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“I am here to build with you”: Placemaking and segmented assimilation of Lebanese and Lebanese-Americans in the Twin Cities

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May 5, 2014

“I AM HERE TO BUILD WITH YOU”

Abstract: The Lebanese and Lebanese-American community in the United States is known for both its entrepreneurship and its unusually long-lasting cultural memory. Though relatively small communities, the Lebanese and Lebanese-Americans have had a disproportionately large impact on the landscape of the Twin Cities. This paper examines how Christian Lebanese communities in Northeast Minneapolis and the West Side of Saint Paul have used placemaking as a means to retain their cultural heritage, form an original Lebanese-American identity, and alternatively resist and embrace assimilation. It also considers the fluidity of Lebanese-American identity, and how the gray areas of rigid American societal politics have enabled Lebanese placemaking, and demanded certain types of assimilation while simultaneously preventing others.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Without the help and support of an amazing support network, this thesis could never have come to fruition. So many thanks to my Advisor, Professor David Lanegran, who encouraged me to be ambitious, talked with me about Lebanese immigration for several hours, and guided my field work in the Twin Cities. Thank you to the faculty, staff, and students of the Macalester Geography Department, who provided the education and experiences that led me to the questions driving this paper, and for giving us the opportunity to present our research at the Association of American Geographers annual meeting. I especially would like to thank Laura Kigin, the Geography Department Coordinator, was especially fundamental in arranging for the trip. Special thanks as well to my committee readers, Professor Dan Trudeau, Professor Eric Carter, and George Latimer, for their patience, recommendations, and interest in the research. I am incredibly grateful to my fellow Geography Honors writers, Zachary Avre, Merita Bushi, and Erin Daly, for their conversations and friendship. Of course, none of this research could have been possible without the help and generosity of my participants. In particular, leaders and community members of the Holy Family Maronite Catholic Church, Saint Maron’s Catholic Church, and Saint George’s Antiochian Orthodox Church played an enormous role in the creation of this paper. Their warmth and enthusiasm transformed this process into a personal journey, and I am so grateful for that. Finally, I would like to thank my family, friends, coworkers, and additional mentors for their kindness and acceptance throughout this process. Demetrius Colvin and the Department of Multicultural Life as a whole were a crucial piece of my support network in this process, and I’m so grateful for their warmth and patience. Speaking of patience, I can’t thank my friends and housemate enough for the space to talk, work, and unwind. And of course, all of this comes back to my family and the stories they have given me. Their continual love and support this past year was my fuel to keep searching—as it always is.

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I believe in you, and I believe in your destiny.

I believe that you are contributors to this new civilization.

I believe that you have inherited from your forefathers an ancient dream, a song, a prophecy, which you can proudly lay as a gift of gratitude upon the lap of America.

...I believe that is in you to be good citizens.

And what is it to be a good citizen?

... It is to stand before the towers of New York, Washington, Chicago and San Francisco saying in your heart, "I am the descendant of a people that builded Damascus, and Biblus, and Tyre and Sidon, and Antioch, and now I am here to build with you, and with a will."

It is to be proud of being an American, but it is also to be proud that your fathers and mothers came from a land upon which God laid His gracious hand and raised His messengers.

Young Americans of Syrian origin, I believe in you.

-Taken from “I Believe in You: A Message to Young Americans of Syrian Origin,” by Khalil Gibran, Lebanese-American poet, writer, artist and sculptor (1883-1931)

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

A. PERSONAL STATEMENT

I would like to begin this paper with a statement on positionality. I identify as fourth-generation Catholic Lebanese-American. I only know a handful of Arabic words, and I have never been to Lebanon. Though I could draw many connections between what participants reported and my own experiences, I am not from the Twin Cities, and I was not raised in these communities. The stories I repeat and quote in this paper are not my stories, and I do not claim to speak for the communities that participated in this study. While I try to describe the general patterns and trends I observed, and the complex factors that shape them, it is critical to remember that the Lebanese and Lebanese-American communities both in the Twin Cities and in the U.S. as a whole are rife with diversity in identities, perspectives, and experience. The stories that participants allowed me to hear are their own, and the analysis I draw based on them are my own. This project is academic, but it is also deeply personal, woven together from a network of diverse subjective experiences.

It's to express this that I chose to begin with a selection from Khalil Gibran's "I Believe in You: A Message to Young Americans of Syrian Origin." It carries the emotional weight that is often embedded in discussions of identity and assimilation. The title of this paper, "I am here to build with you," comes from Gibran's poem. I would like to add my own emphasis to this statement: I am *here* to build with you. The questions of this paper circulate around what it means to be "here," a part of the United States, and to be seen as belonging "here." It addresses this through examining experiences of immigration, assimilation, and placemaking among Lebanese and Lebanese-American communities in the Twin Cities.

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Lebanon is by no means the largest source of immigration to the United States, nor has it ever been. Only at a small scale has the phenomenon of Lebanese immigration captured any degree of media attention. When the Lebanese are in the spotlight, they are usually showcased as a “model minority,” defined here as an immigrant or racial group that has unusually high rates of economic and educational success (Bascara, 2006). Most recently, pop-economics media outlet Freakonomics based a podcast on a question embedded in the title, “Who Are the Most Successful Immigrants in the World?” The podcast examines the entrepreneurial and economic success of the Lebanese diaspora, to the extent that one can in the space of 15 minutes, and suggests that the challenges Lebanese emigrants faced made them resilient and adaptable. Amy Chua and Jed Rubenfeld also highlight the Lebanese as one of eight case studies of “successful” American immigrant groups in their recent book, *The Triple Package: How Three Unlikely Traits Explain the Rise and Fall of Cultural Groups in America* (2014). As the title implies, Chua and Rubenfeld attribute immigrant success to three traits and cultural attitudes. These studies are the most recent portraits of the Lebanese in America, and their dependence on the model minority stereotype leaves much analysis to be desired. Bascara (2006) challenges the myth of the model minority, asserting that “success in conventional terms is taken as a tacit form of forgiveness from the past” (p. 5). This study recognizes the oversimplification the model minority myth makes of immigrant histories, and takes into account how labeling some immigrant groups as “successful” comes at the expense of other immigrant groups, who are then implied to be “failures.” This thesis seeks further to complicate the up-by-the-bootstraps tales that so many of my participants have told me, and that I heard repeatedly throughout my childhood. It also addresses the more hidden factors of success beyond willpower, such as cultural, economic, and racial privilege.

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Throughout this research process I've been repeatedly asked, why study the Lebanese? The first of these answers is completely personal, coming from a Lebanese-American family myself. I was raised on stories about my great-grandfather, who at the age of twelve packed up a rifle, got on his horse, and went off to fight the Ottomans. At the end of World War I, the Ottoman Empire crumbled. The Allies, instead of giving the Middle East independence as promised, carved it up amongst themselves with the Sykes-Picot Treaty. So my great-grandparents left for the United States, without a word of English between them. I know this story inside and out, and for generations my family's loyalty to our Lebanese heritage has shaped our understandings of politics, immigration, and the way the world works. To me, and to many others, the Lebanese diaspora is not a blip in history. It's how we came to be here.

The second answer is a reminder that what seemed like a small new ethnic group in the Americas was a large fraction of the enormous diaspora out of Lebanon and the Middle East. Lebanon itself has only a population of 4 million, compared to the 14 million Lebanese descendants abroad. Brazil alone has nearly 7 million Lebanese and Lebanese-Brazilians. Up until recently, Lebanese immigrants and their descendants also represented the largest nationality comprising the Arab-American community. Lebanese immigration to the United States is a formative piece of Lebanon's history, and it shaped the earliest American understandings of Middle Easterners.

The Lebanese diaspora to America is primarily a white Christian Middle Eastern demographic, a combination of identities that most Americans seem surprised to know exist. The acceptance of white Christianity in American assimilation makes it possible for the Christian Lebanese to adapt to white American culture in most ways, but the continued stigma and exoticification of Arabness or being Middle Eastern keeps Lebanese-Americans indefinitely

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hyphenated. Why do so many descendants of Lebanese immigrants continue to identify as Lebanese well into the fourth and fifth generations? This question and the additional questions it provokes highlight an interesting intersection of what happens when different pieces of an immigrant identity are alternately welcomed and ostracized.

B. ARGUMENT

This study originates in the question of how Lebanese and Lebanese-American identity has managed to prevail through generations beyond other white ethnic groups. I argue that placemaking has allowed Christian Lebanese and Lebanese-American communities in the Twin Cities to selectively assimilate, enabling them to participate in the economic and social benefits of being assimilated, while maintaining and reimagining a Lebanese-American identity.

In order to make this argument, I drew on scholarship about Lebanese and Arab immigration and assimilation in the United States, selective assimilation, and placemaking. I then applied this lens to the original qualitative research I collected from three Christian Lebanese and Lebanese-American communities in the Twin Cities. What was made clear by the combination of this lens and this research is that while placemaking provides a space for ethnic heritage to be performed, celebrated, and passed on, process of assimilation are heavily governed by who is considered “the same” as the receiving society and who is considered “different.” Chapter 2 summarizes the theoretical lens that frames this research, Chapter 3 discusses the methodology of the study, and Chapter 4 summarizes the three main placemaking themes that came out in the research: cedar tree symbolism, entrepreneurialism, religious placemaking. Chapter 5 is devoted to further discussion of placemaking and assimilation, but it also addresses the deeper underlying themes of Arabness and perceptions of difference.

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Perceptions of sameness and difference shape the way an immigrant group is received (Nagel, 2009). It was not my initial intention to include a section on the qualities that grant a community or identity the ability to be perceived as “assimilated,” or at least as not in conflict with what it means to be American. However, as the research went on, the dialogue I heard from participants on being Arab-American (or in many cases, on *not* being Arab) seemed like a critical factor in the shaping of Lebanese and Lebanese-American assimilation in the U.S. It also became apparent that Christian Lebanese and Lebanese-Americans occupy an often unnoticed “gray area” between the rigid boxes, residual from where Middle Eastern delineations of difference fail to align with American understandings of difference. I call this a non-European white Christian ethnicity—one that has so much “sameness” with dominant white European-American culture in the U.S., with the critical exception that it is not European. Nagel (2009) calls for geographers studying assimilation to start asking why it is that some immigrant communities are coded as “same” or “different” from the host society, rather than just the effects of it. This paper attempts to respond to that call in examining how and under what contexts Christian Lebanese and Lebanese-American communities have become accepted as part of the host society.

There are many lenses that I could have chosen to examine Lebanese and Lebanese-American expressions of identity in the United States. Some potential other useful lenses may have been transnationalism or nationalist theory. However, in the recognition that most of the participants in this study had never been to Lebanon, and only a few held citizenship there, bodies of literature that focus on Lebanon as a nation fail to adequately address the formation of an ethnic identity in the U.S. that is bound by the memory of a homeland, but tied more to American politics than to the politics of the homeland. Literature on ethnic identity and assimilation seemed most suited to understanding Lebanese-American identity formation, since

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this Lebanese-American is really an umbrella term for a wide variety of experiences and communities rather than a cohesive expression of nationalism. This study demonstrates how some people who identify as Lebanese or Lebanese-American in the U.S. today define independently or within sub-communities what their heritage means to them, and how it has become a part of being American.

I hope that this study can shed further light on the process of how identities in the U.S. are received and processed, whether they are accepted into the definition of “American,” and what perceptions of sameness afford that. While this study is intended in part to contribute directly to Arab-American scholarship, it is also meant to make explicit connections between placemaking and assimilation. Finally, it is written as a dissection of how perceptions of sameness and difference are created, and how that can manifest in place.

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CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

A. CHARACTERIZING THE LEBANESE DIASPORA IN THE UNITED STATES

The Lebanese diaspora is enormous and, in many ways, continuous. The diaspora, or the large movement out of Lebanon, has primarily been to the Americas and Australia. With 3 million Lebanese descendants, the United States has historically been one of the most popular new homes for Lebanese emigrants. As with many immigrant groups, the circumstances under which Lebanese immigrants came, and continue to come, drastically shape how they are received.

What is commonly known as the “first wave” of Lebanese immigration began in the late 1800s (Naff, 1993). At the time, Lebanon was not yet a country, but a province in the Ottoman-ruled Greater Syria. The Ottoman Empire, stemming from Turkey, was a Muslim empire, and many of the early Lebanese immigrants to the United States were Christians seeking safety from the Ottomans or a new source of economic security after changes in the Middle Eastern silk market. Most were Maronite Catholic, a branch of Catholicism unique to Lebanon, as well as Greek Orthodox and Melkite (also called Greek Catholic) (Naff, 1993). Compared to the overall flood of immigration during the 1800s, their numbers were small. A diaspora that was in many ways so major to Lebanon is rarely noted in American history.

None of these initial immigrants were recorded as “Lebanese” upon arrival to the United States. No such country as Lebanon existed, although the mountains along the western coast of Greater Syria had been known as “Lebanon” for centuries (Naff, 1993). As a result, the new arrivals were typically listed as Turkish or Syrian (Naff, 1993). When they came they were poor, had low literacy rates compared to the American standard of the time (despite having one of the

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highest literacy rates in the Middle East), and spoke little English (Kayal & Kayal, 1975). They were not considered white. However, with remarkable success in peddling and entrepreneurship, the Lebanese immigrants who stayed became Lebanese-American (Naff, 1993). By the 1930s, they were quite nearly accepted as white, and began to pass as such.

