, there is a need for Arabic-speakers in the intelligence and foreign-policy sectors as well as in the Arabic-language media channels - Al-Hurra TV, Alhurra-Iraq, and Radio Sawa - that are run by the Middle East Broadcasting Networks, Inc. and funded by US Congress. The typecast of a “good American Muslim” and a “good AAC” who can be hired and promoted in the US government is the same, generally-speaking: a US-born, US citizen who does not take (or at least articulate) anti-Israeli stances. AACs have slight edge over American Muslims because they are presumed to be likely to become radical Muslims but are subject to similar assessments of their positions on US foreign policy.

Two cases illustrate how Arab American ethnicity and knowledge of Islam and the Arab world can produce very different results. On the one hand, an Arab American leader, James Zogby, president of the AAI, who is an American and a Roman Catholic of Lebanese Maronite ancestry, reported that his political adversaries are Islamophobes:

These Islamophobes just hate. They hate Muslims and they hate me, so they conflate the two. Steve Emerson called me “Holder’s Hezbollah buddy.” Stephen Schwartz called me the “Wahhabi.” I often get emails saying this sort of thing and I always write back [he laughs] in response and I end with, “Oh, and by the way, I’m Christian, I’ll pray for you,” or “That’s not very Christian of you.” What’s stunning is the ignorance factor, [but] it’s not just ignorance. It’s bigotry and ignorance. (Interview on 07/27/12)

Although he invokes his Christianity to counteract the placement of Islam on his identifications, Zogby reports that seeming sympathetic to Muslims abroad incites the Islamophobes. Like Zogby, a few activists reported that they had experienced what I call here the “collateral discrimination” with Muslims for speaking out on issues.

On the other hand, identification with the Arab/Muslim conflated category can produce positive results. A former school principal had a situation where the parents of Muslim girls from Arab, Pakistani, Afghani, and Indonesian families were not sending their daughters, who wore the hijab, to school out of fear after 9/11. He used his identity to establish trust,

... and they knew I was an Arab and they respected me, and so we brought ‘em in, we had workshops, um, with our teachers, our counselors, we collaborated with the Arab American Institute... and we really educated our community, out PTA, our teachers about what it means to be an Arab, what it means to be a Muslim. (#133)

The same man reported that he did think that Muslims are treated differently in the US than Christians and said, “I’ve seen Islamophobia up close, even among members of my congregation. It has taken us a long time to dispel that phobia, bringing in the imams. We have a relationship now with two, um, mosques in our neighborhood and we have tried to dispel that Islamophobia. Even women in hijab are invited into our church to share their experiences.” His church was not an Eastern Church and had no other Arab

Americans in the congregation, so after 9/11 he encouraged more Muslim-Christian dialogue *from within* the church. In this case, he was able to act as a bridge due to the assumption that he would know more about the cultural contexts faced by Muslim schoolgirls and would be a good conduit for bringing in Muslim speakers to a non-Eastern Church. Religious identities were almost secondary to the ethnic identification as Arab but were nonetheless important in both of these cases.

Political Graffiti

An incident at the largest Antiochian Orthodox Church in the DC metro area illustrated that political opponents can consider churches to be party to the Othered Arab-Muslim civilizational amalgam. One respondent echoed, what I heard many times throughout my research, “Arab is with Muslim more so than Christian” (#109) but, as this episode shows, *Arab can also be paired with Christian*.

On January 28, 2009, a Star of David and message was spray-painted in blue, “Israel forever, Arabs never” on the back door that leads to the kitchen of Sts. Peter and Paul Antiochian Orthodox Church in Potomac, MD (NBC Washington 2009). Although church members met with the police and filed a hate crimes report, the perpetrators have not been found. Through their graffiti, the vandals clearly indicated that they had identified this specific church (on a road that houses many churches) as being Arab and opposed to Israel. It is not a leap of logic to assume that the vandals were Zionists and politically motivated to spray-paint *this* church. Obviously, it was known that the church was Christian but what *kind of* Christian was the cause of the graffiti.

The priest that leads Sts. Peter and Paul, Fr. George Rados, had recently spoken out against the Israeli bombings of civilians in Gaza. That month, Israel had conducted many airstrike campaigns on the Gaza Strip, dropping bombs to kill Hamas officials, destroying mosques, the legislative council building and civilian homes (al-Shurrab 2009). Hamas had launched rockets against Israel. After a 22-day ceasefire, the violence resumed on January 28, 2009. The day of the discovery of the graffiti, Obama's Middle East envoy, former senator George J. Mitchell, had arrived in the region to discuss the prospects of peace between the Israelis and the Palestinians. There was new optimism after the President said in his inaugural address that he planned to reach out to Muslims around the world and "initiate a new partnership [with the Muslim world] based on mutual respect and mutual interest" (as quoted in Shear and Kessler 2009). Obama's diplomatic efforts "represented a change in direction celebrated not only in the Arab world but also in European capitals" as well as in Arab-American circles in DC, a policy-oriented city (Zogby 2010, 189). Set against this new optimism about the prospects of peace, I propose that the graffiti was partially intended to silence and intimidate the priest and the congregants and to reassure the vandals and others through the media that Israel still reigned supreme: Obama's will would not be done.

Like Sts. Peter and Paul, the slightly smaller St. George's Antiochian Orthodox Church in DC has Arabic services and Palestinian parishioners and does not say or indicate that it is Arabic on the outside. What made Sts. Peter and Paul the target of vandalism was the *politics* of supporting Palestinians and speaking out against the Israeli bombings in Gaza. Fr. George had been in charge of the archdiocese's humanitarian

efforts for decades. Many of these humanitarian efforts have been focused on charitable donations and support of Palestinians as well as Lebanese when there are crises in the Middle East. Although the graffiti message indicated otherwise, when I asked Fr. George Rados about this incident, he did not see it as political – he felt that he was speaking for justice, plain and simple. In the NBC television news coverage segment cited above Fr. George said that the church believed in peace, tolerance and love and invited the culprits to come back to the parish to talk and so that they could forgive them. Of course, Fr. George could be this gracious partially because this vandalism was not a serious threat – after all, it was only graffiti that was easily painted over.

Although this incident proved that churches could be targets for anti-Arab sentiments, they are not the usual targets. To my knowledge this was one of only two incidents against Arab churches since 9/11.⁷ Mosques and Islamic centers were more commonly vandalized and threatened immediately post 9/11 and then again in a “rise of anti-mosque sentiment” in the US from 2009 to 2011 (Dana, Barreto, and Oskooii 2011). The positionality and context of the situation was crucial to understanding why that church was vandalized and how it was racialized as Arab.

Arab and Muslim Organizations

Arab American identity was institutionalized by organizations that shared a secular outlook and downplayed religious differences in favor of an Arab ethnic identity.

⁷ In 2002, there was a case of arson at the Antiochian Orthodox Church of the Redeemer in Los Altos Hills, CA in which the church was almost completely destroyed. Although there was no evidence, the community blamed the intentionally set fire on anti-Arab sentiment (referenced in Stiffler 2010, 36, ftn 39).

These organizations had both Muslim and Christian presidents, staff members and members and addressed issues that helped Muslims and Christians as well as Druze. Many who worked in Arab American organizations said that they did not know what religion their colleagues and friends were, simply because that did not matter to them. I am quite sure, though, that they knew their politics and shared a pan-Arab outlook towards the community in the US.

In 1990, the first specifically Muslim public affairs group, the American Muslim Council was established with the goal of increasing Muslim participation and representation in the political process and in government offices (Nimer 2005). In the mid-1990s, the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), the American Muslim Alliance, and the Muslim Public Affairs Council were founded and established offices in Washington DC. The leaders of Arab American organizations privately said that they did not see a need for these organizations – they were already handling the same issues that the Muslim organizations were addressing. The Arab organizations felt threatened by the new competition for members and donors. The Muslim organizations argued although their donor and member pool includes Arabs, the American Muslim population was far more than Arabs only and the intersection of people was minimal. In 1999, the coordinating organization of the Muslim public affairs groups issued a joint press release with the Council of Presidents of Arab-American Organizations that indicated their cooperation despite these tensions. They identified their shared priorities: eliminating the use of secret evidence, influencing US policy on Jerusalem and increasing voter registration (as cited in Nimer 2005, 10).

However, the establishment of Muslim American organizations made the Arab American organizations seems more secular *in contrast*. On the front line of political identity claims, Dr. James Zogby, President of AAI, described how Arab American political organizations, such as his own, were now typified by Muslim organizations. He said,

I get irritated when some of the groups define themselves as Muslim and then try to define us as Arab Christians. That is not my self-definition. I am a Christian, but my political self-definition is Arab American, not Arab Christian. We are entitled to define ourselves and have worked for decades to do so. We don't want to see our work undone and our community fragmented by religion for political reasons. We went down that road during the Lebanese civil war and we don't want to go back there.

Zogby makes it clear that he sees AAI's political identity and mission as based on Arab and American, not religious identities.

The leadership at the ADC has made some recent moves away from its traditional, staunchly-held secularist position to make alliances with American Muslim organizations. In the November 2012 elections, ADC worked with CAIR to mobilize voters through a get-out-the-vote campaign that "urges Arab and Muslim voters to go to the polls" (ADC Press Release 2012a). Thus, ADC chose a non-ethnic, faith-based organization as its partner in the campaign, instead of AAI, a similar ethnic and secular group, which already had its voter registration campaign "Yalla Vote" in operation. Ten days later, ADC was part of a coalition of American Muslim groups that called on President Obama "to demand that Israel restore the ceasefire that it broke with Palestinians in the Gaza Strip" (ADC Press Release 2012b). The other signatories of the joint statement were American Muslim Alliance, American Muslims for Palestine, CAIR,

the Islamic Circle of North America, Muslim American Society, and the Muslim Legal Fund of America. ADC was the only signatory without Muslim or Islamic in the title of the organization. Although these decisions were reportedly made *ad hoc* and were only a sequence of two events, this may indicate a shift in ADC's position on the secular-religious spectrum towards Muslim organizations and stances.

In terms of identifications, there is much at stake here. The Arab American organizations were founded on secularist philosophies and their members and supporters expect the policies and statements to follow that line of thinking. If the ADC is politically aligning with Muslim organizations and does not help Arab Christians in Syria, for example, then AACs will object and possibly leave the organization. They will not cite religion as the reason for their departure, but politics. I doubt that it will come to this – not only is the current ADC President is Christian (Orthodox) himself but a secular Arab identity is fundamental to the existence and *raison d'être* for ADC, as well as for AAI. Once again, religious, or secular identifications become important in the presentation of community.

Political Outreach

The conflation of Arab/Muslim/Middle Easterner have been reproduced and advanced within government agencies after 9/11 when new, unprecedented outreach efforts were made to Arabs and Muslims by the White House and other important government agencies headquartered in Washington DC. Before 9/11, input from Arab American organizations were sought on an irregular, issue-driven basis. Post 9/11 outreach efforts were more vigorous but Arabs and Muslims were grouped together, as if

the two communities and their issues were identical. This served to further Huntington's civilizational model of religio-cultural identities.

In George W. Bush's Office of Public Liaison one officer was assigned to be the liaison to both Arabs and Muslims. This structure continued in the Barack H. Obama White House in the renamed Office of Public Engagement because Arabs and Muslims were usually grouped together (Conversation with Paul Montiero, 01/20/2013). Although both groups welcome the outreach efforts that are intended to recognize and "open the two-way dialogue, ensuring that the issues impacting our nation's proud and diverse communities have a receptive team" (The White House 2013), this conflation of a faith-based identity with an ethnic-based identity --- groups that overlap but are not synonymous --- has effected the conceptual distinctness of each group to Americans, to the media and to policy-makers. This has led to a deep sense of frustration for some Arab American activists, as one AAC expressed.