Meanwhile, in the Old Country, the Ottoman Empire fell with the end of World War I. Rather than granting the Middle East its promised sovereignty, the Allies divided power over the region amongst themselves (Naff, 1993). Under the Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1919, France took on the province of Lebanon as a mandate. Lebanon had long been known as a region in the Middle East, drawn off from the rest of Syria by an extensive and mountain range (Naff, 1993). When France finally granted independence in 1943, Lebanon became a sovereign nation for the first time in history (Naff, 1993). Just as the “Syrian” immigrants to the United States were becoming established, the maps changed. They were not only in the process of becoming American, but also in the process of becoming “Lebanese.”

However, even citizens of Lebanon were not in agreement about what it meant to be “Lebanese.” In the mid-1970s, the new state of Lebanon was thrown into massive Civil War. French colonial power had favored Christians over Muslims, and they left a Christian-dominated government in their wake (Naff, 1993). Religious tensions and Christian power abuses culminated in a war that lasted into the early 1990s. The outpour of violence was widespread and indiscriminate. Fleeing war, the “second wave” of Lebanese immigration made its way to the United States. This wave was more evenly a mixture of Muslim and Christian emigrants than the first (Abdelhady, 2011). Those who left Lebanon were those who had the means. As a result, this new wave of immigration, ending nearly a hundred years after the dawn of the first, was wealthier, better educated, and strongly connected to French language and culture in a way the

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poorer mountain people of the first wave were not (Abdelhady, 2011). Even when only considering the two waves of Christian Lebanese immigrants, the differences between the two groups became visible as each was faced with an alternate definition of what it means to be Lebanese in America.

These definitions continue to compete today. Relatively recent Lebanese immigration poses a challenge to what up until then had been Lebanese-American assimilation as a white ethnic group (Gualtieri, 2001). Descendants of Lebanese immigrants, well into their third and fourth generations, still identified as Lebanese, almost regardless of language loss and few ties to the state of Lebanon itself (Ajrouch, 2000). In many ways, first wave Lebanese immigration can be categorized as a white ethnic group. Despite a series of legal battles about the racial classification of Middle Easterners in the U.S., Lebanese-Americans became legally “white” around the same time that Eastern Europeans became “white” (Jacobson, 1998; Samhan, 1999). They were English-speaking, Christian, working- or middle-class, and more or less light-skinned. While the first wave of Lebanese and Lebanese-Americans initiated a pattern of assimilation similar to white European assimilation, many continued to identify with their family’s roots. This pattern is tightly linked to entrepreneurship.

Entrepreneurship is a hallmark of Lebanese immigration around the world, and it has played a particularly large role in Lebanese assimilation in the U.S. (Nagel & Staeheli, 2004; Portes & Rumbaut, 2006). Several scholars consider entrepreneurship fundamental to the Lebanese heritage (Naff, 1993; Abdelhady, 2011; Kayal & Kayal 1975). Some of the earliest literature on the Lebanese in the U.S. is on the role of peddling in Syrian-Lebanese assimilation (Kayal & Kayal, 1975; Naff, 1993). Peddlers were essentially traveling salespeople, and first-wave Syrian-Lebanese peddlers are often credited as the precursors to Lebanese-American ethnic

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entrepreneurship.

“Their mercantile mentality was more than an ethnic oddity. It was part of an emotional, psychological, social and historical inheritance. When we look at the Syrian peddler/trader we are looking at the key to the Syrian-Lebanese-Americanization process” (Kayal & Kayal, 1975, p. 91).

In American culture, peddling was often frowned upon as the poor man’s last resort (Kayal & Kayal, 1975). However, among Syrian-Lebanese immigrant men, the travel and independence of peddling was far preferable to working in the factory. Peddling quickly became the most popular occupation of the young Syrian-Lebanese men of the first wave (Landis, 1967; Kayal & Kayal, 1975; Miller, 1981; Naff, 1993).

Peddling also played a role in making the Lebanese a notably urban immigrant group. Despite that the majority of Syrian-Lebanese immigrants came from small villages and agricultural backgrounds, the popularity of peddling made urban life more convenient and profitable (Landis, 1967; Naff, 1993). It not only for required little capital or knowledge of English, but also allowed for independence from employers (Landis, 1967; Kayal & Kayal, 1975; Miller, 1981; Naff, 1993).

The preference for independent work at times played against Syrian-Lebanese immigrants. Early stereotypes of the Syrian-Lebanese in the U.S. characterized them as violent and lazy. Kayal and Kayal (1975), in one of the earlier examinations of Lebanese immigration, assert that the stereotype of Syrian “laziness”

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“is more properly due to the Syrian’s traditional dislike of working for someone else as well as his historic attraction to commerce and trade. Being an employee was equated with financial exploitation and was seen as a handicap and hindrance to financial success” (p. 91).

Though scholars such as Kayal and Kayal (1975) are quick to reject negative stereotypes of Syrian-Lebanese immigrants, many of these same scholars are equally quick to embrace positive characterizations of the Syrian-Lebanese, such as their tendency for entrepreneurship.

Though most accounts of early Syrian and Lebanese immigration stem from the East Coast, the few accounts from the Twin Cities echo the popularity of peddling. Recounting the history of the Nasseff family in the West Side Saint Paul, Nasseff Hilgert (2005) writes that “peddling worked for many...Most transformed their peddling careers into retail operations by renting a storefront. So, even though they stopped moving they were still selling. Middle Easterners weren’t homesteaders and they weren’t sod busters. They were entrepreneurs” (p. 37). Despite this account, neither the records nor the interviews with the participants in this study provided any actual illustration of peddling in the Twin Cities. The Lebanese immigrants who settled in Saint Paul primarily worked in big industry for the railroads, textile mills, and packing plants (Miller, 1981). In Minneapolis, Lebanese immigrants mainly worked in street and sidewalk construction (Landis, 1967; Miller, 1981). While entrepreneurship played a significant role in defining Lebanese assimilation, there is little evidence of the popularity of peddling in the Twin Cities. However, it was a critical shaping force in other Minnesotan towns and cities where Lebanese immigrants settled, as well as the early American Lebanese experience at large (Miller, 1981).

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Peddling is a distinctly rootless profession. It allows easy travel and the accumulation of capital without investing in property. Peddling was appealing to early Syrian-Lebanese immigrants not only because of the independence it allowed, but because this first wave of immigration had no plans or desire to stay in the Americas (Kayal & Kayal, 1975; Naff, 1993). Peddling was so popular that prior to 1914, 90 percent of all Syrian immigrants had spent at least some period of time practicing it (Miller, 1981). It was a way to make money without learning English deeply or buying land. The profits were often sent as remittances back to the Old Country, and many of those who came from Greater Syria did actually return (Naff, 1993). Although the “myth of return” continued to fuel Lebanese-American culture (Abdelhady, 2011), many Lebanese families made the decision to root themselves in the U.S. for good when they began to buy property (Kayal & Kayal, 1975; Naff, 1993). Entrepreneurship, or investing in a piece of land and building a business on it, was then perhaps a sometimes unconscious decision to become American.

The study of ethnic entrepreneurship sheds light on the economic and placemaking processes that shape how minority communities interact with and adjust to majority norms. In this discussion, I draw a distinction between “ethnic” and “immigrant” entrepreneurship. Immigrant entrepreneurship specifically refers to businesses owned and run by relatively recent immigrant communities. Ethnic entrepreneurship encompasses immigrant entrepreneurship, but reaches more broadly. It refers to usually small businesses owned and run by members of “ethnic groups,” with “ethnic” defined by Waldinger et al. (1990) as “a set of connections and regular patterns of interaction among people sharing common national background or migration experiences” (p. 33). Waldinger et al. (1990) assert that ethnicity is an identity created by economic interdependence. People with similar experiences of migration or heritage seek each

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other out based on that commonality to generate the resources and infrastructure necessary to support small business ownership. These connections reinforce sense of community (Waldinger, et al., 1990). According to this definition, ethnicity is not primordial, nor is it an inevitable consequence of immersion into a majority society that regards members of an ethnic group as a minority, but rather ethnicity is “a *possible* outcome of the patterns by which intra- and intergroup interactions are structured” (Waldinger, et al., 1990, p. 34).

Place is a critical factor in the emergence of ethnic entrepreneurship. Ethnic neighborhoods often provide a niche space for an ethnic business to launch. This is captured in Waldinger et al.’s (1990) model of the emergence and development of ethnic economic integration and entrepreneurship, which is marked by three stages: replacement labor, ethnic niche, and middleman minority. After an immigrant community gains its economic footing by filling in labor needs vacated by previous immigrant groups, it is able to launch its own businesses, supported by its own ethnic market’s unmet needs. The presence of ethnic clustering in neighborhoods facilitates access to ethnic niche businesses. However, in traditional models of assimilation, ethnic neighborhoods have a tendency to disperse as community members gain cultural and economic capital (Zelinsky & Lee, 1998). If an ethnic business is to survive in the long term, it must grow an audience beyond its own ethnic community (Waldinger, et al., 1990). In reaching out to markets outside of the ethnic community, ethnic entrepreneurs become what Waldinger et al. (1990) call minority middlemen, or conduits between an ethnic population and the majority population. This stage is characterized by distinctive spatial characteristics. Ethnic entrepreneurs who become minority middlemen will not necessarily cluster in accordance with their ethnic community or follow, but disperse themselves according to need and demand of their newly expanded market. In doing this, ethnic businesses promote their ethnic identity by

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culturally dominating an area.

The first wave of Lebanese of the Twin Cities fit into the Waldinger et al. model well. While research by Naff (1993) and Kayal & Kayal (1975) suggests that the prevalence of peddling among recent Syrian-Lebanese immigrants may have allowed them to bypass the replacement labor stage, the apparent absence or diminished presence of peddling in the Twin Cities meant that the Lebanese immigrants to Saint Paul and Minneapolis did fulfill the replacement labor stage. The stories from the participants in this study also served to illustrate the ways in which early Lebanese immigrants to the Twin Cities served first as replacement labor in the railroad and manufacturing industries.

Family is another theme running throughout the formation of a Lebanese-American identity in the United States. Syrian-Lebanese immigrants were also known for the tightness of familial bonds and its role in business. Kayal and Kayal (1975) note that the earliest Syrian-Lebanese only made business alliances among other Syrian-Lebanese community members, and rarely employed from outside their own family (Landis, 1967; Kayal & Kayal, 1975). While family networks helped many new immigrants get started in their own careers as peddlers or entrepreneurs, they were also seen as a marker of refusal to assimilate. Early Syrian-Americans were called “tribal” and “inassimilable” (Kayal & Kayal, 1975). To this day, familial closeness remains a cornerstone of what many Lebanese-Americans identify as “Lebanese” (Ajrouch, 1999; Ajrouch, 2000). Familial closeness not only strengthens sense of Lebanese identity, but that parents’ and grandparents’ emphasis on Lebanese identity can be used to promote familial closeness and assert a degree of control over the choices of their children (Ajrouch, 1999). In this way, Lebanese identity in the U.S. emphasizes both familial interconnectedness and economic independence.

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Dependence on family as a network is hardly unique to the Lebanese-American experience. Family and coethnic relationships are critical to ethnic entrepreneurial success (Waldinger et al. 1990). Family connections and coethnic relationships (e.g., relationships with other ethnic groups) can serve as a source of affordable but reliable labor, as investors, and often as an initial market. Family is one shape of many networks that ethnic community members can rely on to eke out economic success. It is not only immigrants who have made it into the U.S. that benefit: migration depends on networks to successfully continue (Light, Bhachu, & Karageorgis, 1993). Potential emigrants rely on familial and ethnic networks to get jobs, homes, and documents (though an oversaturated area shows that network theory has its limits). Networks increase the number of opportunities and are vital to the economic and cultural strength of an ethnic community. As Waldinger et al. (1990) suggests, economic needs make networks a necessity, and networks in turn *create* ethnicity. However, such networks “often outlive the economic conditions that gave rise to them” (Light et al., 1993, p. 43). That is to say, the networks forged by economic necessity remain long after.

A generalized characterization of any group of people is problematic. Stereotyped understandings of the Lebanese and their descendants pervades much literature on the diaspora. The Lebanese are repeatedly characterized as family-oriented, hospitable, hot tempered, entrepreneurial, and fiercely independent (Kayal & Kayal, 1975; Naff, 1993). Many of my participants also described these as pieces of what it means to be Lebanese, and it seems to be possible that defining Lebanese values and traits could be a way of reinforcing Lebanese identity. Two of these traits, independence and familial devotion, are particularly pertinent in both literature on the Lebanese diaspora and the understanding of what it means to be Lebanese or Lebanese-American among the participants of this study. There is no doubt that themes of

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independence and family played a significant role in this study, and they are worth examining. However, this study regards them not as inherent traits of a group of people, but as a piece of the cultural memory Lebanese and their descendants in the U.S. have created in forming a Lebanese-American identity.