We've been hijacked by the Muslim movements. When you go to Arab and Muslim meetings at the White House, or the State Department or other government meetings, they discuss Pakistan and Afghanistan [but] these aren't our issues -- our issues are Arab issues -- the Iraqi problem, Palestine, [the situation] in Lebanon -- if it's an Islamic issue in the Arab world, then that's our issue but if it's not an Arab issue... (#150)

The combined Arab-Muslim outreach had a heavy-duty political component to it because it was linked to US foreign policy and to the military occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan as well as to the broader War on Terrorism. This was made clear in the public relations efforts to hire first-generation immigrants with linguistic and cultural skills that were in demand by national intelligence agencies. In 2007 and 2008, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (DNI) held two conferences to bring together the

whole intelligence community with people in what they called mission-critical communities. These “heritage communities” included Arabs, Iranians, Chaldeans, Lebanese, Turks, Sikhs, Japanese Americans, and Muslims (Interview with Abed Ayoub, ADC Legal Director, 3/16/2011). Obviously, with the exception of Japanese Americans, the DNI was seeking whoever could help with intelligence and military missions abroad, regardless of the classification and naming of these communities. A speech to these communities by DNI’s Deputy Director indicated that there had been a conflation of Arab and Muslim Americans from 2001 to 2008:

We need to expand our focus. Clearly 911 in recent years have led us to focus on Muslims and Arab Americans. But there are a number of other communities that we need to understand, work with and will be part of our ability to deal with the world we’re trying to work in. We need to understand countries like Indonesia, for example. (Kerr 2008, 2–3)

The DNI Deputy Director let it slip that they saw “Muslims and Arab Americans” as *one* group and when the DNI’s focus expanded to Indonesia that was a different country, even though Indonesia has a Muslim-majority population.

Though Muslims and Arabs were sought out by federal and intelligence agencies, there is some debate over how much of a role religion plays. According to Dr. Zogby, who has been an activist since the 1970s, this stigma of being Arab has been around for decades and continues, “In policy circles, being an Arab is still seen as a liability – Muslim or Christian.” He contends that most of the people hired in the Arab/Muslim slots are South Asian Muslim Americans *because of* politics. Zogby thinks that Arab Americans are not hired because they are presumed to be pro-Palestinian and that being pro-Palestinian is more of a political liability than a Muslim identity. Off the record, I

was told that religious identity can make a difference in the hiring and promotion of civil service personnel, particularly in the Department of Defense and the State Department because Arab Christians are considered “safer” and “more loyal” to the US than Arab Muslims, while still having the Arabic linguistic and cultural skills that are in demand. Mirroring Islamophobic stereotypes, Muslim Americans were allegedly suspected of not holding democratic ideals and maintaining a stronger allegiance to Islam than to the US. In this matrix, ethno-religious identifications were seen as potentially political but linguistic and cultural fluency played major factors in hiring and promotion choices.

Age Differentiations

A total of 79 percent of the respondents in this study said that they had been assumed to be Muslim while living and working in the Washington DC metro area. While almost all of those 40 years of age and younger reported that they had been assumed to be Muslim at one or many points in their lives, only two-thirds of those in the older cohort of interviewees reported the same finding, as table below illustrates.

Table 3 Assumption of being Muslim by Age Cohort

	Over 50		Age 40 and Under	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Not assumed to be Muslim	10	33.3%	1	4.8%
Assumed to be Muslim	20	66.7%	20	95.2%
Total	30	1	21	1

The differences in age cohorts can be seen in the responses to my question, “Have you ever been assumed to be Muslim?” Two older subjects wrote their answers:

Yes, but rarely.... The organizers had assumed the popular conflation of Arab = Muslim, and were surprised that I am Christian. Most people familiar with Middle Eastern culture know from my name that I am not Muslim.

i was never assumed to be a muslim due to the fact that i was born christian and i will remain christian, of course i respect muslims and islam, in fact most of my friends are muslim.

Most of the answers below were from the younger cohort who emphatically stated that they *had* been assumed to be Muslim, even by people who knew them personally, such as a secretary. Once again, I have left their written responses in the original text:

Yes, ALWAYS. People automatically think Im Muslim without asking (hell even my own roommate thought I was Muslim). Depending on who they people are, some are in shock that Im Christian even asking, oh did you convert? or confused that there are Christians. Well its a constant struggle, what can I say?

Yes. ALL the time. Almost every day. Sometimes I disabuse people of the notion. Sometimes I feel guilty when I do, because they then treat me as if they’re relieved that I’m not “one of them.”

Yes. Sometimes after people discover I am Arab American (either after asking because of my name, or if I volunteer the information) they continue to converse

as if they are under the impression that I am Muslim. Sometimes people say “so are you Muslim.” This is by no means the elite, but it has happened enough that I have taken note. Sometimes it is not assumed, but asked.

Yes! It is the immediate assumption people make after I say that my parents immigrated from Syria. My name does not immediately identify me as Christian so maybe that is a part of it. My secretary thought an area rug in my office was a prayer rug! Up until then I had assumed she knew I was Christian (thought my saint calendar gave it away).

There seems to be intersectionality in the above passages between age and the assumption of being Muslim. The older subject said that they had never been assumed to be Muslim, or rarely, and the younger subjects said that it was the “immediate assumption.” Although being assumed to be Muslim does not equal a racialization, age and religious affiliations, it should be considered as factors that led to racial formations, as the RFTists postulate.

It's Easier for us as Christians

Religious identity were considered by some to be pivotal in their ability to “assimilate” or adapt and to be socially accepted in the US and that it was easier for Christians than it was for Muslims. This was well-illustrated in an informal focus group of four men, who were either first or second generation in the US, with the latest arrival in the late 1960s, agreed, “We as Christians tend to become part of society easier than our Muslim counterparts... we don’t stick out like a sore thumb.” He explained that beyond clothing, Christians drink, don’t fast for Ramadan or pray five times a day. By attending work happy hours, parties and gatherings, he thought that it was easier for Arab Christians to be accepted socially. He surmised that while it was easier for more educated, less religious Muslims to fit in, religious Muslims tended to “stick out.”

Another man in the group then told a story to illustrate this point. The second man had once owned a large ice-cream business. One of the truck drivers he hired was Muslim and had pulled over on the freeway to pray. A highway patrolman, mistaking the drivers' prostrations for passing out or an epileptic fit, stopped and called 911. As the business owner, he was called in to diffuse and explain the situation with the cops and emergency medical personnel – at this point his audience and I were all laughing, but there was a serious point to the story: through their behavior, and particularly through religious practices, Muslims don't assimilate as easily as Christians.

Men in the older cohort (over 50 years old) were the most likely age/gender group to articulate this type of assimilatory discourse. As one man in his 60s recounted:

We were assimilated – we were assimilating very rapidly... there just was no sense growing up that we were *other than* fully assimilated and accepted Arabs or American citizens. (#147, his emphasis)

He explained that “Arab” was not a term that they used in his childhood and teen years in Alexandria, VA in the 1950s and ‘60s. He recalled that when he was younger it “never would have occurred to them [his Catholic school classmates]” that he or his family was anything other than Catholic and Lebanese. He feels that he is more likely to be assumed to be Jewish or Italian than Muslim. This man, and his family, was active in the Republican Party and in conservative think tanks in the Reagan years and felt completely accepted by the Party. He explained, “The notion that we would be discriminated against for our – for all that we were Arab – was not something I grew up with. I’ve come to realize it; it’s real, I mean don’t misunderstand, but it was a different experience [then].” (#147) Even though he recognizes that there is currently an anti-Arab

bias which he finds “very regrettable”, he self-identifies as Lebanese by heritage and white by race.

Many of this generation have left social circles that can be identified as Arab, Syrian or Lebanese and have become “plain” whites and “plain” RCC or Protestants. The few that were included in this study, said that they had no or few Arab American friends and did not attend a church that had any Arab congregants that they knew of. They have little attachment to their forefathers’ culture beyond food, and have no Arabic language skills except for food names in what I have called “kitchen Arabic” elsewhere (Kayyali 2006b, 84). Although such Americans of Syrian-Lebanese descent may be very numerous in the capital area, they were probably under-represented in this study because they do not have connections with Arab institutions, including the Orthodox, Melkite and Maronite churches, and thus are hard to find (Hyndman-Rizik 2010). There is an intertwining here of race, ethnicity and religious identities, as well as a dominant discourse of assimilation that creates racial formations, as the RFTists describe.

I sought out a few cases that reflected this position since it is part of the Arab American Christian experience. One conversation was fascinating in its illustration of the extremely conflicted identifications of the “assimilated” descendants of the Syrians who immigrated in the early twentieth-century. In an interview in a coffee shop, one woman in her 70s expressed her complicated bitterness and anger towards her own Lebanese heritage and her deceased mother. She said that when asked, “Where are you from?” she always replies that she is from Washington DC. She said that she “would feel alienated in a Muslim situation” and does not relate to the term “Arab” but answered that she was

“Arab American” by ancestry (#145). To the last statement, I asked why. She answered that in her own childhood growing up in Georgetown, she felt branded as “less than because of the Lebanese/Syrian connection.” She thought that this was mostly due to her mother’s disdain for her Syrian heritage and her mother’s own dark skin – an embarrassment she carried from her childhood experiences in Australia and New Zealand, where she was called a “dirty Arab.” Her mother thought that one was “more handsome if you don’t have a hooked nose - a Semitic feature.” In her mother’s mind her own physical features and dark skin acted as a cultural “stigma” that hampered her much-desired upward social mobility.

From Orthodox heritage, her mother went to an Episcopal Church even though there was a Syrian Orthodox Church in DC at the time. Although her parents spoke Arabic to each other at home, they never did so in public and did not teach their daughter Arabic: “I do not speak Arabic because mother didn’t want me to learn Arabic. My parents spoke Arabic in front of me and I didn’t know what they were saying.... I wanted to learn it but never pursued it. My parents forbade it and I had no one to speak it with.” She said that her mother’s opinions “rubbed off on me” and she deeply resented her mother for deliberately distancing her from her Syrian-Lebanese identity. She married a man who is “Mediterranean” (he is of Italian-American background), and they had a daughter. She said that her daughter would not identify as Lebanese but as a “Lebalian” (Lebanese-Italian). Like her daughter, she has never been assumed to be Muslim and sees herself as “white.”

Surprisingly, this woman then expressed her regret about not having “an attachment to the culture” and at one time sought out friends at the Lebanese Taverna but found that they didn’t want to talk with her about her heritage. When she sees someone who is of a similar background as her own on the street, she wants to approach them and say “Oh that’s my background! But there was nothing I could say. I have no credentials.” Based on understandings of her own of “lack of credentials”, she no longer believed in the possibility of having Arab or Muslim friends, and felt “alienated” when confronted with people that to her represented her lost heritage. There certainly was no strategic or political alliance here with contemporary Arab Americans or with Arabs or Muslims in any way. This interview illustrated that even the country-based Lebanese identity could dissipate within two generations and shared place of origin may not translate into a common social or political ethnic identifications. The dominant ideology of assimilation, and the state’s classification of her family as “white” and white only, with no ethnic modifiers (officially), paved the way for intermarriage and the eventual loss of her heritage.

Distinguishing Symbols and Missed Cues

Religious identities can be articulated through the wearing of symbols that give cues to individual religious affiliation. Wearing a cross or having a Christian name obviously reflects a personal identification as Christian but that is often not “seen” as Christian by non-Arab Americans who assume Islamic affiliations. Within the Arab American community, such symbols do convey sectarian affiliations that reflect family identity and intra-ethnic Christian differentiations. Sometimes these items can signal

microspaces, which mark the intersections between religious, national and political affiliations.

Crosses

Gold crosses around a woman's or man's neck generally denote a Christian identity, but many AACs reported that when they wore crosses, instead of seeing a Christian, they were still tagged as Muslim by non-Arab Americans. Although visible crosses could have acted as religious symbols similar to the *hijab* worn by some Muslim women, they were often not seen as indicative of the wearer's religious identity even in DC, which presumably has a population that is aware of the presence of Christians from the Middle East.

In this study, two-thirds of respondents were wearing a religious item on their person at the time of the interview. The reasons for wearing a cross varied – some wore a cross for “cultural reasons”, others because someone from their family gave it to them and still others because it brought them closer to God. One woman wore both a cross and a pendant that says “Allah” together to “create[s] a little dialogue.”⁸ With this combination, she used the symbolism and space around her neck to make a statement about striving for ecumenism and cooperative Muslim-Christian relations.

One-third of respondents who did not wear a cross said that they did so intentionally. One woman said that she wanted to challenge the stereotypes of Muslims and people's “very simplistic way of looking at it” [sectarian divisions]. Another woman chose not to wear a cross because it created visual religious differentiations between

⁸ Allah is an Arabic word for God used by Muslims and Christians but more often associated with Islam.

Muslims and Christians, and in her words, “I like to be looked at as an Arab.” Thus, the *absence* of a cross sometimes did have political connotations --- the non-wearer was making a pan-Arab statement that reflected his or her secular identity.

Wearing a cross can signal a religious identification as a Christian in addition to a sectarian affiliation as Orthodox or Melkite. While some AACs wear a “plain cross”, other AACs wear the Orthodox which may not be as easily recognized as a cross. The Eastern Orthodox cross has three bars (pictured on the left below). This cross can be inserted into the Russian or Greek Orthodox cross (pictured on the right).



Figure 3 Orthodox Crosses

Regardless of the presence of a cross, after AACs had stated directly that they were Christian, the next question often was, “When did you convert to Christianity?” This question reveals that there was a second assumption that they (or their families) were Muslim, when they emigrated, or that they had emigrated because or after they had converted to Christianity. Although most did not mind being misidentified as Muslim,

this last question would irk them and prompted laughter and sarcasm when recounting their replies such as:

- “We’re the original Christians... In fact my ancestors were worshipping Christians when yours were in trees (he chuckled). I mean everyone was originally Orthodox in the entire region when Islam came in the fifth-century [sic]” (#151)
- “I became Christian about 2,000 years ago. I said, Christianity started in my country. It didn’t start here in the Bible Belt or somewhere (he chortled)” (#139)
- “We were Christians way before you were Christians. We were *first-century* Christians” (#133, his emphasis)
- “I’m not a convert, they are. I’ve always been a Christian- my ancestors are the first to follow Jesus Christ” (#150)

The Role of Architecture

Architecture and church tours asserted the ancient-ness of their faith and its Apostolic beginnings. By decree of the Metropolitan Saliba, new Antiochian Orthodox churches should be built with a dome – an architectural feature typical of Byzantine churches that simultaneously evokes their ancient heritage and origins in the Holy Land. Tour guides of the churches at the annual food festivals emphasize the Orthodox Church’s architecture and its long history in the Middle East. Perhaps this identification as the authentic Christians was political: deployed to counteract the hegemonic positions of Protestantism and Catholicism in the US and part of an insistence on a place in the religious landscape in the US,- a place that is uniquely Eastern Christian.

The Maronite Church in DC stands besides the national Maronite Seminary and is “avant garde” in its architecture. The exterior and entrance of the church is white with clean lines that represents, in the architect’s words, “a new pioneering trend in design recently called “new edge design” (Moukarzel 2013). Although the narthex is designed to

recall the old medieval narthex in the Maronite tradition, the overall impression of the building is that it is not ancient but contemporary. No tours are given during the church's annual festival, perhaps precisely because it is not uniquely Eastern or different in its architecture. Rather, the message sent by the church architecture is that it is a new church that is "integrated in the physical, aesthetical and social environment of contemporary Washington" (Ibid). It is almost as if the church's architecture itself embodies an assimilatory discourse.

The hijab

In the last few years, the sight of women wearing headscarves or the *hijab*, or a long black or dark over-dress or *abaya*, has become more commonplace in Washington DC. Although there are many Muslim women who do not wear a head covering, this clothing is seen as a signifier of Islam and a visual difference between Arab Christian and Muslim women. One respondent said that Christians "don't wear hijabs or cover up – they're very Westernized" (#121). Notably, the outward appearance of being "westernized" in this and other narratives was couched *in opposition to* looking or seeming Muslim, and acted to counteract the possibility of discriminatory treatment. A 56-year old man that I first met at the Melkite church festival, explained that neither he nor his Muslim friends, who have lived in the US for twenty to thirty years, have ever been discriminated against or attacked because, in his words, "they've all been assimilated into the American community – nobody would cross their eye at them" (#121). Part of "being assimilated" for this man was clothing – and particularly the *hijab* or headscarf – which for him and at least a dozen other AACs in this study, played a

larger role in *attracting* discriminatory treatment than accent or even place of origin. For these twelve interviewees, the religious identifications of Muslims were made through the *presence* of the *hijab*, or bushy beards for men. They reasoned that since Christian women do not wear a *hijab*, they should not be tagged as Muslim.

Loving Pepperoni and other non-halal foods

Like the *hijab*, some felt that eating pork products should be seen as an indicator of their non-Muslim-ness. Arab Americans perceived questions about food preferences at work as subtle ways to find out a co-worker's religion without asking. Rather than clarifying their religious identity, ordering food with pork in it seemed to confuse co-workers and new social acquaintances and illuminated that their co-workers believed that all Arabs were Muslim.. Take the example of a young engineer who explained that ordering pizza at his job always turned into a fiasco in which he had to defend his love of pepperoni.

For the longest time people assumed that I was Muslim [at work] because I am Arab. I mean I had people where [they would] order pizza and something and they'd say "Wait! It has pepperoni!" and I would say "So?" and they'd say, "You're not supposed to eat pork." I was like, "Says who?" "Like, you're Muslim" and I was like, "No I'm not!" and they're like, "Yes, you *are*" and I'm "No I'm not!" [And] they're like "But you're Arab", and I'm like "I'm Arab but I'm not Muslim." (#134)

Another young man said that he was often assumed to be Muslim, even by Arab Americans. Once after an Arab American event he went out for a late-night dinner with new acquaintances and ordered empanada that had pulled pork as an ingredient. He was quickly warned that there was pig meat in the empanada. Even after he said, "Yes, I know. I'm Christian". They did not believe him. The whole scenario became so awkward

that he changed his order. He added that he finds it a little unbelievable that Arab Americans who work at his Arab American advocacy organization don't already know that he is Christian since he goes home for Christmas and Easter and has a Christian name. It seems that everyone misses cues about religious identity that are obvious indicators – even flags of identifications – to AACs.

Names

A person's name is often the first piece of information offered to a stranger whether in the form of a passport, ID, business card, personal referral or email address. During this research I was often given a name of someone to contact before I met them. At some point during the research process, I began to realize that names carried more than a personal identification. Names could convey religious and political identifications as well as the family's history. Before the mid-1920s immigration officials at ports of entry, including at Ellis Island, transcribed names. Their last names were Anglicized, "sounded-out" Arabic names that in the subsequent generations were accompanied by (often non-religious) American first names, creating names such as Lindsey Aed ("Aed would now be spelled as "Eid"). Before and after World War II, the immigrants wrote their own names down, creating names that reflected Arabic spellings and local colloquial pronunciations. These names often reflected the language of colonialism. Palestinians, Jordanians and Iraqis who were under British colonial rule often had Christian English first names such as Elizabeth, Catherine, John, and George. Lebanese and Syrians, who were under French colonial rule, tended to have French first names and spellings such as Michel, Jean, Marie and Danielle or Biblical names such as Paul, Peter and Joseph in

English. There are some clear overlaps in these categories --- two-thirds of all the respondents had first names that are obviously Biblical (and therefore Christian), and one-third had Arabic names such as Ghassan, Omar, Ranya, and Layla that offer no clues about the person's religion. As I continued with my work, I found that my assumptions based on a name only were often, but not always, reflected in their answers about their own self-identifications. Let me explain.

The early Syrian settlers sought to become white, middle-class Americans who spoke English. Their descendants, such as the fictitious Lindsay Aed, who carry their last names tend to see themselves as primarily white and American, but ethnically Lebanese or Syrian and tend to be Antiochian Orthodox, Protestant or Roman Catholic (although some remained Melkite and Maronite). Their political loyalty lies with the US. They might follow politics in the Middle East and sympathize with Palestinians or Lebanese in the homeland. The people who had English first names and Arabic last names were a mixed group and perhaps the most unpredictable in terms of religious and political affiliations. People with Arabic first and last names tended to relate to an Arab or an Arab American identity even if they were the second or third generation in the US. Politically, they may or may not identify primarily as Americans but held strong ethnic ties which were sometimes manifested in a commitment to the church (usually to the Orthodox Church) or to political homeland causes (particularly if they were Palestinian). Lastly, those with French names tended to be immigrants who left Lebanon during the civil war and were Maronite. They usually identified as Lebanese and American and did not self-identify as Arabs or Arab Americans. Politically, they were either mostly uninterested in

the politics of the Middle East or were only interested in Lebanese issues, particularly in the independence of Lebanon.

Non-Arab Americans tend to skip over the first name to examine the last name for place of origin, but Arab Americans like myself were more likely to pay attention to the full name as indicators of their acquaintance's complex religious, national and political affiliations. Therefore, within Arab American circles, there were less direct questions about religious identifications than in non-Arab encounters but the question, "Where are you from?" still was posed – the differences in answers depended on perceptions of the audience's identity, knowledge and motivation for the question. Answers could be drawn from overlapping, multiple identifications. As Philip Kayal (2002, 106) wrote,

At any moment I am primarily a Syrian, Aleppian, Melkite, or Arab. Normally and ideally there is no conflict between them and they often overlap, but each has its own primacy, use, and relevance.

Like Kayal, many of the subjects in this study had multiple identification options.

Church Identities

People often switched churches and moved *between* Christian sects.⁹ A common reason cited for switching churches was marriage and wanting to attend the same church as their spouse and children. The Orthodox moved to conservative Protestant Churches, such as the Episcopal Church or to the RCC (Interview with Fr. George 06/20/12). While some of the Syrian Orthodox that I met, attended Antiochian Orthodox Churches, some became Melkite or chose not to attend church. Under the surface sometimes were

⁹ It is less frequent to find Arab Christians converting to Islam. In my fieldwork, I came across only two cases of Christian to Muslim conversion.

political reasons for switching churches which left sects somewhat aligned along national identities.

Philip Kayal reported that in the 1970s the American Syrian-Lebanese were one continuous group supported by the Melkite, Maronite and Orthodox Churches. In 2002, he wrote that there were national divisions that were reflected in these social institutions.

In reality, the Lebanese were more likely to be Maronites (and the Maronites, Lebanese), although there was a large and often disregarded group of Aleppian Maronites and Lebanese Orthodox. Melkites were more likely to be Syrian, although their clergy was often Lebanese; and the Orthodox, being both Syrian and Lebanese, were more likely to Arab identified. (Kayal 2002, 100)

He found that these alliances changed between the 1980s and 2002 due to “the Palestinian question in Lebanon and, that of Lebanon’s unashamed religious nationalism (making it a ‘natural’ Israeli bedfellow)” (ibid.) According to Kayal, Maronites initiated these changes by positioning their church as Lebanese and then creating Syrian as a separate distinct identity that was not Lebanese *or* Maronite (previously it was an hyphenated identity based on the Ottoman Syrian province). In my research, I found ethno-national-religious alliances similar to Kayal’s 2002 model, with the addition of Palestinians to the Orthodox and Lebanese to the Melkites (not just in the clergy). Therefore, the general (and simplistic!) scheme of connectivity was Maronite-Lebanese, Melkite-Syrian-Lebanese, and Orthodox-Syrian-Lebanese-Palestinian.

At the Lady of Lebanon Maronite Church in DC, there is a strong ethno-linguistic element --- Arabic is regularly heard and Syriac (a dialect of middle Aramaic spoken in the region from the 4th to 8th century AD) is used in the liturgy. Lebanon and its politics are featured in the sermons and services as *the* shared heritage of its members. According

to oral histories, this has developed since the 1970s and 80s, when many Maronites came to the capital region, fleeing the civil war in Lebanon and bringing right-wing Maronite politics with them. Those, who did not share these politics, including some of the new immigrants and many of the older generations of Syrian-Lebanese Americans.

I interviewed, disliked the politics which they characterized as right-wing, anti-Palestinian and Lebanese nationalist (see Marinova 2010 for more on the politics of US-based Lebanese groups). They drifted to other churches or stopped attending church altogether. During a church service, there were many children running around the church, shouting when the priest was trying to be heard. He became irritated and exclaimed that “we” had left Lebanon to escape Hizbollah and now there were “little Hizbollahs” terrorizing us here at church. The priest, Fr. Joe Rahal, used the politics of Lebanon to create humor and control the children, to no avail. Although an off-the-cuff comment, it reflected the church’s politics and nationalistic Lebanese Christian identity. Church identities are discursively produced and often depend on the priest’s politics, history and his approaches to the concept of an ethnic church. The priest at the Melkite Church, Fr. Joe Francavilla, was Latin Rite Roman Catholic (RC) and became an Eastern Rite RC, or a Melkite. He began his term as the priest of Holy Transfiguration Church in 1971, and has been instrumental in the church’s growth almost since its very beginning. As the priest, he is the ultimate decision-maker at the local church level. Fr. Joe opposes the concept of an Arabic ethnic church and focuses on a mission of faith,

We don’t exist to be able to run a food festival. We don’t exist to be able to make sure that all the Arabs have a place to worship. We’re here because it’s doing the work of Christ. (Interview 03/31/12)

About half of the parish's members are "converts" (like Fr. Joe) and half are "cradle-born" meaning that they were "born into" the church through their family's faith. While the term "convert" is less popular (and inaccurate), the congregants themselves use terms, "cradle-born" or "cradle" Melkites to describe those who have Lebanese and/or Syrian roots, although some of those with Lebanese or Syrian roots had grown up in Egypt and the Sudan before moving to the US.