Throughout this thesis, I use the phrase “Lebanese and Lebanese-American” to refer to the descendants of Lebanese immigrants that continue to identify with their heritage. There are certainly plenty of Americans with Lebanese heritage that do not strongly associate with that heritage, and this thesis does not mean to gloss over that. Lebanese and Lebanese-American people are people in the United States of Lebanese descent who *identify as Lebanese or Lebanese-American*. I use both the terms “Lebanese” and “Lebanese-American” for two purposes: a) to include those who are actually Lebanese citizens, and b) out of recognition that “Lebanese-American,” while an accurate term to describe Americans who identify with Lebanese heritage, is not actually a term I have ever heard used by people to identify themselves. All of my participants, as well as my own family, identify as “Lebanese” in conjunction with being American, and usually with American being the primary identity. The term “Lebanese-American” is here used to mean Americans who associate with being Lebanese, and I use it to indicate when I am specifically discussing Americans of Lebanese descent, and not necessarily recent Lebanese immigrants. I recognize it as an imperfect term because it imposes a label on people that is not always used by people to identify themselves. However, I use it in the hopes of clarifying my argument.

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I. BECOMING LEBANESE, BECOMING AMERICAN

Naff (1993), one of the first scholars to deeply examine Syrian-Lebanese assimilation in the U.S., writes that “individualism, along with loyalty, piety, and close family relations, as the Syrians in America were to discover, were compatible with the most cherished American values” (p. 62). Because of this, Naff (1993) asserts, Syrian-Lebanese immigrants were well-poised for assimilation into American society. In writing one of the first catalogues of Lebanese-American history, Naff (1993) is also contributing to the creation of Lebanese-American cultural memory.

Cultural memory “is the realm where different actors compete in making their narratives formal collective memory” (Abdelhady, 2007). Abdelhady (2011) uses the concept of cultural memory to understand the formation of a Lebanese-American identity among Syrian-Lebanese immigrants and their descendants, many of whom left the Middle East at a time when Lebanon did not yet exist as an independent state. Abdelhady (2011) argues that Lebanese-descended ethnic communities, identities and cultures are neither disappearing nor staying as they were in the homeland, but forming a new identity all together. They have been able to form this new identity by weaving together a new social identity, composed with carefully selected strands of their Lebanese and American pasts (Abdelhady, 2011; Hyndman-Rizk, 2010). While Abdelhady’s (2011) analysis of cultural memory in Lebanese-American communities is useful in this study, the term *cultural memory* is more heavily used in the fields of literature, philosophy, and psychoanalysis. In the social sciences, collective memories are more commonly called *social memory*. Social memory implies a collective memory that is physically visible, as illustrated by Connerton (1989).

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Social memories are frequently played out in physical space. Connerton (1989) chronicles the ways in which societies selectively remember the past by highlighting certain pieces of the past through bodily practices and ceremonies. At the same time, a society may intentionally “forget” parts of the past they do not wish to be a part of their narrative by omitting them from daily recognition and practices (Connerton, 1989). Alternatively, groups whose own histories are omitted by the dominant social memory may form an oppositional history (and memory) of their own (Connerton, 1989). Some of the practices that Connerton identifies as formative to social memory, such as ceremonies, are directly noted in this study as a means through which Lebanese-Americans create and preserve their own unique cultural memory. Connerton’s understanding of social memory as a performance can be seen in many of the practices and placemaking patterns of Lebanese-American communities in the Twin Cities.

The first wave of Syrian-Lebanese immigration began in the 1880s and channeled primarily into the United States (Naff, 1993; Abdelhady, 2011). Most of these immigrants were Christians from the mountainous areas of modern-day Lebanon under the Ottoman Empire. The Ottoman Empire, led by the Muslim Turks, was an oppressive regime to Christians, and fear of Muslim persecution was an enormous impetus for many early emigrants (Naff, 1993; Abdelhady, 2011). These immigrants arrived before Lebanon itself was a country, and, alienated from the Muslim Ottoman Empire, did not necessarily identify as Lebanese (Kayal & Kayal, 1975).

Meanwhile, an anti-immigration fervor was sweeping across the U.S. “Concerns about diluting the American race emerged aside fears that the highly urbanized, often poor immigrants would undermine cherished American values by retaining the political, social, and cultural loyalties of their foreign heritage” (Samhan, 1999, p. 211). The quotas and exclusions placed on immigrants from Asia were applied to Middle Easterners as well. In 1915, July 4th officially

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became National Americanization Day, and in 1924, the National Origins Act went into effect. This act limited European immigration, completely halted immigration from Japan, and imposed quotas for all other groups based on a percentage of how many from that country were already present (Samhan, 1999). The National Origins Act also effectively prevented immigration from the Middle East until the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 (Naff, 1993).

As all of this was occurring in the United States, Lebanon was only just becoming a country. It gained independence from France in 1943, after the first wave of immigration from Lebanon to the United States and before the second wave, which was brought on by the Lebanese Civil War from the 1970s through the 1990s. Many of those who had come in from the province of Lebanon when it was a part of Greater Syria during Ottoman rule still called themselves Syrian. Many of those early immigrants and their descendants began calling themselves Lebanese, and both in Lebanon and among the diaspora, a pan-Lebanese identity was forming (Naff, 1993; Abdelhady, 2011).

In the U.S., forming a Lebanese and Lebanese-American identity was complicated by race and religion. American reliance on race as a social category has profoundly affected the Lebanese in the United States. Arab Americans, and Lebanese-Americans, occupy a precarious grey area in American understandings of race. Although Arab Americans are marked as “white” on the census and other demographic surveys, they have historically had to fight to keep this status. The Syrian-Lebanese immigrants of the First Wave relied on becoming “white” in the eyes of the law to keep the doors of immigration open. Since the early 1900s, however, Lebanese and Lebanese-American opinions about whiteness have become complicated. While there are still those who advocate to be seen as white, there are others that want Arabs to be recognized as an official racial category, and others who believe Arab peoples should be seen as people of

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color (Suleiman, 1999).

There are more still who shun classifications altogether. As Suleiman (1999) notes, “there are also those who resent being boxed into one category. Their sense of identity is multifaceted; they are men or women; Arab, American, Muslim or Christian; white or dark skinned; and so on. They think of themselves in different ways at different times or in different contexts, and they argue for getting rid of such categories or for the use of more descriptive categories that recognize different aspects of their background, culture, or physical appearance” (p. 15). Especially among the first wave and its children, becoming Lebanese has been as much a process as becoming American, and the two have become inextricably linked.

II. LEBANESE-AMERICANS AND RACE: THE PERPETUAL QUESTION MARK

This paper rests on the assumption that ethnicity is ultimately constructed. Ethnicity also implies the question of race. In the United States, race has very much been a political question, based less in science and more on perception (Jacobson, 1998). The U.S. Census sets the standard for how race is perceived and counted in the United States. Race was a key player in American immigration history for groups of “probationary whiteness,” such as the Lebanese (Jacobson, 1998). Immigrant communities were allowed into the United States on the basis of whether or not they were considered “white” until the opening of immigration in the 1960s. Syrian-Lebanese immigration hung upon whether or not they could be counted as “white,” and to keep lines of immigration open for themselves and their families, early Syrian-Lebanese immigrants fought to be classified as “white.”

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The case of George Dow in 1914 was a critical case in the question of Lebanese whiteness. Dow, a Lebanese Christian, was denied citizenship based on the 1790 statute that said only free white persons can become American citizens (Joseph, 1999). The statute was originally intended to differentiate between Free African-Americans and free European-Americans, and its racist intent was employed again to racially filter incoming immigrants (Samhan, 1999). Dow, however, argued that he was Semitic, and therefore white. He was granted his citizenship, and his whiteness, but the battle was not over—multiple legal cases over the whiteness of the Syrian-Lebanese, and thus their right to immigrate, followed Dow’s own (Joseph, 1999). Lebanese and Arab whiteness remains a question with fluctuating answers.

Classifying Arabs as “white,” while paving the way for initial assimilation and continued immigration, has now rendered Arabs invisible by their *lack* classification (Samhan, 1999; Naber, 2000). Similar to how claiming “colorblindness” can perpetuate turning a blind eye to existing racial inequalities, refusing to recognize Arab minority status in a society that is in the midst of a heavy anti-Arab fervor prevents Arab communities from having a united political voice (Joseph, 1999). Immigration policies seek to control who can make up the demographics of the United States. The ongoing reality is that Arab Americans tend to be viewed with suspicion in the U.S., especially Muslims (Naber, 2000; Nagel & Staeheli, 2004). The Arab American Institute highlights contributions made by Arab Americans and celebrities of Arab descent in the U.S. Their mission is to:

“draw attention to 1) a shared history of immigration, marginalization, and acceptance, 2) the importance of civil rights movements that may seem to distinguish immigrants from a mythic mainstream whose race and ethnicity seem unmarked, and 3) the ways in which

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the American experience is based on the acceptance of cultural differences predicated on shared political values of community” (Nagel & Staeheli, 2004, p. 14).

Lebanese and Arab whiteness was most recently called into doubt after 9/11. People of Arab descent, or assumed to be of Arab descent, have been persecuted socially and politically. Despite that modern Arab immigrants are among the most educated and professional of incoming immigration, they have been painted by the media as backwards and barbaric, and politically suspect (Naber, 2012; Abdelhady, 2011). Naber (2000) and Joseph (1999) argue that Arab-Americans have been racialized through Islam, subject to American neo-Orientalists who see Muslim societies as incapable of producing strong states, people, or democracies. What, then, of the Christian Arabs?

Whether or not “Christian” and “Arab” are contradictory terms remains point of debate among citizens and descendants of the Middle East. Abdelhady (2011) conducted a qualitative study on Lebanese diaspora across New York, Montreal, and Paris, and found that repeatedly, her Lebanese participants denied being Arab, for to them Arabness was associated with Islam, or, as one of my own participants told me, “Arabs are Muslim.” Through Arabness has traditionally had a religious connotation, Arabness and Islam in the U.S. have been racialized (Nagel & Staeheli, 2005).

Part of the American struggle to racially categorize Lebanese and Arab immigrants lies in that they do not easily conform to American racial standards. Naber (2000) depicts four paradoxes in the American racial and ethnic classification of Arabs and their descendants: 1) Arab countries have extremely diverse racial makeups, but are represented as homogenous by the U.S. media; 2) Arabs and Arab-Americans are racialized both as white and as non-white; 3)

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Arab-Americans are more strongly racialized by religion (e.g., Christian or Muslim) rather than by appearance; and 4) that Arab countries use religion as a marker of difference, and the U.S. uses race. Regardless of whether Lebanese-Americans consider themselves Arab, overarching American understandings of Arab as Muslim and homogenous puts the “Arabness” of often light-skinned Lebanese Christians into question. While they remain tied to the minority politics of Arab-Americans, Christian Lebanese-Americans have for the most part acquired the cultural, social, and economic capital necessary to step away from being considered Arab or Arab-American in favor of being considered European.

Alba (1990) has been a foremost scholar in examining the legacy and transformation of white ethnic identities in the United States. He draws attention to the resurgence of ethnic identification among white descendants of European immigrants, despite that these identities no longer correlate with any real difference in economic or social status. According to Alba (1990), these identities are symptoms of symbolic attachments to remnants of ethnic heritage, with little consequence for their expression. Furthermore, Alba argues that the symbolic resurgence of ethnic attachments is actually a symptom of the emergence of a completely new ethnic group, the European American. The analysis and conclusions of this research assumes Alba’s hypothesis of the resurgence of white ethnic identity and the creation of the European American identity.

While the term “European American” is academically useful and accurate, its use seems to be limited to academia alone. I have never heard “European American” used by someone to identify themselves, just as I have almost never heard the term “Lebanese-American.” Alba’s “European Americans” could also correlate to the group of people identified by the term “white Americans.” While whiteness is more a racial signifier than an ethnic signifier, it is contingent on European ethnicity. As is witnessed by the George Dow case, the Lebanese have had to argue

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their whiteness on the basis of their Europeanness, not their skin color. While the term “white American” has heavy racial overtones, it is in part because of this that I feel it is an appropriate term to replace “European Americans.” In this paper, the new ethnic group Alba (1990) calls “European Americans” will be known as “white Americans,” which is not only a racial category, but an ethnic category. The rise of a pan-European ethnic category shaped the assimilation of first-wave Lebanese immigrants and their descendants and is critical in understanding the Lebanese and Lebanese-American position as non-European Christian white ethnics.

B. SELECTIVE ASSIMILATION

The use of the term *assimilation* is controversial. It is a word laden with meaning in American history, carrying images of Ellis Island, changed names, and essentially forced cultural and language loss. Many scholars are currently employing terms that are more neutral, such as *acculturation* or *incorporation* (Smith, 2006). These terms can be helpful in allowing scholars to re-envision a migration and adaptation process that isn't necessarily negative and acknowledging that adaptation processes occurring today are unfolding in a very different context than the processes of one hundred or two hundred years ago. However, Smith (2006), Nagel (2009), Jacoby (2004), and other scholars take note of the history of the term *assimilation* and defend its continued use, arguing that “it more accurately describes what immigrants perceive to be a coercive process with often negative consequences for them and their children...I think we cannot get a good picture of the current reality without acknowledging it” (Smith, 2006, p. 7). While the word should be used with intentionality and acknowledgement of the baggage it carries, *assimilation* should not be erased from the migration vocabulary. The history it holds and

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the sometimes traumatic processes associated with it are legitimate pieces of the multitude of experiences and emotions that come with relocating from one place to another. *Assimilation* and the baggage it carries are particularly relevant for this case study. The majority of the families I interviewed immigrated prior to 1940, and most of their parents, grandparents or great-grandparents came through Ellis Island. While the process of assimilation is changing rapidly, most of the participants in this study carry a family legacy deeply tied to traditional American notions of “assimilation.”

The process of moving families to a new country and trying to adapt to a new set of cultural attitudes and values continues to be a controversial, often painful process in which people are forced to negotiate between identities. However, this process and scholarly understanding of it is undeniably changing (Portes & Zhou, 2005; Nagel & Staeheli, 2005; Alba & Nee, 2005). Traditional understandings of assimilation in the U.S. have relied on the idea of a “melting pot,” where “assimilation...meant becoming more like middle-class protestant whites” (Alba & Nee, 2005, p. 4). However, this traditional definition denies assimilation as a multi-faceted process of mutual shaping between the immigrant and host societies (Portes & Rumbaut, 1990; Alba & Nee, 2005).

Traditional assimilation definitions that fail to account for the reality of assimilation as a two-way process and demand fully erasure of ethnic identity and markers have been a continual roadblock in scholarly understanding of the actual processes and experiences immigrants and their descendants undergo (Portes & Rumbaut, 1990; Alba & Nee, 2005). However, it is still useful to consider a definition of assimilation that takes into account how cultural, social, and identity differences can be used as factors to alienate a minority group from a more powerful majority:

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“How then should assimilation be defined, given the prospects for a more racially diverse mainstream society arising from large-scale immigration of non-Europeans? A viable conceptualization must recognize that (1) ethnicity is essentially a social boundary, a distinction that individuals make in their everyday lives and that shapes their actions and mental orientations toward others; (2) this distinction is typically embedded in a variety of social and cultural differences between groups that give an ethnic boundary concrete significance (so that members of one group think, “They are not like us because...”); and (3) assimilation, as a form of ethnic change, may occur through changes taking place in groups on both sides of the boundary. Consequently, we define assimilation as the decline of an ethnic distinction and its corollary cultural and social differences.” (Alba & Nee, 2005, p. 11)

“Decline,” in the sense that Alba and Nee (2005) use it, does not necessarily mean that differences *disappear*, but that they lose their importance in distinguishing between groups and individuals. Critically, to be assimilated does not mean the erasure of ethnic differences, but the acceptance of them by the host society. Assimilation implies the resolution of tensions between being “American” and another ethnic identity (Joseph, 1999).

Segmented assimilation has evolved as a subset of the assimilation discourse to understand the multiple pathways immigrants and their descendants may follow in integrating into American society (Portes & Zhou, 2005 Smith, 2006). Portes and Zhou (2005) define this pattern as rooted in class:

“Instead of a relatively uniform mainstream whose mores and prejudices dictate a common path of integration, we observe today several distinct forms of adaptation. One

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of them replicates the time-honored portrayal of growing acculturation and parallel integration into the white middle-class; a second leads straight in the opposite direction to permanent poverty and assimilation into the underclass; still a third associates rapid economic advancement with deliberate preservation of the immigrant community's values and tight solidarity” (p. 82).

Portes and Zhou (2005) also propose that assimilation has become increasingly segmented after the implementation of the 1965 Immigration Act, which loosened immigration restrictions and made it easier for families to immigrate as whole units. Segmented assimilation, they claim, is largely the result of 1) recent immigrants arriving as families instead of as independent individuals who could easily shed their cultures and pasts; and 2) the re-structuring of economic opportunities that eliminates the solidly middle-class industrial jobs and leaves only minimally-paid working-class jobs and highly skilled professional jobs (Portes & Zhou, 2005). They also note the shift from almost entirely European immigration to immigration from Africa, Asia, and Latin America, which has made race an increasingly prevalent piece of how immigrant societies are received, and which path of segmented assimilation they follow (Glans, 2004; Portes & Zhou, 2005).

Heterolocalism is a model of assimilation proposed by Zelinsky and Lee (1998) to address patterns of recent immigration that do not seem to rely on spatial clustering to maintain an ethnic identity. Heterolocalism diverges from pluralist and traditional models of immigrant spatial patterns in that recent immigrant communities start at integration. Zelinsky and Lee (1998) attribute this to a shift in immigration that favors those with professional skill sets, affluence, and some knowledge of the English language and, through the media, American culture. The result of this is that, to a degree, “the foreign-born person seeking permanent or

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temporary domicile in the US disembarks with assimilation already in progress” (Zelinsky & Lee, 1998). In the absence of spatial nearness, ethnic groups are not absorbed into a pan-American identity as the melting pot model asserts, but can maintain their ethnic identities through enhanced technology, communication, and transportation (Zelinsky & Lee, 1998). Hardwick (2006) further nuances Zelinsky and Lee’s (1998) theory by proposing nodal heterolocalism, characterized by a series of dispersed and relatively small residential clusters. Based on participant testimonies, the second wave of Lebanese immigration to the Twin Cities seems to best fit the nodal heterolocal model. However, the first wave spatially assimilated in a way best defined by the “traditional” model based on European immigrant assimilation.

First-wave Lebanese immigration is one of the oldest voluntary non-European migrations to the United States at a (relatively) large scale. However, they were Christian and, with persuasion, accepted as white. Hyndman-Rizk (2010) collected qualitative data about “being Honkey-Lebanese”: appearing white and assimilated, but feeling too Lebanese and not white enough to truly be American. Many from the first wave of Lebanese immigration to the United States remain actively participating in the pieces of Lebanese heritage and history *they have chosen to keep* (Hyndman-Rizk, 2010). This older wave of Lebanese-Americans, descended of less educated and often illiterate mountain communities, find themselves in a culturally at odds with the more recent Lebanese and Lebanese-Americans of the second wave, who came post-1975 to escape civil war in Lebanon (Hyndman-Rizk, 2010). The second wave, unlike the first wave, is more evenly comprised of Muslims and Christians, and is also wealthier and educated (Hyndman-Rizk, 2010). The first wave’s current living descendants, its second-, third- and fourth-generations, tend to be educated and middle-class, with more American social and cultural capital than more recent immigrants (Hyndman-Rizk, 2010). Despite this, they may feel

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threatened or “inauthentic” in the face of actual Lebanese citizens or Lebanese-Americans who are less assimilated (Hyndman-Rizk, 2010; Naber, 2012). The result of the collision of first and second wave Lebanese and Lebanese-Americans, then, is a competition in definitions of what it means to be Lebanese in America.

Cultural authenticity can be seen as one of the benefits of maintaining an ethnic identity. Naber (2010) identifies cultural authenticity as a way Arab Americans engage with their heritage without engaging in its context or the politics it implies. It is “a process by which middle-class Arab diasporas come to herald particular ideals as markers of an authentic, essential, true, or real Arab culture” (Naber, 2012, p. 63). Arab Americans can feel connection to and comfort in a broader Arab culture without the marginalization or discrimination that comes with being seen as unassimilated. It is also a method of selectively assimilating to American culture (Naber 2010). For instance, Arab cooking, Arab-Christian traditions, familial closeness, or Arab social networks might be kept, while anything that might visibly mark them as incompatible with perceived American ideals or otherwise be stigmatizing, such as certain Islamic practices, is left behind. In the case of Lebanese Christians whose very Arabness is negotiable, cultural authenticity can be a way to both become American and remain connected to Lebanese roots (Naber, 2010).

C. PLACEMAKING

Placemaking is one of the less explored geographic aspects of assimilation. The spatial distribution of assimilation has been discussed, modeled, and studied (Zelinsky & Lee, 1998; Hardwick, 2006), and can be a useful tool for understanding the economic and communication patterns of assimilation. Placemaking has less of a presence in assimilation literature. However,

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Davis (2001) provides a useful example of how placemaking sheds light on immigrant and ethnic identity expression in an exploration of Latino placemaking in urban public spaces. I believe that the right to the city dialogue, Nedelsky’s (1990) explanation of “the bounded self,” and Cresswell’s (1996) discussion of transgressive acts shed light on the connections between placemaking and assimilation in the case of Lebanese and Lebanese-American ethnic identity in the U.S.

The widespread and dynamic “right to the city” dialogue lays the framework for understanding the relationship between placemaking and assimilation. Introduced by Lefebvre (1991), “right to the city” asserts that an individual or group of individuals can assert their belonging to a place by changing it to reflect their needs and identity. The power to change space then becomes a tool for equal voice, especially among marginalized or disenfranchised groups who might not conform or have access to more traditional forms of voice (Lefebvre & Nicholson-Smith, 1991; Mitchell, 2012). The right to the city may be critical for city dwellers without political voice or clout, such as undocumented or non-citizen residents (Mitchell, 2012). While Nedelsky (1990) and Lefebvre (1991) both assert that controlling property is a sign and assertion of individual or non-state power, Nedelsky specifically makes the case for private spaces, whereas Lefebvre (1991) and the “right to the city” dialogue have mainly concerned public spaces.

While the connection between placemaking and assimilation could certainly be seen through the lens of “right to the city,” and perhaps should be for some immigrant communities, it is more appropriate to use Nedelsky’s (1990) argument and its emphasis on private property in the case of Lebanese immigrants and their descendants. Nedelsky (1990) argues that in the American legal framework, property is the ultimate expression of autonomy. The American

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Constitution primarily used and boundaries and definitions of property to determine who had the right to their own space and, as a consequences, who has autonomy from the government, and how much. Private property is a space where the rights of the individual trump the rights of the state or of collective society (Nedelsky, 1990). Nedelsky (1990) challenges this principle and sees it as ultimately flawed: “Property must distort because it makes inequality rather than liberty, or individual autonomy, the central problem of government” (Nedelsky, 1990, p. 165). While there is some expression of Lebanese identity in public spaces throughout the Twin Cities, such as through murals and cedar tree symbology, Lebanese and Lebanese-American placemaking centrally expresses itself through entrepreneurship and the creation of communal gathering spaces, such as churches. These places are ultimately private, albeit communally used, spaces, and their power is directly connected to the Lebanese and Lebanese-American ownership of land. Buying property was the ultimate sign that Syrian-Lebanese immigrants had given up the “myth of return” to Lebanon and set their roots in the United States (Kayal & Kayal, 1975; Abdelhady, 2011). It could perhaps even be said, then, that ownership of private property was the founding of the Lebanese-American identity, allowing for continued attachments to Lebanese ethnic identity, but too American to go back.

I also draw on Cresswell’s (1996) discussion of transgressive acts. Transgressive acts are actions seen as inappropriate because of where they occur and who performs them (typically, marginalized groups). Unlike resistance, transgressive acts are not dependent on whether the action was intended to provoke a reaction, but whether or not it actually did (Cresswell, 1996). Cresswell (1996) also claims that defining what is “normal” in a place and what is “deviant” is determined by whoever has power over that space. By *appearing* outside the norm, or “out of place,” individuals or communities are marginalized as “not from here” or as an “outsider”

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(Cresswell, 1990, p. 25). As a result, these marginalized actors may suddenly find themselves in direct conflict with governmental powers or the surrounding community by simply acting in a way that might be considered completely acceptable somewhere else. While I do not believe that the acts of the Lebanese communities in the Twin Cities are necessarily transgressive, reflecting on the nature of transgressive acts brings out the nuances in Lebanese and Lebanese-American placemaking and can perhaps help explain why it has been so durable. The presence of Lebanese communities is marked in subtle ways that might only be visible to those who are already familiar with Lebanese culture. In part, this research examines how the Lebanese communities of the Twin Cities have balanced changing the places around them with blending in. This incredible balancing act simultaneously allows Lebanese and Lebanese-Americans to establish cultural roots around them while superficially assimilating and dodging too much public observance or “transgressiveness.”

However, even as Lebanese communities evade being perceived as transgressive or “out of place,” they assert their increasing social, cultural, and economic capital to redefine what is “normal” in these places. “In effect, the ‘reading’ of people acting in space is also a kind of ‘writing’ as new meanings are formed” (Cresswell, 1996, p. 165). In the small and subtle ways Lebanese communities deviate from what might be seen as normal, they are rewriting what is “normal” in those spaces. Through selective assimilation, Lebanese communities have been able to discard cultural markers that might be seen as “transgressive” while simultaneously retaining pieces of their heritage that might be less noticeable or appear less threatening to the “norm” of the Twin Cities. Their success at this allows them to remain “Lebanese” or “Lebanese-American” without being pressured to further assimilate and, through their success, define the places around them.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

A. CASE STUDY SELECTION

My research takes place in Minneapolis, Minnesota and Saint Paul, Minnesota. The most heavily investigated areas in this research were Northeast Minneapolis and West Side Saint Paul. Some research also took place immediately outside the Twin Cities in Mendota Heights, Minnesota, in order to pursue connections with a church that had been moved from the West Side to Mendota Heights. The Twin Cities have a medium-sized Lebanese and Lebanese-American population. Although there are no formal accounts of Lebanese immigrants or their descendants in the area, research participants gave a consistent estimate of about 1200 families throughout both Minneapolis and Saint Paul. Between Minneapolis and Saint Paul, I studied three overarching Lebanese and Lebanese-American communities.