The "cradle-born" were the founders of the church and are active on the various committees, particularly the Middle Eastern Food Festival Committee, which raises one-third to half of the annual revenue for the church. As Matthew Stiffler (2010) found in his work on an Orthodox Church in Detroit, these festivals use Orientalist and cultural tropes to commodify and sell symbolic ethnic items such as hummus, baklava and kabobs, etc. The "Middle Eastern" element is why people came and is a point of pride for the "cradle-born", who spend many hours preparing the homemade foods for sale with recipes that have been passed down through generations. The festival is now in its twentieth year of operation and Fr. Joe supports the festival wholeheartedly saying, "Of course the events have an ethnic flavor – that's part of the fun!" All can come and enjoy "the uniqueness of the Middle Eastern culture – the music is infectious and dancing is infectious... and you don't have to be able to speak Arabic to dance." But, when he is asked or pressed by a congregant to maintain the Arab ethnicity of the church, he reminds the person that Arab culture is "a Muslim phenomenon" and that "there has been an Islamization of Christian thought." He then talked about Arab social norms and marriage patterns:

Fr. Joe: Among the Arabs the preferred level of relationship is to marry cousins, first cousins perhaps for example. In fact the colloquial Arabic word for mother-

in-law is wife of my father's brother, presuming you've married your first cousin, okay? Mart-ammi – you know Arabic? – it's mart ammi.

RK: You're right. I've never even thought about it – yes, you're right.

Fr. Joe: Typically, this type of marriage is what would happen in Islam – one way that they've been Islamized unconsciously because you just can't live in a culture that values these relationships and use this terminology...

Fr. Joe wanted his congregants to prioritize their faith identification with the Church over ethnic or cultural identifications. Therefore he rejected “Islamized” marriage patterns, which he pointed out, were against Byzantine laws. Ironically, since the Melkites had become Catholics, they were exempt from Byzantine laws and were therefore allowed to marry first cousins, if the bishop was petitioned and approved. The differentiation in which church follows Byzantine laws led to ecclesiastical cooperation between the Orthodox and Melkite Churches in DC. The Orthodox priest, Fr. George was forbidden from administering first cousin marriages so he would send Fr. Joe the Orthodox couples who were first cousins and wished to marry and Fr. Joe would marry them in the Melkite Church.

When I asked the “cradle-born” what they thought of Fr. Joe, they said that they fully supported his focus on faith and respected his leadership of the church. Like many of the “converts” these “cradle-born” were against Vatican II and wanted to keep the Eastern Rites of the Church “pure.” They were against divorce, abortion as well as any form of birth control --- issues that are tagged in the US as right-wing and conservative. Those who attended other churches often came back for the annual festival and for baptisms, funerals, weddings and for a few special holydays, were less supportive of the domestic political agenda of the church, feeling that it was “too far right” for them even if they voted Republican. In this way, domestic politics simultaneously created fractures

and fusions for the Melkites in Virginia. My conclusion from this example is that the battle over identity happens *in* individual churches and causes realignments of church affiliations to national and ethno-linguistic identifications.

Identifying as Palestinian and Arab and then Christian (or secular)

Palestinian Christians were the most likely group to express their Arab and Palestinian self-identification and to prioritize national identities over Christian ones, such as the 40-year old man quoted below:

RK: Have you ever been assumed to be Muslim?

Respondent: Yeah, of course.

RK: Can you explain what happened?

Respondent: People ask you where you are from and you say I am Palestinian or you say that you're Arab and 99.9% of the time the assumption is that you are Muslim.

RK: What do you say after they assume that you are Muslim? Or do they say it?

Respondent: I usually don't go there but if they think of me as Muslim, that's fine with me.

RK: Uh-huh. So you just let it slide?

Respondent: It depends on the situation. I don't have, I don't have ill feelings, like I am being stereotyped in a certain way because - in terms of religion – *because religion is not my identity. My identity is being Palestinian, being Arab and that's what counts for me.* I don't care that [I am] being stereotyped as Muslim or non-Muslim or Christian or not Christian. It's the other stereotypes that bothers [sic] me. That has to do with my nationality. (#129, my emphasis)

While this man wore a plain white gold cross – a gift from his mother – he self-identified as a secular nationalist. Prioritizing an Arab identity for this man, as well as some of the Lebanese and Syrian respondents, was tied to his commitment to the Palestinian struggle for peace and justice.

Palestinian Christians come from a very diverse set of churches including the Episcopal, Greek Orthodox, Melkite, Roman Catholic, Evangelical/Pentecostal Churches

as well as Quakers and those who self-identified as “spiritual.” Both Palestinians and Jordanians are directly under the jurisdiction of the Greek Orthodox Church and not the Antiochian Patriarchate (as the Lebanese and Syrian Orthodox are). However, when they arrive in the US, they gravitate to the Antiochian Orthodox Church for community reasons. Although there are Palestinian Melkites, Middle East politics sometimes combines with local church dynamics to force switches of religious identifications. One man I met at the Ramallah convention had left the Melkite Church in Detroit because in the 1980s it was “too Lebanese”, meaning Lebanese nationalist that had an anti-Palestinian edge. With a Palestinian national identity, he felt alienated and so he joined the Orthodox Church, which typically has more Palestinian-friendly politics. He said that after he was received by the sacrament of chrismation in a private ceremony, he *became* Orthodox.

Class, place of residence and origin play significant roles in which church Palestinian Christians chose to attend and identify with. Some of the older immigrants from Ramallah, who have been financially successful in the US, are now living in the most expensive suburbs, such as McLean and Vienna in Northern Virginia. The Ramallahites attend and perhaps even dominate the lay membership (particularly the volunteers) at the Orthodox church in suburban Maryland, whereas the more recent Palestinian Orthodox immigrants, who tend to be less wealthy and live closer to the DC church. Although both groups have strong opinions and commitments to being Palestinian, how and where they worship depends on their place of residency and their socio-economic situation in the US.

Many Palestinian Christians said that they saw their religious identification as a *useful* conversation opener and as an opportunity to educate their audience on Palestinian issues. Whereas a few years ago, a young female teacher trainer used to just say “Palestinian” when asked where she is from, she now says that she is a “Palestinian Christian.” Questions inevitably followed such as, “Where is Palestine?” or “I didn’t know there were Palestinian Christians” or “There aren’t that many of you left, I can’t believe it!” (#120) She took this opportunity to talk about the plight of Palestinians and the situation of Christians in the Holy Land.

Palestinian American Christians in the DC area recently set up the Palestinian Christian Alliance for Peace (PCAP). While ostensibly religious, its goals are more political and national in nature. PCAP states that its mission is: -

- 1) Creating awareness of the dispossession and oppression of Palestinian people.
 - 2) Providing speakers, literature, materials, and other resources.
 - 3) Advocating for moral support and humanitarian assistance in partnership with Palestinian communities.
 - 4) Supporting boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) initiatives.
- (Unpublished flyer emailed on 11/26/12)*

One of the leaders of this initiative said, “My religious mission is in what I do politically.” (#111) As part of his religious/political mission, he is invited to attend churches of different denominations, worship with them and then give a presentation on the Palestinian/Israeli conflict. He believes that “as a minority, Arab Christians have not had enough play” and uses the label “Arab Christian” to reach out to churches and religious communities, to teach them about Palestine. In his talks, he emphasizes the long history of Christianity in his hometown, Jerusalem, and quipped, “One great success Palestinian Christians have had is the export of Christianity to the rest of the world.”

Rather than seeing religious identity as divisive, it is seen as a bridge to American Christian audiences.

Identifying as Lebanese Christians

For some Melkites and Maronites in this study, “Lebanese Christian” or “Lebanese Catholics” was its own exclusive category of identity that was defined as *not* Arab. While the Melkites and Maronites saw themselves as Christians, their Christianity was not blended with or to be confused with Islam or Muslim identities. One young Lebanese Maronite woman in the study explained to me that while she would marry a Christian or a Jew, she would not marry a Muslim. Another Maronite woman who did not attend church said her sister married a Muslim, though it was controversial in her family. Marrying between Christian sects, however, was less controversial and in fact, regularly happened. In the case of inter-Christian marrying, the children and family were expected to follow the husband/father’s sectarian identity. Sometimes people became non-church going or switched churches to a nearby RCC out of convenience due to philosophical differences with the Church’s or priest’s politics.

The Catholicity of the identity of Melkites and Maronites was tied to ecclesiastical structures in the US. For example, in one of the oral histories I heard, a young Melkite priest went to the Bishop of his diocese expressing his desire to join the priesthood and was told, “You’re a Greek Melkite Catholic, you have to become a Greek Melkite Catholic priest.” From this story, one can learn that (1) a Syrian-Lebanese heritage and a Melkite background precluded him from becoming a plain Latin-rite RC priest and tagged him as only eligible for Melkite Catholic priesthood, (2) the RCC hierarchs

viewed the Melkites as Greek Catholics or Eastern-rite Catholics, and (3) the Melkites clearly have a Catholic identification under the jurisdiction of the US RCC, and not under the Melkite ecclesiastical hierarchies in the Middle East. These combine to create a strong US-defined Catholic identity that is modified by Greek/Eastern rite identifications *before* ethno-national affiliations. Some of the Maronites were tied to the Maronite Church Patriarchate headquartered in Bkerke, Lebanon. Some said that they had switched to a non-ethnic full RCC church affiliation because of the political positions of the Maronite Church. Contrary to internal AAC stereotypes of Maronites, those I spoke with – who mostly did not attend the Maronite Church - did not frame their identity as Phoenician – rather they expressed a Lebanese national origin to the exclusion of any other. Phoenicia is an ancient Semitic civilization that predated Islam that is often used to refer to a staunchly held Lebanese national identity that is not Arab. The only case in which Phoenician heritage was mentioned was by an Orthodox woman in her 60s who explained to me that she didn't identify as Phoenician but her aunt and mother did. She thought that they used the term "Phoenician" to make them seem a "little bit better than being Arab" and to "feel like we're more civilized, you know, we were merchants."

She thought that the word "Phoenician" was totally incomprehensible to most Americans and thus claiming a Phoenician heritage vis-à-vis an Arab ethnic background was lost on the audience for which it was intended. She wanted nothing to do with the Phoenician label and called herself Arab American. Perhaps this realignment from a Phoenician identification to an Arab American one over one generation was influenced by her participation and membership in the Orthodox Church where many self-identified as

Arab American.

Even though there was a distinctive Catholic identity, many Melkites and a few Maronites had Muslim friends. One Lebanese Melkite man said that with his Lebanese Muslim friends

There was really never a mention of religion with each other. You know, we understood – they were Muslim and I was Christian – but we never talked about religion. We talked about common interests, we talked about socializing, and having fun together but religion was never an issue between us, at least negatively. I would go to their houses around our feast – Christmas – they would have Christmas trees in their homes. At the end of Ramadan when they had their *fitr* – or sometimes during Ramadan when they had their *fitr* or *iftar* in the evening, they would invite us as well. So religion was never an issue to be discussed in a negative way. (#121)

The basis of these friendships was common interests, a mutual national affiliation and a respect for the other's religious traditions. In this framework, religious identities were clear but not divisive. However, a distinct *Lebanese* Christian identity was commonly expressed in Maronite and Melkite circles.

Identifying as Syrian Christians

Since December 2010, news coverage of the Arab Spring in Syria, Egypt, Bahrain and Iraq has heightened awareness of the presence of Christians in those countries. Starting in 2012, the Assad regime began fighting the Free Syrian Army. The media coverage has highlighted the persecution and mass exodus of Christians from Syria (for example Shea 2013). During the Asad regime (1970-present), Christians and Alawites were favored and the uprisings were increasingly seen as Islamic in nature during the latter half of the interviews. These unfolding developments did not seriously impact Syrian Americans and their prioritizations of national and religious identifications. At the

start of the research period, one young woman said, “I think that being Syrian and Christian have mostly defined my identity, more so than generally Arab.” She said that she did not self-identify as “Arab” because she thought that there was an “automatic affiliation here [the US] with Arabs and Muslims.” She said that she closely identified as a Christian and her social circles as “Syrians and Lebanese.” She recalled her childhood:

For me the church was really integral in my upbringing. I went on a weekly basis, hardly ever missed, and the social, the community, of the church became really important in my life and it still is (and for my parents) and so a lot of our social activity revolves around the church and other Syrian and Lebanese Christians.
(#108)

Towards the end of the research period, a retired Melkite priest explained, “I’m not a fan of Assad but he tolerated the Catholics there – he allowed them to build and grow but whoever is going to take his place, we now --- we don’t know what will happen to the Christians.” Concern over Christians in Syria prompted the Melkite Church to take up at least one collection and to pray for the Syrian people during services.