The three communities I studied can be roughly divided along the lines of three prominent Lebanese Christian churches: Saint Maron’s Catholic Church in Northeast Minneapolis, Saint George’s Antiochian Orthodox Church in West Side Saint Paul, and Holy Family Maronite Catholic Church in Mendota Heights. The parishioners of these churches do not necessarily live in the area immediately surrounding their church, although many do. These churches and their communities collaborate on occasion and are connected to each other, but they are distinctive communities with separate histories. In this study it should be understood that the Lebanese communities of the Twin Cities do not necessarily form one cohesive community, and that Lebanese Christian communities are almost never solely comprised of

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Lebanese and Lebanese-American members. While many or most of the parishioners in each church were of Lebanese descent, each church also hosted people of other ethnic heritages.

The three churches represent diverse perspectives on what it means to be Lebanese-American. Saint Maron’s Church of Northeast Minneapolis and Holy Family Maronite Catholic Church of Mendota Heights are both Maronite, a branch of Catholicism that comes from Lebanon and has only spread outside Lebanese borders by way of Lebanese immigration. Holy Family Maronite Catholic Church originated in West Side Saint Paul, a traditional immigrant community, to serve the Lebanese immigrants and their families in the area. The community is largely from the mountain village of Aslout in Northern Lebanon, and the majority of the parishioners at Holy Family today are the third- and fourth-generation descendants of Lebanese immigrants. Many people of non-Lebanese descent have also either married into the church or have left Roman Catholic churches to join the Holy Family. The church was founded in 1918 in the West Side and later built its own church within the West Side in 1950. After many Lebanese and Lebanese-Americans left the West Side in the 1960s and 1970s, Holy Family relocated to Mendota Heights, a Saint Paul suburb. It continues to host priests from Lebanon, and its services are hosted primarily in English.

Saint Maron’s is also a Maronite Catholic church, but its community and history is completely distinct from that of the Holy Family. The Saint Maron’s community comes primarily from the town of Batroun. The church was begun in the late 1800s by the surrounding community, beginning in a small house converted to a church in 1913, and then migrating in 1919, both locations along Main Street in Minneapolis. In 1948, Saint Maron’s moved to its present location on University Avenue in Northeast Saint Paul.

I chose to focus on Lebanese Christian communities both because the vast majority of

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Lebanese and Lebanese-Americans in the Twin Cities are Christian and because the three churches selected for this case study are major pillars in maintaining the local Lebanese communities. Churches, I will argue, are one of the critical places Lebanese immigrants and their descendants have created maintained that allow them to celebrate or express their identities. Parishioners of these churches included many local entrepreneurs, whose created spaces I also study as examples of placemaking.

The question I posed in the three main case studies was whether placemaking was a factor in Lebanese selective acculturation and how that process unfolded. To address this question, I used two methodologies: field research of Lebanese and Lebanese-American spaces, and in-depth interviews with various members of the Lebanese and Lebanese-American communities of the Twin Cities.

B. INTERVIEWING

Much of my data and observations are drawn from interviews with Lebanese and Lebanese-American community members in Saint Paul and Minneapolis. I conducted 16 interviews in total, which typically ranged from one to one and a half hours long. Two interviews were conducted in participants' homes, eight interviews were conducted in various cafes and restaurants around the Twin Cities, and two interviews were conducted by phone. Participants were found through the snowballing technique, usually referred to me by a previous participant, who I would then call to arrange an interview time. In a few instances I called businesses or community leaders with connections to the Lebanese community without a prior contact.

I attempted to interview Lebanese and Lebanese-American community members with a

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variety of points of view. Most interviewees were second- or third-generation descendants of Lebanese immigrants and identified as being Lebanese or Lebanese-American. Some were local community leaders, some were entrepreneurs, and some were simply contacts that others thought might be valuable to listen to. Nearly all of my participants had deep opinions about assimilation and often spoke directly on the topic. While I primarily draw from their life experiences and family histories, I also listen to their thoughts on Lebanese assimilation in the United States and immigration today. These opinions are incorporated into later parts of the paper.

To interpret the data from interviews, I transcribed each recorded interview and typed up the notes from phone interviews. I used coding, a method of drawing connections between sources by tagging phrases and paragraphs by theme, to draw connections between the different interviews and find themes throughout them. These themes went on to define the chapters of this paper. The interviews also frequently referenced the very places I observed as Lebanese or Lebanese-American spaces, and the participants offered information, history, and opinions concerning these spaces.

C. FIELD WORK AND PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION

I observed the places I call “Lebanese and Lebanese-American spaces” through observation and participation. When I use the term “Lebanese and Lebanese-American spaces”, I refer to spaces in which Lebanese identity or heritage is supported, encouraged, or highlighted. These spaces are not necessarily exclusive to other identities, and might not even be inhabited by primarily Lebanese people. To document these spaces, I took field notes and pictures. I also recorded my experiences and impressions participating in these spaces.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

The West Side of Saint Paul is actually in the southeast of Saint Paul. It's separated from the downtown area by the Mississippi River—hence the neighborhood's name, for being west of the river. It has a centuries-long tradition as a gateway for new immigrant communities, many of which have left their mark on its neighborhoods before moving out. At the present, Latino communities have the most visible shaping effect on the landscape. Especially along Cesar Chavez and Robert Street, the streets are lined with signs in Spanish, dozens of Latino-oriented restaurants and groceries, and enormous murals, typically depicting scenes taken from a Mexican cultural heritage. Although more recent Latino immigrants are heavily located in Minneapolis and East Side Saint Paul, the earliest waves of Latino (then primarily Mexican) immigration was concentrated in the West Side and continues to carry visual prominence there.

There are few, if any, obvious signs that the Lebanese community was ever present in Saint Paul. The West Side Flats, close to the river and prone to flooding, housed many recent immigrant communities, the Lebanese included. Though many of the recent Lebanese immigrants worked for the railroad and other local industries, the majority were peddlers (Landis, 1965). There were also some Lebanese-owned businesses, particularly groceries and meat stores that served the local population. In the 1950s, however, the communities living in the West Side flats were pushed out to revitalize the neighborhood. In the process of this revitalization, any imprint that the Lebanese community and other communities had made on the neighborhood was erased (Landis, 1967). While many Lebanese and Lebanese-American residents simply moved higher up on the hill, the renovation of the flats marked the time when the descendants of Lebanese immigrants began to leave the West Side (Landis, 1967). According to participants, several moved to South Minneapolis, but most eventually migrated to Saint

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Paul’s suburbs. Since Arab Americans are not given a great deal of visibility in demographic counts, it is impossible to gauge how many people who self-identify as Lebanese or Lebanese American still live in the West Side. Some interviewees insisted there is still a significant Lebanese community there, and others insisted that nearly everyone had left. Either way, and in spite of the erasure of past Lebanese neighborhoods, a handful clear markers of the Lebanese community remain on the landscape, such as a few Lebanese restaurants and businesses and even an actual mural incorporating the Lebanese flag.

The Lebanese community originating this area is predominantly Maronite and Antiochian Orthodox. The Maronite community mainly came from Aslout, a village in the mountains of Northern Lebanon. The participants whose families came from Aslout cited many different reasons for their family’s immigration. A popular reason was to escape the persecution of the Muslim Turkish Empire, or, almost ubiquitously in the case of second wave immigrants and their descendants, to flee the violence of the Lebanese Civil War. Others talked about the increased economic opportunity that the United States presented. Their families found those opportunities in West Side Saint Paul and downtown Saint Paul, just across the border, as rail workers, peddlers, and entrepreneurs.

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Image removed for copyright reasons

Hand-drawn map by Landis (1967) of Lebanese neighborhoods in Northeast Minneapolis (top)
and West Side Saint Paul (bottom).

“I AM HERE TO BUILD WITH YOU”

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Hand-drawn map by Landis (1967) of home cities of Lebanese immigrants to the Twin Cities.

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Northeast Minneapolis, also a site of industrial job opportunities, drew its own Lebanese community, primarily from Batroun, a coastal city of northern Lebanon. Minneapolis as a city draws more immigrants than Saint Paul, especially in the case of Arab immigrants. Partially due to this, and partially due to the continuation of immigration from Batroun, the Lebanese community in Northeast Minneapolis is a more even mixture of first wave immigration fleeing the Ottoman empire and second wave immigration fleeing the Lebanese Civil War. Most recent Lebanese immigration has been to Minneapolis, and as a result, the Northeast Minneapolis community is growing.

Participants who were both in and outside of the Northeast Minneapolis community most commonly attributed this growth to the better access to jobs in Minneapolis. Due to this, many parishioners of Saint Maron's, the Maronite Catholic church of Northeast Minneapolis, live within walking distance of the church. In that same neighborhood is Emily's Lebanese Deli, one of the oldest Lebanese restaurants in the Twin Cities, and the Peter Nasseff Home, a living community for seniors that serves many Lebanese-Americans. Due to the invisibility of Arabs and white ethnic groups on Census data, it is unclear exactly how many of the community members in this area are Lebanese, but several participants described the area and other nearby parts of Minneapolis as a key residential space for recent Lebanese immigrants. By comparison, neither of the other two churches in this study, Holy Family Maronite Catholic Church and Saint George's Antiochian Orthodox Church, in Mendota Heights and West Saint Paul respectively, are within walking distance for any significant portions of their members.

GZ: Nobody walks to church anymore. We're not dense enough...when Lebanese people from the West Side got moved off the West Side by the city, they dispersed them to the

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Upper West Side, which is an area just above Concord Street. For the lower West Side, that was the promised land, up above there. Because they had grass, you know? They had everything but the church. The church was the hub. The church was up there, but it was on the fringe of the lower West Side and the Upper West Side. So once they became a little more affluent, they moved further out, and the more affluent they became, the less they moved back to the Holy Family.

While West Side Saint Paul still holds evidence of the Lebanese community's presence, its Lebanese and Lebanese-American residents have largely moved out, and with them went the Lebanese churches. The restaurants and businesses that do remain are relatively far apart, and certainly not all within walking distance for any Lebanese community members that do remain. One Lebanese-American entrepreneur in the area noted that most of his customers were not from the immediate area, but rather were a younger demographic than nearby residents, and primarily drove in from other parts of the cities or, sometimes, from other parts of the state. Based on these observations, it can be said that while Lebanese communities of both West Side Saint Paul and Northside Minneapolis began as centralized immigrant enclaves for the Lebanese community, those communities in the West Side have dispersed and suburbanized, while Northeast Minneapolis still retains some characteristics of an immigrant enclave, such as clustered ethnic businesses and services. This spatial trend has shaped the way assimilation has played out, and continues to unfold, in these communities.

CM: When you go to Saint Maron's, it's very much a conclave of immigrant families and they've continued it just beautiful, you know...They've maintained that Lebanon here in the United States where the Holy Family Church has assimilated and have come up with a new way.

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The former building of the Holy Family Maronite Catholic Church, on the West Side, now hosts an Eritrean community.

Saint Maron’s, which essentially acts as a Lebanese community center of Northeast Minneapolis, was recognized by many participants as “less assimilated” than the other parishes. According to participants, its spatial patterning to a large degree also follows that of a traditional immigrant enclave, compared to the “more assimilated” and spatially dispersed former communities of West Side Saint Paul. It is likely, then, that the renovation of the West Side Flats and the consequential expulsion of the Lebanese community from it contributed to the more rapid spatial assimilation process of the West Side Lebanese and Lebanese-Americans. However, as the participant quoted above notes, the dispersed communities of the West Side still strongly

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retain their ethnic identity, which in this context can be taken to mean, as another participant put it, “shed our Arabic skin, so to say, and be a Christian parish that doesn’t think ethnically.” The participant above explains that the West Side Lebanese have “come up with a new way.” This “new way” is a balancing act between the benefits of being economically and socially acculturated, while still retaining select parts of Lebanese heritage, and reshaping what those pieces mean in the context of being American.

Placemaking is a key agent in enabling the selective, inventive assimilation process that the Lebanese community has opted for. In this study, I examined various spaces where Lebanese heritage and identity is performed and communicated, and what those processes look like. Some repeated themes throughout the study were the use of Cedar tree symbolism, the creation and maintenance of entrepreneurial spaces, and the continuation of distinctly Lebanese Christian churches. These spaces have allowed Lebanese and Lebanese-Americans to exercise Lebanese heritage and identity in a space where it is considered “normal” while still appearing as white, Christian, and American to outsiders.