Conclusion

As Hall on Gramsci argued, the state is a hegemonic agent in racial classifications but the authority of the state is propped up by ideology. Firstly, the OMB classifications do not recognize ethnicity as Arab or national origins, but place an emphasis on a regional MENA identity that makes MENAns white. Secondly, AACs report that they are assumed to be Muslim through their origins in Muslim-majority MENA countries. Thirdly, the state reproduces these dynamics that merge Arab and Muslim as identity categories at the top echelons of the political power in the US, including White House Administrations and the Office of the DNI. These efforts have been accompanied by

ideologies that create consent from non-Arab Americans in the form of discourse that derived from Samuel Huntington's clash of civilizations thesis. Political discourses that posit Arabs as the enemy of Israel and US foreign policy objectives help to frame Arab Christians as targets, as shown by a 2009 graffiti incident in which a local church was marked with anti-Arab, pro-Israeli graffiti for considering Palestinian human rights important.

Rather than being Muslim or a monolithic group of Eastern Christians, AACs belong to many types of churches and may identify as secular, by sect or simply as Christian. Religious identity can be reflected in a person's name or the type of cross they wear. These may be cues better understood by other AACs than by non-Arabs but still mark significant religious self-identifications. A social constructivist approach can be used to study the religious/secular identities of Arab Americans on its own or in combination with ethnic, national or racial formations. To this end, I argue that RFTists must prioritize religious identities in understanding Arab American identifications that are multi-faceted.

CHAPTER 4: RESISTANCE TO WHITE RACIAL CLASSIFICATIONS AFTER 9/11

“Have ya’ll seen Arabs? We ain’t white! [she laughs]... We are not Anglo-Saxon!”
(#113)

“Well, I mean I don’t like the racial designations anyway. They’re very problematic and there’s no such thing as purity, so where do you draw the lines? [he laughs] But, white in this country tends to mean white Anglo-Saxon and western in real heritage and even color-wise, we’re not white. Some are very white but, on average, we’re not! [he laughs again]” (#111)

Many of the respondents, such as the young woman and the older male quoted above, did not feel that they were white by race in their lived experiences. About half of the sample disagreed with the racial classification system altogether or said that their race depended on context and circumstances. About half of the sample agreed with the Census Bureau (CB)’s “white” racial classification. This is not an overwhelming support of whiteness and indicates dissent from the official OMB and CB classifications, which essentialize Arab Americans as white, full stop. Some other federal forms do include categories that have MENA or Arab as check boxes, but the CB’s clear demarcation of Arab American’s racial status provides a clear display of the state’s hegemonic rulings on race and is a solid jumping off point for this chapter.

Some CRT theorists have looked at this phenomenon such as John Tehranian (2009) and Khaled Beydoun (2007) and some scholars have examined this race issue from a critical whiteness perspective (Abdulrahim 2008). More common in the literature

on Arab Americans is a social constructionist perspective along the lines of Omi and Winant's work (Jamal and Naber 2008; Cainkar 2006; 2008; 2009). This chapter will contribute to the literature by specifically placing Christian religious and secular identifications into this mix of race discussions on Arab Americans. As illustrated in the introduction, I insert "the religion factor" to shed light on the meaning and impact of racial classifications for "borderline whites." I argue that the saliency of whiteness still holds true for many in the older generation who value their white status. The younger generation and activists are more apt to have a counter narrative that includes alternative non-race classifications or a nonwhite racial identity. While official classification systems fail to account for some of the ongoing racializations, it is not totally due to the omission of religion and religious discrimination. Ethnic identity, names and place of origin contribute to the racial formations. The explanatory factor for the differences in racial self-identifications is ideology – specifically how the individual situates him or herself in the discourses of assimilation and white privilege. Utilizing direct responses in interviews and oral histories, this chapter will explore how Arab Americans relate to the Census' classifications and how they self-identify when asked directly about their race and their origins in public contexts.

Inheriting Whiteness

Arab Americans who grew up in the US in the 1940s, 1950s and early 1960s or moved to the US after World War II inherited the legal legacy of Syrians being classified as "white." Many of the older respondents knew of the legal cases that determined the Syrians to be white and saw their own classification as due to Arab Americans who

“lobbied so hard to be considered white a century ago, [so] we need to understand the repercussion of those actions” (#104). Indeed, this history of the pursuit of whiteness and the socio-political imperative to be classified as white to secure full acceptance into US society through citizenship was not lost on the older generations of Arab Americans. They well understood the socio-political racial binary that was even more pronounced in the “the American South” which includes the whole DC area (though part of the northern reaches of the South). Locating oneself as white was acutely important and strategic because it meant legal as well as cultural citizenship (Ong 1999). CRTists argue that the state set the system up to place whites at the top of the racial hierarchies by bestowing legal status and privilege.

Certainly in the 1950s, upholding white racial classifications meant that avenues to a middle-class life and financial opportunities were open. After World War II, Syrians, like other “ethnic whites” such as Jews, Greeks and Italians, were further incorporated into a white category that was broader than just WASPs (White Angle-Saxon Protestants) when they physically relocated from urban neighborhoods to suburbia. As happened in other cities (Aswad 1974), DC’s suburbs grew and suburban “cities” such as the City of Fairfax and the City of Falls Church in northern VA were incorporated in the 1950s and 1960s.

Posing the question on white racial identity

As part of my research, I asked about racial identifications in this way: “Census 2010 classified Arab Americans as “white.” Do you agree with that racial designation? 1. Yes. 2. No 3. Depends. Please explain.” I was not surprised that the respondents were

concerned about their racial status --- only one respondent said that she didn't care what the racial designation was, flagging the fact that the vast majority of respondents knew about the Census racial classification, and it was an issue for Arab Americans in Washington DC. As the table below illustrates, almost half of the respondents agreed with the "white" designation (49%), while the rest (51%) were split between disagreement and "it depends."

Table 4 Positions on the Census Racial Classification as White

	Number	Percent of respondents
Agrees with White	25	49%
Disagrees with White	15	29%
It depends	11	22%
Total	51	100%

The subjects were often very aware of the social construction of them as white and the power of the state as the agent of these racial constructions. As if affirming Gramsci's claim that the state needed consent to maintain its hegemonic position many subjects said that they consented to their whiteness. They even sometimes asserted that whiteness was a privileged position. Among those who agreed with white classifications were two written answers, which, again, I will leave in their original text:

yes i agree to be classified as white in the 2010 census, as i am white

Yes. I associate my racial identity with privilege. Even though politically, sociologically and ideologically I relate very well to people of color, growing up I was always protected by being a Christian and just physical appearance. People

assume I have an European background – Italian or Spanish usually – when they meet me.

The latter subject said that her children, however, do not relate to the “white” label and embrace her husband’s Palestinian (and Muslim) identity as their own (overriding her Lebanese /Syrian heritage). She attributed this to their public Virginia high school that strongly embraced diversity and where the student body hailed from 64 nationalities. This resistance to white classifications by the younger cohort was described by three subjects from the younger cohort who thought of Arabs as a minority group:

I do not feel as an Arab American we have the same history/association or even treated the same as white Americans. Not only do we come from VERY different cultures, the way we are looked at here in the United States is VERY different and I feel having our own distinction would help show our large number and even potentially help with the election where we will finally know where large pockets of Arab Americans are located.

White Americans and other don’t see Arabs as white. I often get: “Oh I thought you were white or Hispanic.” The government doesn’t treat “White Arabs” as “white.” It’s like being “white hispanic”--(1) often, but not always, possessing physical characteristics which differentiate one from other “white” Americans and (2) being thought of us different from other Americans—and treated that way both by the government and the general populace. I personally don’t like the wishy washy construct of race. However, if they’re going to use it, lumping Arabs in with other “whites” whitewashes our unique and troubled experience with ethnicity and race in America.

Arab is not "white" because we are a minority group with a certain shared experience that is different from others--from whites. It would be more accurate to have our own classification, I believe.

The subjects who answered “it depends” to my question often had very different reasons for doing --- at issue was the definitions and understandings of race, and that the identities that they felt closer to than white — “Arab” and “Middle Eastern” — were not “racial” categories. One young woman articulated this position well:

I do not think white is always an accurate representation of the way AAs think about themselves; I think both our culture and the way we are perceived by others sets us apart from "whites." However, a number of Arab Americans would like to think of themselves as white (or already do) especially to set themselves apart from Arab American Muslims, and they would disagree with being labeled as racially different. I also think that because Arab Americans lobbied so hard to be considered white a century ago, we need to understand the repercussion of those actions. So although I sort of disagree with the racial designation, I think a better answer would be to have an ethnic category rather than a racial one.

Most notably, those who answered that they thought their answers "depended" said that they might check the white box, but not mean it. In other words, checking the white box did not mean that they felt that white was a true representation of their racial identity.

In fact, all three groups – those that agreed, disagreed and answered "it depends" – on the Census' race classifications mentioned that the race categories themselves are problematic. Instead, they preferred non-racial identifiers. "Arab" (15 responses) was the most popular alternative racial response, then "Middle Eastern" (9 responses). While Middle Eastern was spread across all three positions on the Census, Arab was most often paired with disagreeing with the Census form. Countries of origin were sometimes offered as additional or better alternatives to white --- Lebanese was the most popular country or origin for those who agreed with white, while Palestinian was the most popular national identity with those who disagreed with white.

This correlates with how respondents answered the question, "Where are you from?" in everyday life. I call this the ancestry question. People who answered that white is the appropriate racial designation, tended to answer that their ancestry was (1) Caucasian, (2) Semitic (3) Syrian or (4) Lebanese. People who disagreed with the white

classification tended to identify as (1) Arab (2) Arab American, (3) Palestinian, or (4) Palestinian/Arab. Middle Eastern as an ancestry response was evenly divided over all three categories and included Lebanese, Syrians and Palestinians.

This gestures to a specifically Lebanese identity being tied to a white identity and a Palestinian or Palestinian/Arab ancestral identity being tied to a nonwhite racial identity. These answers did not map onto religious identities neatly – there were Palestinian, Lebanese and Syrian Orthodox Christians who self-identified as Arab but were divided between white and nonwhite. There were Lebanese Maronites who considered race to be too broad of a social construct to be answered with any accuracy (“it depends”) in addition to the white and nonwhite answers.

Essentialism and Agreeing with White Racial Categories: the Over 50 Cohort

The data and my ethnographic work indicate that age was the most significant factor in predicting answers to the Census racial classification. While I interviewed 25 men and 26 women, as well as both secular and religious people from a variety of sects and nationalities, age was not evenly distributed among my interviewees. While the ages ranged between 18 and 86 years old, the median age was 53 years old. This is on the older side. While Census included those below the age of 18 and my research did not, the median age of Arab Americans was estimated to be 35.4 years old in the 2000 Census. The decade-based distribution of age ranges in my study can be seen as follows in the figure below:

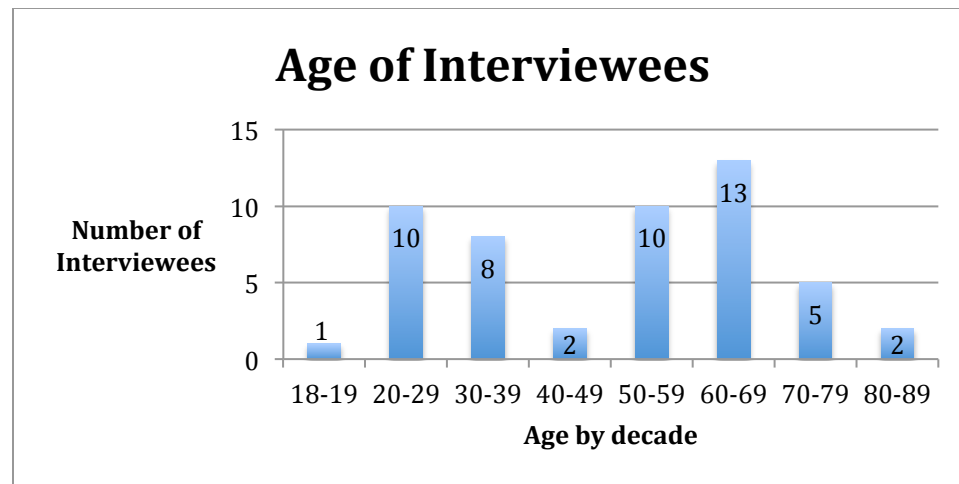


Figure 4 Breakdowns of Age in the Study

As figure above illustrates, there is a notable drop in the number of those in their 40s even though I met *many* people in their 40s in the course of my fieldwork. Yet, they tended to be too busy with family and work to meet one-on-one for a long session. The higher number of those in their 20s, 50s and 60s was due to their willingness and availability for interviews. Although unintentional, this gap in the age groups allows for a starker comparison between those 40 and under and those over 50. (The two people in the study in their 40s were exactly 40 years old, and in my fieldwork those in their 40s tended to react to white Census classifications in a similar way to those in their 20s and 30s). This next section will focus on the difference between the two age cohorts regarding their reactions to the Census' racial definition of Arab Americans as white.