A. CEDAR TREE SYMBOLISM

Cedar trees are a long-standing symbol of Lebanon, to the extent that they are even featured on the Lebanese flag. The Cedar gained its importance during the time of the ancient Phoenician empire, which used its strong, light wood to make fine ships and become a formidable naval force. Cedar trees are most plentiful in the mountains of Lebanon, and somewhat as a result, it is often seen as more a symbol of the Christian people of the mountains than of Lebanon as a whole (Abdelhady, 2011).

The Christian association of the Cedar is emphasized by the repeated mentions of

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Lebanese cedars throughout the Bible. David and Solomon used Lebanese cedar wood to build their palaces. Perhaps most cited of all these references and stories is Psalm 92: 12: "The righteous flourish like the palm tree and grow like the cedar in Lebanon." This quote is engraved across the entrance to Saint Maron's Church, next to the Lebanese flag.

Though the visible presence of the Lebanese communities in the Twin Cities is miniscule compared to other minority communities and can easily fly under the radar, an eye trained to the sight of the Cedar can catch them throughout the two cities, sometimes in unexpected places. Some places, such as on the sign of Beirut Restaurant, a business that rests on its Lebanese heritage, the image of the Cedar is less surprising. However, it also appears on the sign for Nasseff's Mechanical Contractors in West Side Saint Paul and the Peter Nasseff Home in Northeast Minneapolis. Businesses that have no apparent connection to a Lebanese heritage, save their owners, highlight the presence of a Lebanese community. To most outside observers, however, the Cedar might not be a known and recognizable symbol.

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A Lebanese-owned business on the West Side makes use of the Cedar

By flying under the radar of most non-Lebanese observers, the Cedar becomes an unintentionally subtle signal between Lebanese and Lebanese-Americans of each other's presence. Several of my participants wore the Cedar tree as a charm on a necklace, or had it displayed somewhere in their homes. One participant recounted her own experience of this:

JD: I was teaching...and had a student ask a question, it was laboratory classroom, and he kind of rolled his chair forward, and I was writing on the board I turned around to address the question. In the middle of his question, he stopped and asked me if I was Lebanese. I mean right in the middle of the question. He just sort of looked at me and said, are you Lebanese? And I said yes. And he goes, you're wearing a Cedar. And I didn't even realize, I have a chain with four or five charms on it, and one of them was a Cedar. I wear it every day. The Cedar had kind

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of flipped to the front, and he caught it as it flipped forward, and he said, that’s the Cedar. The other 23 students looked at me like... are you guys for real?

Despite the impact of Lebanese immigration on placemaking in Saint Paul and Minneapolis, their presence is mainly unnoticed except to others of Lebanese descent. It is perhaps largely because the Cedar is only a symbol, rather than an action, that it remains unnoticed. Unlike the “transgressive acts” outlined by Cresswell (1996), symbols can infiltrate spaces where they might be considered “out of place” and easily be covered. They pose less threat to what is considered “normal” because while their existence might spark a certain emotion, it is hardly ever an actual agent of change. This, coupled with the reality that the Cedar tree mainly only evokes emotion or even recognition from individuals who are already familiar with Lebanese culture, means that the Cedar tree can be used as a portable signifier of Lebanese presence without disrupting the mainstream or more widely accepted narrative of a place.

B. ENTREPRENEURSHIP

The Lebanese diaspora is best known for its incredible tendency for entrepreneurship—which is, consequently, a phenomenon that has a great deal of impact on physically, culturally, and economically shaping a place. This research began with the hypothesis that entrepreneurship and the placemaking it involved allowed Lebanese immigrants and their descendants to selectively assimilate—that is, to assimilate in some ways and not in others. While entrepreneurial spaces, depending on their purpose and intent, can be places for Lebanese and Lebanese-Americans to exercise their heritage, the evidence from this research and from previous scholarship suggests that entrepreneurship was also the platform the Lebanese used to

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achieve economic assimilation. In terms of Portes and Zhou’s (1993) model of segmented assimilation, economic gain allowed the Lebanese to assimilate into a white middle class. That is to say, entrepreneurship was as much a part of processes of Lebanese-American assimilation as it was a tool to maintain and reinvent ethnic identity.

All of the participants cited in this section are Lebanese or Lebanese American entrepreneurs in the Twin Cities, involved in a variety of different businesses. For some, the family business has been a vein of passing down Lebanese (or Lebanese American) culture. For others, however, there was little or no observed relationship between starting their own business, or even continuing a family business, and maintaining a Lebanese identity. One respondent, whose family runs a Middle Eastern restaurant in the Twin Cities, cited her own lack of connection to Lebanese identity:

CA: My mom was different, she wasn’t really into the Lebanese ways. We’re Americanized...[In a Lebanese family,] everyone’s very close and very into each other’s lives. My family’s really different.

Other entrepreneurs had similar feelings, or felt that the happenstance of their businesses themselves had little to do with being Lebanese. Based on observations of various spaces owned by Lebanese people, the physical space of a business itself almost never acted as a space for the performance and expression of Lebanese identity. The exceptions were restaurants that served Lebanese cuisine, which often expressed heritage in their decoration, menu, and music tastes. However, even in these spaces, the majority of the customers were often not themselves Lebanese. Rather than serving as community spaces for Lebanese and Lebanese-Americans themselves, these types of restaurants play a role in “normalizing” Lebanese cuisine and making it a part of the Twin Cities culture. As one participant, himself a restaurant owner, put it, “I

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honestly think that, the more [Lebanese food] got popular, the more places opened up, the better it helped us. That’s what I think made everybody realize, hey, this food is kind of normal. Maybe it’s not as weird as we think.” In the past fifteen years especially, some participants observed, Lebanese and Middle Eastern cuisine has taken off in popularity and has even become seen as a part of American food culture. Hummus, for instance, has only in the past ten years become an average household word. Restaurants that advertise themselves as Lebanese have helped make this possible by demonstrating that Lebanese cuisine *belongs* in Minnesota.

In addition to redefining what restaurants are considered “normal” in the Twin Cities, the profession of being an entrepreneur at all holds a strong association with Lebanese identity. Regardless of the business itself as a space, nearly all participants, entrepreneurs or not, made direct connections between being an entrepreneur and being Lebanese.

JK: The first true businessmen in history were Lebanese. In history. The Phoenicians. When they went from their area in Lebanon, it wasn’t called Lebanon at that time, when they traveled to Spain, they figured out whatever they had with them...they figured out that they could get things, turn around and sell it, and get a profit for it. And not in like your own town, I’m talking about importing and exporting...They say the first merchant business people were Lebanese...We try to encourage our kids to be professionals first... But I just think, naturally, we’re just good salespeople. Because of our culture, because of our life, our religion, it just kind of all ties together. We’re passionate people. We know how to sell something...It’s really unique to Lebanese people.

Entrepreneurship was regarded as a fundamental part of being Lebanese among several participants. Even if the business itself was not explicitly related to Lebanese culture in the way that a restaurant could be, participants who were entrepreneurs typically saw the family business as a rite of passage and a critical part of exercising their Lebanese heritage.

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The loss of businesses, then, might be related to assimilation. Past scholars, in addition to emphasizing the role of entrepreneurship in Lebanese identity expression, noted that the underlying principle of entrepreneurship is independence (Kayal & Kayal, 1975; Naff, 1993). The economic independence that early immigrants gained in starting their own businesses and peddling allowed them to duck regulations by employers that would have demanded them to assimilate (Naff, 1993). When members of the Lebanese and Lebanese-American community were no longer able to work for themselves or for family members, they found themselves subject to assimilation processes. After the Lebanese community was expelled from the West Side in the 1950s, several small Lebanese-owned groceries and butchers shops were shut down.

GB: Instead of as much entrepreneurialism as there was before, they tried finding jobs with reputable companies, so they could fit in better where they were. So instead of having a grocery store, they went to go work for Minneapolis-Moline. Instead of having a shoe shop, they went to work for the American Hoist. I think they went backwards a bit for a while. And then when they wanted to pass something on to their children, of course, the shoe business, of course, the grocery business. So with the last push, we got some of it back, but not all of it back.

While the economic independence entrepreneurialism offered allowed immigrants and their descendants to resist assimilation longer than other white ethnic groups, it also acted as an agent of it. In the same way that Lebanese businesses selling Lebanese-specific goods helped normalize the immigrant culture in the Twin Cities, Lebanese businesses selling American-specific goods opened up Lebanese communities to American culture. One participant recalled her first introduction to American food through a Lebanese business:

CM: Up until that point, we didn't eat much American food. We'd have a hot dog now and then, and then when pizza came around, that was neat. We had pizza because the owner was Lebanese. So we'd start eating pizza because that was a big treat.

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Entrepreneurial spaces are not, in and of themselves, places where Lebanese community members can perform and express their heritage. However, these spaces did act as powerful mediators between white American and Lebanese communities, mutually normalizing one to the other. One caveat of this assertion is that, clearly, this normalizing relationship is not perfectly balanced. Lebanese-Americans in the Twin Cities have become much more normalized as American than nearby Americans have been normalized as Lebanese. However, this interaction highlights that immigration is a two-way process in which both the immigrant community and the host society shape and are shaped.

Despite the independence entrepreneurship provided, it was also a main vessel for economic assimilation. As Naff (1993) asserts in recounting the role of peddling in early Lebanese immigration, and as “Triple Package” and “model minority” stereotypes perpetually remind us, economic success is a bartering chip to be accepted as a part of white American middle class society. The often noted entrepreneurial tendencies of Lebanese immigrants, then, has been one of their strongest tools in shaping the space around them, in resisting certain cultural aspects of assimilation, and in the gaining economic capital that would allow them to be accepted as American without having to fully shed their ethnic identities. Yet despite entrepreneurialism’s role in economic and partial cultural assimilation, it perhaps also plays a role in creating and reaffirming Lebanese and Lebanese-American identity.

To put Lebanese entrepreneurship in conversation with Waldinger et al. (1990), immigrant need for economic support and eventual immigration gives rise to networks and, with time, the creation of an ethnicity based on those networks. If this is the case, Lebanese ethnic entrepreneurship is a critical piece of the network between people of Lebanese origin in the U.S., contributing to the formation of a Lebanese and American identity. The Lebanese ethnic

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entrepreneurship network also enabled Lebanese immigrants and their descendants to assimilate “upward” into the American middle class (Portes & Zhou, 2005). Aspects of the entrepreneurial network is certainly a demonstration of Lebanese placemaking, but their deepest impact in maintaining Christian Lebanese and Lebanese-American ethnic identity has been economic. A more significant *place* in maintaining ethnic identity has been the church.

C. RELIGIOUS PLACEMAKING

Churches were among the most significant and constant spaces where Lebanese and Lebanese-American identities are celebrated and performed. Unlike businesses or restaurants, churches are a consistent and public weekly meeting space where communities can be formed. In the Twin Cities, Lebanese Christians are largely concentrated at three main churches, each of which acts as its own node for the Lebanese community.

Each of the three parishes, Saint Maron’s, the Holy Family Maronite Catholic Church, and Saint George’s Antiochian Orthodox Church, act as more than places of worship. They are tightly knit communities that share celebrations, meals, and a community history. Since Maronite Catholicism is unique to Lebanon, the members of those churches are primarily Lebanese, while parishioners at the Orthodox church are a mixture of various communities beyond the Lebanese, such as Bulgarian, Romanian, and various Middle Eastern nationalities. As a result, the Maronite churches have a slightly different dynamic than the Orthodox church in some aspects. However, each church serves as a tightly knit community center and a space for performing Lebanese cultural and language traditions.

The degree to which the three churches used Arabic in their services varied greatly. Saint Maron’s has the highest immigrant population and, correspondingly, uses the most Arabic and

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Aramaic throughout the service. One service each week is conducted entirely in Arabic, and the parishioners themselves can be heard speaking Arabic before and after mass. The Holy Family, with significantly fewer recently immigrated families, contains far less Arabic than it used to. Similarly, Saint George’s services are now almost entirely in English, except for a monthly mass conducted by a priest brought in from outside the church. Both of these last two churches face the challenge of a church-going population that speaks less and less Arabic, both because of language loss in the young generations and because of the incorporation of non-Lebanese members into the church. Earlier first wave generations, like many immigrant groups of their time, were shamed for speaking Arabic outside of the home, such as in school. It was often this generation (typically the second generation in the U.S.) that stopped passing down Arabic to their children and began to set their sights on an English-only community.

PA: Some priests were here long enough to develop English speaking capabilities, slowly, I imagine, to better serve their populations... We said we want to go hundred percent English in our services, but also people like my father said, I can’t teach my kids Arabic, but the priest can...When the elders in the church who said let’s get one hundred percent English, they had finally to acknowledge that is not over, [recent immigrants] are still here. We have little Arabic-speaking children running around, who are the children of Arabic-speaking mothers and fathers, who have come in the last few years, and they too are going to grow up and learn the language and eventually assimilate....What we’ve learned in our church is that processes slow, and we haven’t found the point yet where we’re ready to sort of shed our Arabic skin, so to say, and be a Christian parish that doesn’t think ethnically.