Older White Identifications

As the table below illustrates, two-thirds of the respondents over 50 years old – roughly those born in or before 1962 - agreed with the white designation (68%) whereas

less than half of those 40 and under agreed with the Census' classification of Arabs Americans as white (47%).

Table 5 Age Cohorts in response to Census Question

Position on the Census	50+	40 & Under	Total	Percentage of over 50
Agree with White	17	8	25	68%
Disagrees with White	7	8	15	47%
It depends	6	5	11	55%
Total	30	21	51	59%

Agreement with the white racial ascription was sometimes accompanied by logic that viewed race as essentialist, primordial and static. However, rather than seeing Arab Americans as completely passive or simply complicit in their racial ascription as white, I view them as active agents in this racial classification (here I agree with Abdulrahim 2008, 135). Their contemporary realities were contested in, and their histories steeped in, struggles to “become white.”

Echoing the racial binaries dominant in the US post WWII, many of the 50+ in my study actively agreed with the CB's classification, implicitly acknowledging that white was at the top of the racial hierarchy and the spot that they consciously occupied. Not only did they seem to embrace essentialist and unchanging conceptions of race but often cited the Census as proof and explicitly consented to the state's authority in determining racial classifications. A US-born 58-year old man said that he was white and then asked me, “What else are we?” Those born outside the US were more likely to openly express that they were white *because they were not black* --- whiteness was present and real only in relation to blackness and even Asian-ness. One 58-year old

respondent said, “Yes we are white. What else would you say? We are not black, we are not Asians.” (#150)

Childhood experiences and education helped to create a confirmation and self-identification as white for the US-born. A brother and sister who grew up in the District in the 1950s and 60s agreed with each other, “No question when we were growing up, we were white” (#124/5). A 64-year old woman who grew up in two states (but not in the DC metro area), recounted that in high school she learned that she was Caucasian. She said matter-of-factly, “When I was in high school, there were five categories under Caucasian and we are Semitic, which is a subgroup of the Caucasian race. At least that was the configuration that was in place when I was in high school so I would identify as Caucasian, as Semitic.” In the interview, she turned to the entry for “Caucasian” in her dictionary but the definition was a person from the Caucasus Mountains. She was frustrated and responded, “I don’t like these new dictionaries, they don’t say a damn thing. They’re really lame!” (#130) She was searching for a clear black-and-white definition, in print, to what race she *is* – as if race was a fact, an essence of self and not a social construct. For some the Census categories provide a final say on what race Arab Americans *are* – white – but for others the Census categories can be contested. Replying to the census question in the interviews, one respondent said, “it’s silly, we’re not white, we’re not black. I don’t like that question, period.” (#114)

Understanding white relatively

Many in the older cohort, both born outside the US and US-born, reasoned that they were white because of their skin color. Phenotypically, Arabs range from black to

white and often comments on the self's light skin color was contrasted against other Arab nationalities that were darker and therefore not white, so that the Palestinian, Lebanese and Syrians that I spoke with became lighter-skinned *relationally* to other Arabs. For example, over a game of backgammon at a church festival, a Syrian man who was born in Egypt identified himself as white in race and skin color, following up this pronouncement by saying that many *other* Arabs are "brown" such as Muslims and Copts. His white Syrian-ness sets him apart from Egyptians, whether Christian or Muslim – a concept that he probably brought with him to the US from Egypt. Another older man born in Jerusalem said that he agreed with white,

"I do agree because of the color of my skin but there are a lot of Arab Americans that are not white – you know, you have a lot of Yemenis who are more in the African-American range, as far as color goes. This whole Census stuff, as far as I am concerned – ethnicity designation or whatever, doesn't make sense. I don't agree with all of it – a lot of it is confusing. Is someone from Egypt African-American?" (#139)

These answers signal that sometimes the country-based *national* origins – such as Egyptians, Yemenis or Sudanese were associated with darker-than-white skin color and acted as stand-ins for commentaries on racial ascriptions. While these two gentleman thought that they were white due to their skin color, they disagreed that this meant all Arab Americans were white. Perceived skin color and by extension national origins, created intra-group *racial* distinctions that were beyond ethnic identity.

These distinctions were not only between national/country of origin groups, and sometimes skin color comparisons were made within families. One 25-year-old woman compared her skin color with the darker complexion of her sisters, saying that she is "the

literal white” but then, as if at that moment realizing that race was more complicated than just skin color, she continued, “and then you think of it culturally too – Caucasian, European – and I’m not that.” The categories – Middle Eastern, Caucasian, European – were merged and conflated in overlapping ways that made little sense to her. In the end she concluded, “technically [it’s] in the same category, so I’m just checking white.” (#123) Frustrated, white became her racial default category. Other respondents commented that even though they were not of European descent or WASPs, they were still “technically” white, usually because of their light skin color.

Some of those who disagreed with the Census categorizations mentioned that they perceived their skin color to be “olive” and distinguished between white, olive and black.¹⁰ A conversation between a married couple illustrated this well:

Him: Well, it depends. If it’s my nephew who’s fairly white, then it would make sense but Arab is not a racial designation, it’s an ethnic designation so I, I would – we talked about this last night – so I would check the box that says olive.

Her: Olive? *Mafie shi* olive [there’s no such thing as olive]

Him: Well, that’s what I am. I’m olive.

Her: I would always compare to my kids - a sheet of white paper to their skin. I’m like, are you white? That’s white. Are you? [Laughter]

RK: Right.

Her: I don’t know.

Him: Even Newt’s not white. [Referring to Newt Gingrich]

Her: There’s Arabs who are *clearly* dark-skinned.

Him: That’s why I said it’s an ethnic, not a racial designation. A Sudani is “soud” [A Sudanese is black] [he yawns again]

Her: But if he’s Arab, he has to, he’s considered white?

Although I think both of their skin color tones could be described as olive, he claimed that as his preferred “box” in the Census. When she objected to this – pointing

¹⁰ Although, skin color is not the only physical factor that is used in considerations and perceptions of race but it was the only physical feature mentioned in the interviews.

out that olive is not an option – he insisted that that was the best race description for him. She would prefer nonwhite because for her the white of the census is the color of a piece of paper (presumably bleached). For him, it is comparative – he is olive by skin color/race, because he is not white like Newt Gingrich or black or dark-skinned like the imagined Sudanese man.¹¹ While her position vis-à-vis race is more ambiguous, his position is not --- Arab is not a race; there are white Arabs and there are black Arabs; Arab is an ethnicity. This interpretation dovetails with Census definitions of Hispanic as an ethnicity separate from race. Distinctions, such as the ones made in the quote above, between white-olive-black indicates that race does not always operate in a bichromatic binary and race options on the census form do not reflect self-perceptions of skin color or race.

The lines between race and ethnicity were constantly blurred and intersecting. One 86-year old woman whom I met while preparing food for a festival said that she was white, Caucasian, of Arabic origin and Syrian. In fact, in more casual settings during my fieldwork in both the Melkite and Orthodox churches, I often heard people say that they were white *and* of Middle Eastern or Arabic origins but in my one-on-one interviews – and presumably in the Census itself – they felt that they could only provide one answer for their racial identification although the CB allows for multi-racial answers (i.e. checking more than one box to the race question). Often implicit in conversations was that if Arab Americans accept their status as white, or continue to “pass” as white, then

¹¹ Newt Gingrich was characterized as a right-wing pro-Israeli conservative white here because, as another respondent said, “he’s the consummate, ultimate, Washington gamesman, an insider” (#130) and, at the time of this interview, he had just commented that Palestinians are an invented people.

they will not be associated as foreigners or illegal aliens but, if they press for state recognition as an ethnic group, then they will be Othered, and considered resistant to assimilation, foreign and not American. In other words, for those who subscribed to this rubric, whiteness conferred a desired status: socio-political belonging to the US. The catch is that the only body that can confer this status of belonging is the state itself through bestowing citizenship and so it retains its hegemonic power in socio-political self-identifications.

In truth, identifications, whether called ethnic, racial or cultural are performed and contextual. This came to the fore for me as a concept when people said to me that they “passed for white.” For those that admitted it, “passing” was unintentional – they did not strive to act or seem white. While some enjoyed this ethnic option others felt guilty for it (Waters 1990). One respondent said, “I’m able to pass for a lot of things and in some sense I feel that that appellation [white] is right for the purposes of why we have those distinctions because I’ve benefited from being able to pass as white whereas as other Arabs who have dark skin and dark features obviously don’t have [that].” (#103) Diane Rehm, the famous host of *The Diane Rehm Show* on National Public Radio, which is recorded in the District, sees herself as “white” by race but *ethnically* Arab. The blurred lines between the two can be seen in an account in her autobiography, *Finding my Voice*, where Ms. Rehm recounted a conversation in her recording studio with the renowned African American author, Alice Walker. Rehm was talking about her background and mentioned that although she was born in an area that is now part of Turkey, that both her

parents were Arabs, when Alice Walker laughed and exclaimed, “Why Diane, all these years you’ve been ‘passing’?” (as quoted in Rehm 2002, 17).

“Passing” and even self-identification as racially white could be strategic, as two people in the older cohort acknowledged in the interviews. Imagining the self as white by race had two important, intertwined and desired socio-political consequences: white privilege and access to full citizenship. As CRT argues, both consequences are the result of racial hierarchies that have been created through legal rulings which privilege whites and the ideology of white privilege. A 62-year old US-born woman found that the pairing of white, Christian and a light-olive skin color “protected her” and combined to give her a privileged location at the top of the social and racial hierarchy.

I associate my racial identity with privilege. Even though politically, sociologically and ideologically I relate very well to people of color, growing up I was always protected by being a Christian and just physical appearance. (#105)

The second of these consequences was full citizenship and acceptance into an imaginary American mainstream and body politic. A 53-year old man born outside the US said,

The thing is if you put white, you are assumed to be American. If you put Middle Eastern, you are assumed to be non-American as either a foreigner in this country and there are negative connotations to that in this day and age. These are all categories of Americans but it is assumed... that if you’re not white and you’re not African American, that you aren’t American. (#139)

The selection of the white box can be strategic – a way *not to be* classified as racially Othered, but checking the white box does not always translate into believing or feeling white. Almost all of the respondents in my study were aware of the Census’ classifications and controversy, but even disagreement with Census categories should not

be interpreted as a repudiation of whiteness. Rather it was usually articulated that race was a “problematic” social construct. As one respondent said,

Well, I mean I don’t like the racial designations anyway. They’re very problematic and there’s no such thing as purity, so where do you draw the lines? [he laughs] But, white in this country tends to mean white Anglo-Saxon and western in real heritage and even color-wise, we’re not white. Some are very white but, on average, we’re not! [he laughs again]. (#111)

The older man saw white as vaguely meaning an “Anglo-Saxon and western in real heritage” which I think implies a Protestant Christian-European background. In his view, his Eastern Christianity was not the racializing factor – rather his “heritage” and possibly skin color combined to make a cultural definition that made him and other Arab Americans nonwhite.

There is counter narrative to the universalism of being American that articulates the value and importance of multiculturalism and minority rights within the state (Taylor 1994; Kymlicka 1995). In this counter narrative, whiteness is not privileged and cultures (rather than just races) are celebrated. In DC, there are book readings, concerts, art shows and lectures where Arabic cultural heritage is celebrated, both in public forums and in private homes throughout the metro region. The churches participate in this type of event in their annual weekend festivals that include Arabic food, music and dancing. The culture is presented as non-threatening and celebratory and sold through goods – shwarma sandwiches, baklava and spit-fired cooked lamb. Outside of the churches, this commercialization of Arabic food and items happens at restaurants and hookah bars throughout the region. There is an element of “cool ness” in being Arab and labeling it as non-white is a nod to an alternative socio-political identity. Of course, this concept of

“alternative” still assumes a place to be different from - an unexamined “white center” – and thus begins with a language of assimilation and mainstream whiteness.

The conflict between an imagined binary of nonwhite/other and white created a tension in the community over issues such as minority business status. In my research, the tension was well illustrated in a conversation between an aunt and her niece:

Niece: A lot of times I put Other.

RK: And [what] do you put, what do you write in the blank?

Niece: If they do have it, I put Arab-American, but a lot of times they’ll just say Other and I just mark it off.

Aunt: You aren’t Other! You happen to be American – you were born here!
[voice raised]

Niece: But they’ll put... are you black, are you Caucasian, and are you Oriental?

Aunt: Yeah, Caucasian, yeah...(#117).

In this conversation two narratives – white and assimilationist versus multi-culturalist and inclusive – were at odds. The elderly aunt expressed that she wanted her niece to record that she was white/Caucasian and not Other because she was US-born, American and white. The niece countered that identifying as Other had no bearing on her belonging to the US but her preference in the Census was for an Arab American option that could combine her two national identifications within the US social framework.

Being Critical of Whiteness

As one chapter in the edited volume, *Race and Arab Americans Before and After 9/11* by Sawsan Abdulrahim (2008, 132) stated, many of the post-9/11 writings on the racialization of Arab Americans have assumed that there has been a move “away from ‘whiteness,’ in a predictable trajectory, [and] through engaging in nonwhite racial formation.” Some of the replies in the interviews and my experiences in the field revealed

strong objections to the CB and their forcible re-classification of their answers on race in 2010. These objections were generally couched not in terms of a “racialization” after 9/11, but more in cultural *differences* from whites. In fact, I never heard the term “racialization” in discussions or interviews. Many did, however, see race as a social construction – meaning a product and consciousness that developed in social and political contexts. This was articulated as displeasure with the “wishy-washy construct of race” because it “whitewashes out [the] unique and troubled experience with race and ethnicity in America.” (#103) Few wanted to call this structural racism. In general, people in my study either agreed with the white designation or wanted state recognition as an ethnic, non-racial group, though what that group should be called differed. Preferred general answers included Arab, Arab American, Middle Eastern, Semitic, and Mediterranean as well as national origins.

The Role of National Origins

While the census currently asks about race and, on occasion, about ancestry, in everyday life the more common question posed by people is, “Where are you from?” This question is often prompted by an accent or appearance that indicates that they are not from “here”, already distancing the questioner from the inquisitor. Everyone in my study said that they had been asked this question at some point in their lives, but some reported that they were regularly asked this question to the point that it seemed to be “pervasive” and “annoying.”

Most respondents said that they try to determine or clarify the questioner’s intent before they answer the question: Does the inquisitor want to know where they are from in

the US or the country where they or their ancestors from? Some tried to avoid ancestry identifications by simply answering the question with “I’m American” (20%) or I’m from x [a specific place in the US] (27%). In other words, almost half (47%) of the respondents give one form of US-based answers when asked, “Where are you from?” The most popular answer to this question was to name a country in the Middle East, answering Lebanese, Syrian and, most often, Palestinian. One-fifth (20%) of respondents gave the answer Arab or Arab American and 8% reported self-identifying as Middle Eastern, both of which offer broader regional identifications.

Palestinians and Lebanese are equally likely as national groups to identify as American or from a place in the US. None of those born in Israel identified as Israeli. Rather, they chose to articulate their origins as a “Palestinian from Nazareth” or a “Palestinian with Israeli citizenship.” When pressed as to why, the respondents said that they interpreted the question to mean what is your ethnicity and they felt that their ethnicity was Palestinian. Other Palestinians would answer that they were from Ramallah – a strong city-identity within the West Bank that has been supported and reproduced in future generations by AFRP.

Almost half (47%) of the respondents gave a US-based answer when asked where they are from and this was closely tied to agreeing with white Census classifications. Interview respondents were almost twice as likely to say that they were white if they answered “the US” or a place in the US as their origins, as the table below indicates.

Table 6 Positions on Census White classification by answers of origins in everyday life

	American	Place in US	Arab	Middle East	Country of Origin	Other
Agree with White	5	6	5	3	14	6
Disagrees with White	3	3	3	1	14	4
It depends	2	5	2		7	2
Total	10	14	10	4	35	12
(Note: More than one answer allowed)						

If they answered the US or a place in the US, sometimes they would be asked, “Where are you from?” again. As Amer Zahr, an Arab American comedian who performed at the AFRP convention joked, “This is what white people say when they want to know where you’re from, you know, where are you *from* from?” (Comedy Act, 07/18/11). After the comedy routine, one person said that she never says where she is *from* regardless of the pressure or situation (she is from Ramallah, Palestine) but most people said that after they gave a US-based answer, they would tell people their ethno-national origin only if pressed hard to “reveal” it.

Some interesting intra-ethnic stereotypes came out when I asked how people identified to non-Arab Americans. One single 24-year old woman said that when she was in a bar or a social situation, she would be asked politely, “What are you, if you don’t mind me asking?” Although she is Palestinian, she would claim to be Lebanese. When I am empathetically asked why, she explained, “If you’re Lebanese you’re gorgeous, if you’re Palestinian, you’re just political.” (#122) Being Lebanese here was a coping mechanism and a way to avoid the politics of being Palestinian, while upping her perceived attractiveness. In this and other statements reflected intra-ethnic stereotypes

and contrasts – Lebanese as high-maintenance, successful, conniving and beautiful; Palestinian as hard-working, more working class, down-to-earth and political.

Predictably, there were a variety of answers that did not fit the main options I had offered. Among these, I heard, “It’s complicated” most often, and the need for full bios of their family heritage such as Irish-Dutch-German-Lebanese and/or place of birth to explain where they were “from.” One place of identification was often not enough – in particular the national origins of parents was set against birthplace and an American identification such as the answer, “I was born here but my family is from Palestine.”

The State and the Census: Hegemonic re-classifications

Since the 1980s, multiculturalism, the rise of ethnic pride movements and identity politics have inspired Arab American organizations to seek recognition as an ethno-cultural group. Arab Americans have been considered white by race in the Census since 1910. Since the OMB classifies “white” as “A person having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, the Middle East, or North Africa,” people with Arab ancestry do not usually qualify for minority status (US Office of Personnel Management 2013). The fact that the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) guidelines deliberately include MENA in the definition of white indicates that there was a need to spell this out for government agencies. The US government struggles with definitions of people from the MENA region perhaps in the same way that it struggles with ways to talk about its not-quite-white and not-black Latino population (Haney-López 1996; Rodriguez 2000). However, the OPM and the Census recognize Latino as an ethnicity, while Arabs remain in an

undifferentiated white category.¹² Though not federally mandated, public and private institutions can collect data beyond the OMB classifications at their discretion. Therefore, statistical information on Arab Americans *may* be collected from colleges and companies and at the state and local levels, but federal government compilations of national demographics on Arab Americans are only available when ancestry data is collected.

The 2010 Census form consisted of only ten questions, with no ancestry question, in order to maximize response rates. In the 2010 Census if someone from the MENA geographical region checked the Some Other Race box and wrote in a term that fell under the rubric of MENA, then the tabulators at the CB enumerators would re-classify that response as white. This is an example of the state enforcing racial categories on the population and the Gramscian enforcement of state as the hegemonic agent over racial classifications.

There were many unofficial campaigns to check the Some Other Race' box and write-in Arab or another identifier but the bottom line is that all MENA peoples who did this were re-classified by the state as white. This irked Amer Zahr, who in his comedy routine said,

You know because we fill out the Census form and everybody's got their own thing – Samoans, Pacific Islanders, Filipinos, everybody! But Arabs, we don't have anything! And if you do check something like Other - Other, like you, I don't give a shit who you are, *Other* – if you do check that they put you in the white pile. Did you know that? (Mummers in the crowd) Did you know that, that you're white? But I know you're not white. None of us are white, we're different! (Amer Zahr, AFRP convention, Washington DC, 07/18/11)

¹² Although ancestry data is collected in the American Community Survey (ACS), the statistical value of this data is questionable (For Arab Americans, ACS data has a standard deviation of about 30%).

Apparently the state's neglect and re-classification of Arab Americans as white was both funny *and* structurally marginalizing. However, characterizing the state's treatment of Arab Americans as neglect is inaccurate. The CB is aware of backlash against the outdated concepts of "race" and is considering removing the word "race" from the race question, adding Hispanic as a race (or non-race) option, and possibly adding a MENA box in the 2020 Census, which is a long shot. Although removing the word "race" is a significant achievement, it would still reify racial identity *categories* by focusing on race/ethnicity in all but name. Of course, the Census itself, with or without the term race underlines the state's regulation and subjugation of its population.

The lack of a MENA or Arab race or ethnic box has consequences. It means that there is weak statistical counting of the population. It means that Arabs as an ethnic group are not recognized by the state. It means that Arab-owned businesses do not qualify for minority business loans and contracts. It means that Arab American students do not qualify as minorities and that Arab Americans do not receive preferences set aside for minorities in other arenas, such as housing loans. These potential benefits are not pursued with vigor by Arab Americans for three main reasons: (1) many Arabs, as this study shows, see themselves as white, (2) the leadership is divided over whether they should seek status as a subgroup of white or as a separate "race" category, and (3) there is a split in the choice to advocate for Arab American or a MENA classification.

The lack of a consensus within the community of Arab American activists on the race issue became evident in the 1990s. When the OMB categories were being reviewed by Congressional Subcommittees, AAI and ADC differed in their requests for racial

classifications: AAI wanted a Middle Eastern ethnic category underneath the white racial category and ADC wanted Arab as an ethno-racial category. These divisions have been one of the main reasons cited by the government for not making changes organizations (see Kayyali 2013 for a fuller history of Arab Americans and the Census). Today, the ADC and AAI are on the same page, literally. Together with Iranian and Arab organizations, they are drafting a letter to the OMB requesting the “updating of the OMB race and ethnicity categories—whereby MENA origin would be considered an ethnicity regardless of racial characteristics, like Hispanic origin.” (Draft of letter to OMB, received by email 04/24/13).¹³

Religion and the Census?

By law, the Census cannot ask about religion but the CB is conscious about reaching out to Muslims since 9/11. I observe that this has been done *in part* through Arabic language outreach. In the 2000 Census, the CB funded Arabic-language promotional material from the Detroit regional office and conducted a small, focused Arabic-language outreach program. In 2010, their efforts were drastically boosted with the assignment of under \$800,000 of a \$300 million budget for outreach to the three emerging language communities (US Congress 2010, 371). The decision to include Arabic as one of the emerging languages happened early on. Prior to the 2010 census, the CB knew that there were high levels of distrust about government motives for gathering information among Arab respondents. The CB commissioned a report that found that

¹³ Notably, the letter stated, “We estimate that over two-thirds of the MENA populations do not identify with the white race.”

many Arab respondents “would not have been as concerned about providing the census with personal information as they are today” and that confidentiality had become a more salient concern during the war on terror and in the post-9/11 period (US Census 2010 2007). Arab Americans in focus groups reasoned that the CB may share their personal information with other federal agencies “under the guise of national security ... particularly when it involves Arab-Americans *or those of the Muslim faith*” (Ibid: 13-4, my emphasis). This “fear and mistrust” was based on personal experiences with racial profiling, media coverage and perhaps a 2004 incident in which it was discovered that the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) had requested, and was given, tabulations of publicly available census data on Arab Americans by ZIP code (EPIC 2004). Although this data was used to enforce Treasury Department guidelines about posting signs in foreign languages at airports, it left the impression that census data was used to aid in the profiling of Arab and Muslim Americans. After the use of secret evidence, arrests and detentions based on Arabic ethnicity – almost all of whom were Muslim - it seemed that the US government not only condoned, but encouraged, racial profiling (Murray 2004). Certainly, the immediate post-9/11 political climate and security policies increasingly merged Arab and Muslim identities in a way that set a precedent – even a guideline - for its security personnel to consider Arabs and Muslims potential security threats. The hegemonic ideology of the state therefore followed the Orientalist and civilizational binaries that merged Arabs and Muslims.

Conclusion

Racial, ethnic and ancestral identifications overlap in complex ways. While the sample was pretty evenly split over the appropriateness of the white racial category, there were some ancestry labels that tended to accompany each position. The conception of whiteness was at the core of these answers – those who considered their ancestry Caucasian and Semitic considered themselves white, as did those who self-identified their ancestry as Lebanese and Syrian. The most significant finding from my research in this area was that there are correlations between older age, identifying as white in the census, and answering a US location as the place where they are from. Among this group there was a “language of assimilation” which privileges white racial formations that were present in the 1950s and 60s when the older generations were growing up. This generation formed their identities at that time or during the Lebanese civil war when Lebanese nationalism was at its height.