As this participant notes, the assimilation of an entire community at once is a more difficult and slow process than the assimilation of a single individual. According to the participant, whose father depended on the priest to teach his children Arabic, the presence of a community that almost universally used Arabic supplemented language-learning where individual families could not. The presence of more recent immigrants, such as families from the second wave, can help

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revitalize the linguistic and cultural ties of the church to a Lebanese identity. Several participants noted the influence of more recent, Arabic-speaking Lebanese members of their communities in re-learning traditional recipes, clarifying pieces of Lebanese Christian history, learning more Arabic, and reviving a connection to Lebanon itself.

PA: I have to confess, you come back [from Lebanon] a little more tribal than you were when you were there. You come back understanding little more directly why your grandfather left his home. And they are grateful for the opportunity, you're a little angry that your roots are 100 years away from being ripped out of that soil.

JD: We really needed to bring it back and get little more traditional year. And then, without a few women who make traditional flatbread and keep it alive, and you know, we try to not Americanize everything. But it happens anyway, you know? Things change, the ingredients change. If you get a few chance, the priest has arranged at least one trip over [to Lebanon] for people to go on...But again, there seems to be this strong desire to go back.... It's not a very easy place to go visit if you don't have a guide or somebody guiding you.

The churches provide a space and community for descendants of the first wave to connect with more recent immigrants from Lebanon. Within the three churches, two of the primary priests are from Lebanon. In interviews, many participants noted that these two priests, both from Maronite parishes, have not only made great strides in establishing connections between their two churches, but in maintaining a relationship between parishioners and Lebanon. One of these churches periodically hosts trips to Lebanon for parishioners of all ages, to learn more about Lebanon and visit their families' villages. These trips serve to help members of the church, especially those who are multiple generations away from immigration, to understand and keep in touch with their heritage.

JK: A lot of the first wavers don't know Arabic...if the community is so small, it's hard to keep the culture strong. That's why it's good when the community grows and grows and grows, it's easier. Easier to socialize with fellow Arabs or Lebanese.

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GZ: I think [assimilation] will happen with everybody, unfortunately, unless we continue to bring in immigrants.

Saint Maron’s has a much stronger immigrant demographic. This was universally noted by all participants, and many participants who were not members of the Saint Maron’s community expressed admiration for how this had helped revive cultural traditions at Saint Maron’s. Multiple participants acknowledged that they felt there were tensions between Saint Maron’s and other parishes. A participant who held a leadership position at a non-Saint Maron’s church explained that he felt his community was to some extent intimidated by how well-connected Saint Maron’s was to Lebanon, making them “more Lebanese” than his own community. Some participants felt that these differences were also tied to class differences.

CM: They were wealthier they didn’t need the community as much as the people here [in West Side Saint Paul] for jobs. You know what I’m saying? They just got into the environment because they had to had to work they had to do things that do things to survive. When you have money, I think there’s a question that enables you to sustain a life because you have that money, you can sustain that way of doing things and seeing much more crossover now like Minneapolis people are starting to come over to our things and vice versa.

PA: The children of immigrants just like my dad, I knew those people and where they’re from. They’re country folk.

The perceptions of class differences between Saint Maron’s and the other communities can be read at multiple levels. On one hand, as the participant above has noted, recent immigration from Lebanon has generally been of a more professional class. It follows, then, that with a wave of more recent and more professional immigration, Saint Maron’s own financial capacity and the class demographics of its community have increased. Some other participants attributed the difference to economic variances between the villages of origin of each Lebanese community. Holy Family in particular was described repeatedly by both its own members and by other

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participants as “mountain folk.” This difference embeds itself in small daily habits, such as preferred spices (e.g., the use of cumin over cinnamon). The cultural and class differences of the Saint Maron’s parish can be read in the landscape as well. In 1990, the parish received a large donation from one of its community members, and the church was renovated. The beauty (and expense) of the new building was remarked upon by many participants. The building clearly demonstrates its affiliation with Lebanon not only on the inside but also from the outside, which was not the case for the other two parishes. The Lebanese flag flies next to the American flag in front of the church, and its dome-like construction is more reminiscent of distinctly non-Western European architecture. This is also the church that bears Psalm 92:12 over its entrance, which carries an explicit reference to Lebanon.

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Saint Maron's Catholic Church in Northeast Minneapolis flies both the Lebanese and American flags.

The coincidence of more recent immigration and higher economic capital at Saint Maron's has translated into a stronger ability to stay connected to its Lebanese heritage. Arguably, the beauty of its facilities and the strength of its connection to Lebanon makes it a popular parish among the Lebanese of the Twin Cities. A participant who was not a member of the Saint Maron's parish described it as a "powerhouse" of Lebanese culture in the Twin Cities, and many participants expressed concern that Lebanese and Lebanese-American community

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members who felt strongly about preserving their heritage would choose or transfer to Saint Maron’s, dwindling the population of their own churches.

While these tensions appear to highlight some significant connections between economic capital and ethnic cultural capital, they do not overshadow the deep feeling of interconnectedness the Lebanese communities of the Twin Cities share as a whole. The idea of the churches as communities was one of the strongest themes throughout the various interviews. One participant described the rite of First Communion in her parish and the feeling of family that the community shares:

CM: The families stopped having receptions. They just say they’re inviting 20 family members, and we set up in church. I tell the people, I says, understand that your kids are going to be handed cards and money and gifts from people who don’t know them. I said, just be prepared for that. And that’s exactly what happens. Guys’ll walk over and shake their hands and give them a five dollar bill. I mean, it’s a big day in the Lebanese community.

While intra-parish charity and gift-giving was an aspect signifying community solidarity, other practices also made this evident. At many of the various church functions I attended in completing this research, Sunday masses were followed by brunches that were open to all members of the parish. At these events, most, though not all, of the food was traditional Lebanese cuisine made by the parishioners themselves. Several participants described the process of baking, cooking, and cleaning up together as times of bonding and an opportunity to learn recipes and Arabic vocabulary from more recent immigrants.

GZ: They [Old Country folk] need to be accepting and willing to accept American Lebanese people so they *can* pass this on. You meet with some that say, I’m Lebanese, I’d like to teach you more about the Old Country.

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Churches also served as points for memorializing family and community histories. Each of the three parishes had at least one bound publication memorializing its creation, its roots in Lebanese and other immigration, and its connection to the surrounding community. Several of my participants mentioned these documents or even brought them with them to the interview to point out the pictures of their parents and great-grandparents. It was apparent that the idea of community in these churches put a deep emphasis on their immigration history. The churches, then, were not only places of connection between modern parishioners, but between parishioners and their descendants.

The enormous emphasis on community in churches is surely not unique to the Lebanese and Lebanese-American community. It could be argued that a significant portion of churches in the United States have become just as valuable for the communities they form as they are for the religious teachings they provide. However, the closeness of the communities outside of a purely religious sense and the draw of the churches as community spaces has been a critical factor in the segmented, selective nature of Lebanese assimilation. Since all three parishes in this study had many or mostly Lebanese and Lebanese-American members, the church has become a source of community and bonding over a shared Lebanese heritage, as well as a space to practice that heritage.

JK: I think it makes it less weird for [my kids], especially expressing their culture. It makes it a little bit easier for them when you have people that are also there with you.

GB: My grandfather in the men's club, my grandmother in the women's club [at the church]...when they got together, they would talk. And because of my language, I was able to pick up what they said.

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For some participants, the religion itself of the parish was also closely tied to pride in a Lebanese heritage. Many participants took special pride in being Christian Lebanese, which they distinguished from being “Arab.” Some—though, importantly, not all—participants also tied their roots back to the ancient Phoenician empire, asserting that their connection to Lebanon is older than that of Muslim Arabs. Many of these same individuals also used this connection to identify themselves as one of the oldest branches of Christianity. Both Maronite and Orthodox participants made this connection. In this sense, their Christianity became a symbol of an ancient connection to the land that is now Lebanon. This did not appear in all, or even most, interviews, but those who discussed it spoke on the topic with great passion.

PA: I think evangelicals today can be so forgetful about where we’re from, and people are surprised when you say to them, there are Christians in the Middle East. Not only Jews and Muslims. Which I want to bite my tongue and say, where do you think this all started? Jesus wasn’t a Roman. This a great saying amongst Arab students...they knock on my door, they knock on our door, to teach us about the son of our daughter...Because Mary was one of us. She was us. An Aramaic woman in Palestine... It’s that attitude that says, we’re the church. We are the Church... I think some of us, the Christians in the country, Arab Christians, will hold on strongly to the cultural traditions, bringing us back to where we started because we believe it is something sacred in our tradition, even though it’s ethnic as well as spiritual, as well as religious, why we don’t want to give up the Arabic, because we think there’s a connection to what was many, many hundreds of years ago, we think that’s relevant and necessary.

The strength and pride of these Lebanese communities is so strong that some actually found they carried the capacity to bring in non-Lebanese members. One participant referred to this, with some tongue in cheek, as the “assimilation” of white Americans to Lebanese culture.

CM: We are attracting at Holy Family a lot of outsiders people who come and enjoy the atmosphere, the celebration, the community. The Mendota Heights people have opened their arms to us they attend all of our functions.

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From my participation in church events, it was apparent that at least some of these new, non-Lebanese members had not only come to the churches for the convenience of their services. They participated on church committees, in the organization of events that memorialized the churches' Lebanese immigration history, and engaged in learning traditional recipes. Participants reported that some of these new members were drawn to Lebanese parishes because of their physical proximity or have married into the church. However, several participants emphasized that these newcomers chose to stay and even convert in Lebanese parishes because of the richness of the heritage that colored them.

GB: We have an awful lot of non-Lebanese people. I think there are more non-Lebanese people than Lebanese...With the activities at the Holy Family, having dinners and *kafias* and things that they invite people too, people have seen what we have. If the church ever fails, we'll open up a restaurant there. [laughter]

Quite critically, the newcomers into these churches were all Christian *before* “assimilating” into Maronite or Orthodox faiths. Cultural backdrop aside, the actual practical differences between the various sects of Christianity are minimal compared to the differences between Christianity and other religions. Had these communities had been Lebanese mosques rather than Lebanese churches, it is imaginable that they would have had far less converts from the surrounding neighborhood. The ability for white Christian newcomers to join in the rituals and communities of these parishes rests on the fact that the Lebanese parishes are also Christian and, in most situations, considered white. Although these parishes remain close to their Lebanese heritage internally, they do not (with the exception of Saint Maron's) express this identity externally. In a dominantly white, Christian landscape, these churches do not seem “out of place” in the way that a mosque might. Their surrounding communities have not rejected them but

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instead even begun to join them, allowing Christian Lebanese communities into the realm of what can be considered “normal” in that space.

PA: If they come and they try to whitewash us, we’re going to push back. Some of the people who feels more strongly than others about the importance of the Arabic culture and the Antiochian Orthodox me know how that attitude. People come in and don’t try to change us, we want to try to make room for them. And for their traditions. But the come in and they say take the Arabic out, we’re going to resist.

The fluidity between white Christian Lebanese churches and the white Christian landscapes they are immersed in allows Lebanese communities in the Twin Cities to go unchallenged, but it can also make them vulnerable to loss of a distinct church.

PA: The challenge and Catholicism, so much more so than an Antiochian Orthodoxy, the challenge of Arab Christians is that at the end of the day, they’re Catholic. They know they’re Catholic. No one can tell them it’s a sin for them to leave the Holy Family Maronite Church for the St. Matthew’s, the church where their girlfriend goes. It’s all under the same Pope, so it’s very acceptable. And those marriages happen very, very commonly between Catholic parishioners and Maronites, and they lose parishioners to mainstream Catholicism.

When parishioners leave Lebanese Maronite or Orthodox churches for Western European Christian churches, it is unclear whether they will leave (or begin the process of leaving) their Lebanese and Lebanese-American identities as well. However, based on the findings of this study, I would argue that the answer is, “not necessarily.”

Based on the accumulated responses of participants about their homes, businesses, and churches as spaces to perform Lebanese and Lebanese-American identity, I would assert that having a space distinct from the “mainstream’ American public, and that is instead controlled and regulated by Lebanese and Lebanese-American community members, Lebanese immigrants and their descendants have been able to preserve pieces of their cultural heritage. The creation of places where being Lebanese or Lebanese-American is normalized, and the separation of those

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spaces from other American landscapes, empowers individuals and communities of Christian Lebanese descent to exercise control over *how* they assimilate, to what extent, and to redefine what it means to be Lebanese in the context of America.

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CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

A. “THE HARD STUFF”: SHEDDING ARABIC AND ARABNESS

“They gave America a bastardized version of their Arab past. This, plus their inability to effectively resolve their vertical religious cleavages, left them completely prey to the forces of Americanization. These Middle Easterners became Americans before they had a chance to become unified American ‘Syrians.’” (Kayal & Kayal, 1975, p. 138)

The above quote from Kayal and Kayal (1975), two Syrian-American sociologists living in Brooklyn as Lebanon was on the brink of its first Civil War. Their work *The Syrian-Lebanese in America* (1975) is an account of how the first wave of Christian Lebanese and Syrian immigrants became American while simultaneously unravelling what it means to be Syrian-Lebanese. They argue here that the tumultuous lines of nations in the Middle East, ever-evolving, left Syrian-Lebanese immigrants without a secure national identity to look back on as they became subject to the forces of assimilation, and this left them vulnerable to complete and total absorption into mainstream American society.