Many in the community, however, view race as a socially constructed concept that has left them out or is inaccurate. Those that disagree with state classifications tend to question the salience of race, seeing it as a way in which the state denies their group’s right to exist or forces people into categories. Many who identified as Arab or Arab American noted the difference between *being classified as white* and being *treated or perceived as white*. A few within this group called themselves “olive” by race and Palestinian, Arab or Palestinian and Arab by ancestry. However, the state is the hegemonic actor in the game of race classifications and ideologies, as Gramsci argues.

Through OMB, OPM and CB classifications, the state perpetuates a status quo that leaves Arab Americans as (non-minority) undifferentiated whites.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this research has been to highlight the dynamics between ethnic and racial classifications and religious associations and identities. I use a case study based in Washington DC to ask *why do Arab American Christians have such divided racial, ethnic and religious identifications?* My original motivation, here, was to learn more about the identifications of an understudied group – that of religious and secular Christians of Arab American heritage post 9/11. Thus, by inference, come to understand how a marginalized population navigated and determined racial and ethnic identities at a time when there is substantial critique of Arab societies and cultures. My research suggests that AACs neither passively submit to the racial-cultural structures nor forcefully separate from them. Instead, there is both a deep ambivalence about race and staunchly held positions on the value and applicability of white racial classifications.

AACs' divided identifications on race are matched by their differentiated ethnic or ancestry identifications. Some argue that Arab identifications are inherently Muslim identifications, others relate to regional affiliations as MENAs while still others prefer to self-identify by a country of origin in the Middle East or by a US location. These choices often reflect complex sectarian, national, and political interfaces, especially among activists. Three types of these combinations are (1) Orthodox, Arab and pro-Palestinian, (2) Maronite, Lebanese and not pro-Palestinian, and (3) Arab, secular and pro-

Palestinian. The net result of these divisions is that Arab Americans are not asserting unified claims-making strategies and continue to adhere to the racial classification systems set forth by the state.

State Hegemony and Racial Classifications

AACs interact with their racial identifications at three levels. Firstly, at the level of official classifications, such as in the Census forms, where almost fifty percent of AACs interviewed agreed with the white classification while almost thirty percent disagreed with their white classification and the rest answered that it depended on the context. Secondly, at the level of outreach by federal agencies, Arabs and Muslims are conflated into one group – a conflation that may advantage or marginalize AACs. Finally, at the community level, where racial classifications are as important as other identities, including national and sectarian identities.

The boundaries that distinguish Arab racial classifications are not blurry in the eyes of the law. The state classifies all Arabs and peoples from the Middle East and North Africa as white. In explaining how this came to be, I discussed the legal cases and rulings that determined that the “Syrians” and “Arabs” were not Asian and were white by race in the first half of the twentieth-century. I argued that the Orthodox Church, the Arab press and the national community rallied around the term “Syrian” as a national/ethnic term and paired it with Christian to claim white racial belonging. The role of religion was highlighted in later cases when Muslims from Saudi Arabia and Yemen sought and obtained white racial status that allowed them to become US citizens. Using these court cases and archival research, I moved away from viewing racial formations as solely

focused on racial discussions towards including religion and ethnicity as combined factors in state determinations of race.

The genealogies of a state-generated racial classification leave historical traces on different communities. Through autobiographies, oral histories and land deeds, we know that the DC community self-identified as Syrian into the 1950s when people shifted to identifying more closely with the newly independent countries of Lebanon and Syria and being Palestinian. Arab nationalism began to broaden community definitions and an Arab American identification began in the late 1960s – an identification that is popular today in many circles, including with scholars and activists. In the 1970s, deep ideological divides began to form and became institutionalized in advocacy groups based in DC. Even as communities expand and change names, the white racial ruling of Syrians in the 1910s, Arabians in the 1940s and all MENA peoples in the 1970s hid the internal community rifts.

My research has argued that the hard-won white racial classification of the first period was a classification that was never seriously challenged until the contemporary moment. This was because at a major historical conjunctural moment (1965-80), the Syrian community divided into many communities due to ideological differences. Some of the immigrants who came in the second period, after 1965, contributed to the creation of a new Arab American identity that aimed to articulate a pro-Palestinian voice and improve the media image of Arabs in the US. Some of the immigrants who came from Lebanon and the older generations of Syrian-Lebanese immigrants pursued competing political agendas relating to homeland politics that bolstered a sectarian identity, which

paired Lebanese and Maronite. Parallel identities and organizations fractured into three or more profiles of groups that were unwilling to challenge the state on racial classifications and were more concerned with US foreign policy, particularly in regard to Lebanon and Palestine. In addition, Arab and national country of origin identities were not considered “racial” in scope but rather “ethnic” and thus subsumed under a white racial category.

Today, Arab Americans are opinionated and divided on the question of race. As Gramsci put forth in his paradigm, racial status is not always determined by the state, but by consent through social and political ideological constructions. How did the state lose consent to this racial ascription after 9/11?

Ideologies on Religious Affiliations

The ideology behind the racialization of Arab/Muslims post 9/11 is based on a religious/civilizational paradigm that focuses on innate cultural differences – differences that have become racialized through what Gramsci calls “common sense”. This ideological discourse on the clash of civilizations posits a binary of East/Islam against West/Christian civilization and culture. Depending on the context, origins can serve to create a sort of collateral damage and discrimination for all from the MENA region in the US, including AACs.

The power of this ideology is mobilized through creating stereotypes and conflating Arab, MENA and Muslim into one racialized group. The conflation of Arab and Muslim is discursively produced between the general US public and the state. Federal agencies such as the White House, DNI, DHS, and the CB categorize Arabs and Muslims together and operate under the notion that that they are synonymous with one

another. Beyond the state employment and outreach, a total of 79 percent of the respondents in this study said that they had been assumed to be Muslim while living and working in the Washington DC metro area. Policies reflect popular confluences of Arabs and Muslims and vice versa.

Ethnicity and Social Conflict

Although Arab Americans are sometimes presented as a monolithic group, in my research, I found that there are three vectors of social conflict:

- (1) intra-Christian Arab conflict (sectarian conflict; intra-Christian),
- (2) inter-religious conflict between Muslim, secular and Christian Arabs (religious conflict; intra-Arab) and,
- (3) conflict between Arabs Americans and Americans (intra-national conflict)

This research touched upon all three categories.

The intra-Christian distinctions involved sectarian and national associations and combinations that created microspaces of identity. Arab Christians in DC have the option of at least four churches that use Arabic in the services and are Eastern Churches. While some parishioners go to the other's festivals in September and these churches exist mostly without tension between them, there are still divisions between AACs and socio-economic and national differentiations between churches that reflect patterns observed at the national level. In addition to non-Arabs, Palestinians, Lebanese and Syrians attend the Orthodox Church, Syrians and Lebanese attend the Melkite Church and Lebanese attend the Maronite Church. While some Lebanese and Syrians identified as Arab, Palestinians were the most likely of the three groups to do so. Those who answered that they

identified as Arab, Palestinian or Palestinian/Arab American, were more likely to disagree with the Census classification of them as white, while those who described their ancestry as Semitic, Caucasian, Syrian and Lebanese were tended to agree with the white classification.

There was some tension between organizations that identified as Muslim, Christian and secular. Muslim organizations are ostensibly not limited to one ethnic group because they are religion-based, but Christian organizations tended to be sectarian and focused on one-country and Arab American organizations include both Christians and Muslims. The organization's identity and focus mostly defined the boundaries between them but issues and memberships can overlap and overstepping bounds or making alliances can upset the delicate balance. For example, Arab American organizations must appear to be equally fair to Christians and Muslims to keep up the appearance of secularism and making too many alliances with Muslims, for example, will upset the Christian members and perhaps cause them to leave the organization.

Conflicts between Arab Americans and Americans can be seen in many forums, including in racial classifications. The increase of negative media images of Arabs and Muslims created an atmosphere in the US from the 1970s on that made discrimination against Arabs and Muslims socially, and above all, politically acceptable. Images and events such as the terrorist attacks on 9/11 have cast a shadow on the loyalties and identifications of **all** peoples from the region. Arab American Christians are conflated with an Arab/Muslim/Middle Easterner racialized category on a regular basis and so are sometimes subject to discrimination and even hate crimes.

If racial classification remains constant, then there might be the impression that there is no conflict – they are all whites. Highlighting these three sources of socio-political tension emphasizes that AACs are not a monolithic community. While CRT and RFT focus on racial formations and classifications and the literature on critical whiteness focuses on white privilege, it is important to consider how religion alters these formations.

Contributions to Theory

The dialectical relationship between religion, ethnicity and race impacts the study of the histories and contemporary accounts of racial formations. The cost to scholarship and social understandings of a myopic focus on race is that the important role of other social identities is neglected and the discursive impact of many factors is unaccounted for. I agree with the Critical Race Theorists (CRT) who call for “a broader perspective that includes economics, history, context, group” (Delgado and Stefancic 2001, 1) but I would add religion and religious ideologies to the list. My research finds a need for CRT and RFT to expand their analysis of the broad race categorization to conceptualize ethno-religious constructions as significant in racial and social formations.

Christians and whites have been perceived in sociological literature to be the center, the mainstream and privileged. My analysis, sited in RFT and critical whiteness studies, raises an interesting question for empirical research. Can white Christians be racialized if they are Arab? Are religious-cultural affiliations enough to de-white-ify a group? Is there such a thing as a reversal of the whitening process? My research on a minority group of Christians mounts a challenge to racialization paradigms and

assumptions about the process of becoming white. In societies where religion is not standard demographic information requested by the state, the politics of religion necessarily ties people together and pulls people apart in terms of community. I have made a case against the assumption that racial identities trump all others – more significant to AACs are ethno-national and sectarian identifications.

This research advances our understandings of how racial constructions are discursively formed with religious ideologies, frameworks and identities. I have laid the groundwork here for a broader sense of social identifications and, in particular, shown how it is theoretically possible for racial formation studies to embody religious identifications and ideologies. This research explores a new field: that of transnational religious ties and identities and contributes to understandings of diasporic politics and long-distance nationalisms that use religion as the binding agent. The focus on transnational ecclesiastical relationships with the Mother Church by the Maronites and Antiochian Orthodox, contributes to knowledge of how transnational ethnic and racial formations happen in a discursive relationship with domestic ones. As this research indicates, sometimes the transnational political elements can cause conflict with groups that were or could potentially be co-ethnics. As such, this research reaches into the fields of social movements, international and comparative politics and political sociology.

The recent upsurge of interest in the racialization of Muslims in the US and abroad post 9/11 has emphasized the need to challenge stereotypical assumptions about Islamic culture, and the stereotype of the Arab American community as Muslim. AACs have been neglected in the literature though they are about half of the population. In

broad terms this research suggests expanding the analysis of the merged Arab American and Muslim American racialization model to other groups to reveal the complexities and intersections of national, ethnic, racial and religious identities. At the most general level, this study alerts racial formation theorists to the fact that religion and religious affiliations ought to be considered as an important analytic unit and opens up space for further research on the socio-political conditions of religion, race and ethnicity in the US.

Like AACs in this study, small minority groups within the MENA region may face collateral discrimination with Muslims/Arabs in the US and feel treated as nonwhite but are classified as white. These include Iranian Jews; Armenians from Turkey, Syria or Lebanon; Chaldeans and Assyrians from Iraq; and Copts from Egypt. Locating religious identities crisscrossed with political ideologies may shed light on the dynamics of social, political, racial and ethnic formations. The research framework set out here is a call to include considerations of religion *alongside and intertwined with* racial, ethnic and national identifications, opening up new avenues in Racial and Ethnic Studies.

Future Directions

Policies that merge and racialize Arabs and Muslims stand in contrast with official race classifications which include MENAs in a mostly European-descent white category. Unrecognized in racial classifications are new racial formations that are based on a “common sense” of false East-West cultural differences. These divergences began to be felt on an individualized level after 9/11 were articulated in campaigns directed at the Census Bureau in 2010 for Arabs and Iranians to check the Some Other Race box. Three years later, the Arab and Iranian organizations are drafting a letter to the OMB to request

a new non-racial MENA classification box alongside white, black, Native American and Asian. Although this letter may not materialize, it shows that consent to state classifications as white is eroding. While internal community divisions, even between and among Arab American Christians, are still present, there is a push to de-whiteify MENA legal classifications in order to match the cultural categorizations that are felt by many Arab Americans.

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