But that isn't what happened. Despite the blurred lines of identity in the Middle East, the many descendants of Lebanese immigrants who came to the United States continue to identify as Lebanese or Lebanese-American well into the third, fourth, and even fifth generation. Assimilation *has*, most definitely, occurred. With each generation, less and less descendants of Lebanese immigrants of the first wave speak Arabic. While many of my participants noted that children of the second wave of Lebanese immigration have helped revitalize Arabic among Lebanese-Americans, not all Lebanese-American communities have sufficiently large recent immigrants to combat immense language loss. As generations pass, it becomes more difficult, too, to preserve the stories, recipes, and connection to the Old Country. In spite of this, Christian Lebanese and Lebanese-Americans into the fourth and even fifth generations continue to identify

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themselves as such. I believe there is a deep merit to what Kayal and Kayal (1975) assert, in that due to the precarious and competing identities of Lebanon itself, even under the umbrella of “Christian Lebanese” different individual and communities have developed diverging understandings of what it means to be Lebanese in America.

Despite the tensions that Kayal and Kayal (1975) observe, echoed by the observations of Naff (1993), Suleiman (1992), and my own, Lebanese and Lebanese-Americans ethnic identity has not evaporated into the white pan-European identity proposed by Alba (1990). Based on all of the data accumulated through interviews, field work, and participant observation, it is evident that placemaking allows Lebanese immigrants and their descendants to continue their connection to Lebanese identity. It allows them to incorporate themselves economically, linguistically, and in most ways, culturally, while keeping small pieces of Lebanese traditions and culture.

It could be noted as unusual that so many descendants of Lebanese immigration continue to identify with their Lebanese heritage, regardless of being four or five generations away from the immigration and often regardless of having little or no family still in the Middle East. However, this connection is a selective one. As one respondent put it, it is a connection to the “easy stuff,” without engaging in the “hard stuff.”

PA: The cultural aspects that I think people hold fast to, it’s the easy stuff, food, art, music, that kind of stuff. Food, art, music, expression. Things that cultures use to express themselves, express themselves in the clothing, and the food they ate. And the music is saying, the dances you do, the art they perform, those are the things. I think those are the pieces. Everyone’s different, but they find something in the immigrant past that they really try to grab onto and carry with them.

AN: If that’s the easy stuff, what’s the hard stuff?

PA: I think language, can be the hard stuff, especially our situation Arabic. It’s not easy. And it’s different in every region of the Arab world. Our people came from the mountains, where the language is significantly different than what spoken in Abu Dhabi or Qatar or Morocco for that matter, or Pakistan, where Arabic is spoken in mosques...

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And I think teaching is language to people in an oral fashion only has extreme limitations. So I think language, particularly fluent educated language, reading and writing in Arabic, is the number one challenge.

The participant noted that the Arabic language is all but extinguished among today's descendants of the first wave of Lebanese immigration. Participants who were descended from the first wave of immigration almost universally reported that the second generation of Lebanese in the United States, the children of original immigrants, did learn to speak Arabic. However, as was common in the early and mid-1900s, children were discouraged from speaking any language besides English in school. One respondent from the West Side told the story of how his father, in the 1930s, went into elementary school knowing only Arabic, and was forced to wear a dunce cap every time he spoke. The third generation, the grandchildren of original immigrants, almost never learned Arabic. This linguistic disconnect has evolved in tandem with a loss of connection to the actual country of Lebanon.

The language remains most alive in church ceremonies, but even that is becoming increasingly endangered. In Saint Maron's, weekly services have little Arabic in them, save for certain songs and prayers and a monthly service in Arabic and Aramaic. Saint George's is also struggling to balance its services between Arabic and English. Many participants described the difficulty of trying to provide a service that balances accessibility with cultural traditions.

Similarly, the integration of the churches with non-Lebanese members has come with benefits and challenges. One of the clear benefits of these newcomers is that they are, in fact, expanding the church population. Almost all of the participants in this study had married outside of the Lebanese community, and several (though not all) of them found that their spouses preferred the Lebanese parish. Other non-Lebanese newcomers came out of dissatisfaction with

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their Roman Catholic parishes, were drawn in by proximity, or were drawn in by the Lebanese traditions and hospitality themselves. These newcomers are warmly welcomed into the community. Several participants brought them up during interviews to demonstrate the appeal of the Lebanese community to the surrounding white American neighborhoods. However, their inclusion makes it more difficult to passing on “the hard stuff” to the next generations, especially Arabic language.

Though this study did not include the perspective of youths, participants who spoke of their children ubiquitously described their children’s pride in their Lebanese heritage, often despite being *nisa nis* (“half and half,” or of mixed background). Many emphasized that their children did desire to learn Arabic and someday go to Lebanon, even though their parents often did not speak Arabic or ever travel to Lebanon themselves. However, other participants emphasized that their children did not prioritize establishing a connection to Lebanon itself, despite taking immense pride in being Lebanese-American.

JG: [My children] are very proud to be Lebanese...None of them desire to go to Lebanon. Their lives are so busy, their families, the shop is so busy...It’s hard to get away.

The struggle to keep the “hard stuff” alive is not unique to the Lebanese-American immigration experience. Branches of European immigration occurring at the same time as first wave Lebanese immigration often also pursued language schools and intermarrying as ways of keeping their ethnic heritage alive (Alba, 1990). What is perhaps unique about the Lebanese experience is the revitalizing effect of the second wave. The presence of more recent immigrants re-introduced the desire for Arabic in Lebanese Catholic and Orthodox churches, and created a venue for third- and later generation Lebanese and Lebanese-Americans to establish new connections with “the

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Old Country” (Naff, 1992).

Comparing the experiences of the two waves of Lebanese immigration to the U.S. is filled with potholes. The underlying difficulty is that immigration before 1925 and immigration post-1965 are occurring in completely different worlds and contexts (Zelinsky & Lee, 1998). Overall, the second wave arrived with more education, broader acceptance of a diverse society, cultural and linguistic preparedness, and existing Lebanese and Lebanese-American communities to land in. The result is that their spatial patterning throughout the Twin Cities is perhaps best described by nodal heterolocalism. Recent immigrant communities from Lebanon can be found throughout the cities and their suburbs, bound to the surrounding Lebanese and Lebanese-American communities largely through their parishes. According to one community leader, there is some clustering of recently immigrated (that is, second wave and later) Lebanese families around Saint Maron’s Catholic Church in Northeast Minneapolis, the only one of the three churches in this study that did not relocate to a nearby suburb at any point in time. The first wave fits better into traditional models of assimilation, albeit imperfectly. This is not to say that it has “melted into the pot,” but that the assimilation process the first wave followed resembled European-American assimilation. Families that arrived during the first wave were clustered into Northeast Minneapolis and West Side Saint Paul and dispersed to the suburbs, in part due to heightened economic status, but also because the urban renewal of the Lower West Side in the 1960s. The spatial patterns of the first wave and its descendants over time follows the classic “invasion-succession” pattern.

The first wave of Lebanese immigration followed the traditional European-American assimilation model more than just in spatial distribution. As participants universally agreed, and as other scholars (Gualteri, 2001; Ajrouch & Jamal, 2007; Hyndman-Rizsk, 2010) have

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observed, Lebanese and Lebanese-American Christians have largely been accepted as “white,” reaching approximately as far back as when Eastern Europeans became considered white. However, the emphasis here is on the word *Christian*. As discussed in Chapter 3, Arab-Americans, though included as white on the Census, have been racialized through Islam. Glazer (2004) suggests that the real impact of 9/11 for Arab-Americans was an increased pressure to assimilate, in the same vein that World Wars I and II catalyzed European assimilation. In the case of Lebanese and Lebanese-American Christians, this might be more true than not.

GZ: “I have many Jewish customers. They say...’what are you?’ And I say, I’m Mediterranean. They say, what do you mean Mediterranean? We’re all from the same part of the world...You’re my friend, you’re my customer, so why can’t this be over there? Because over there, they’re crazy. Here, we’re educated, we’re probably a little less crazy.”

While anti-Arab sentiments seem to have sparked more pan-Arabism among many Arab-Americans, Lebanese Christians and their descendants have been given a route to sidestep the racialization that comes with being Arab and Muslim. However, there is a diversity of opinions on the subject within the Christian Lebanese and Lebanese-American community itself. Throughout my interviews with members of the Lebanese and Lebanese-American Christian communities in Saint Paul and Minneapolis, I asked, Are the Lebanese Arab? The diversity of answers was astonishing. All participants felt strongly about their answers and responded without hesitation. Below is a sample of the answers that capture the diversity of opinions on the matter:

JH: No. Arab is Muslim.

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MS: We are not Arabs. We are Phoenicians before we are Arabs... We speak Lebanese, we don't speak Arabic.

AN: Do you consider [the Lebanese] Arab?

JK: We have to. Yeah, we have to. The Arabic Republic of Lebanon.

GZ: I don't know what else I'd be.

This question and the lack of consensus for it says a great deal about the respondents' perspectives on Lebanese ethnic identity, the obligation of Lebanese and Lebanese-American peoples to the turmoil of the Middle East and Arab-American relations, and whether the Lebanese are closer to Europeans or to the Arab world. These attitudes in turn shape how assimilation can be achieved in the U.S., a society which privileges white descendants of Europeans and has a tendency toward anti-Arab sentiments, especially in recent years.

The debate lies primarily in whether people of Lebanese descent should be considered Arab, and what Arab means. The reality is that Lebanon has been the site of countless migrations, invasions, and contestations. As a result, the people themselves are incredibly diverse, racially, ethnically, and religiously. Abdelhady (2011) found that many Christian Lebanese emigrants preferred to align themselves more closely with Europe and France than the Middle East, regardless of the fact that Lebanon's relationship to France only began in the early 1900s. Other Christian Lebanese and Lebanese-Americans identify as Phoenician, descendants of an ancient naval empire that existed approximately in the area that is now modern-day Lebanon (Abdelhady, 2011). Whether they reach deep into B.C.E. or begin counting Lebanese history with the 1916 Sykes-Picot Agreement, many Christian Lebanese and Lebanese-Americans choose not to associate with the more than two thousand years in between the

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Phoenician and the French that were dominated by the incoming of Arab peoples.

For descendants of first wave and second wave immigrants, the question of Arabness may have a different meaning. First wave immigrants came prior to the creation of a state of Lebanon, from an Ottoman-dominated Middle East. They had no sense of national identity, let alone a pan-Arab identity (Naff, 1993). As with many pan-minority identities, the generalized label of “Arab” did not become important or even meaningful until people from different Arab countries came to the United States or other lands and found more in common with each other than the “mainstream” society they were immersed in. Though many Lebanese-Syrian immigrants from the first wave eventually switched to calling themselves Lebanese, not all did. One first-generation participant spoke to his family’s continuing debate over whether the family is Syrian or Lebanese:

PA: My father didn’t speak in terms of Arab or Phoenician. My dad’s generation wrestled with the much more recent and relevant for them, were they Syrian or were they Lebanese? My grandparents immigration papers don’t say Lebanon because Lebanon didn’t exist. It was the province. Syria, everyone knew where Syria was on a map... So I don’t think my family has ever quibbled much about Arab or Phoenician. I think we’re more Syrian versus Lebanese. My father was resistant to change. My father died in 1985, and he said he was Syrian.

However, as Lebanon continues as an established state, the turmoil within it asks not whether Lebanese identity exists in its own right, but how Lebanese identity can move beyond religion to unify all of its citizens and those who claim heritage to it. As many participants voiced, pan-Arabism has associations with Islam, the dominant religion in most Arab countries. Furthermore, the politics of difference in Lebanon is rooted in religion.

PA: Most of the Arab Christians who are in our midst today will tell you they are here because they had enough of living under a Muslim authority. I think it’s a rare person, or

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it is not necessarily a rare person but not terribly religious person, that puts those tribal issues aside and focuses on pan Arabism.

GZ: We're here, we don't want to go back. We don't want to cause trouble.

GZ: We're a little more affluent now, we don't want to be associated with living on the lower West Side, being poor. Since they have had the church moved out there, to Mendota Heights, they [the kids] realized what they have missed...The kids started coming back. It's a resurgence.

As some participants noted, the arrival of newcomers into the church has both added to and detracted from preserving Lebanese heritage in various ways. The main challenge of bringing non-Lebanese adults into the churches is that they do not come with background knowledge of Arabic, and their presence has spurred the need for English-language services. However, the loss of Arabic was already a process that had taken hold in many parishes, especially parishes with primarily descendants of the first wave of Lebanese immigration. The addition of more adult non-Arabic speakers mainly catalyzed a process that was already underway.

While preserving the “easy stuff”—namely food, music, and entertainment—the loss of the Arabic language has fostered the growing disconnect between Lebanese-Americans and the country of Lebanon. This is typical of many immigrant groups and their assimilation process, especially of European ethnic groups (Alba, 1990; Jacobson, 1998). Lebanese-American culture has been a continual process of evolution—and that process has been selective. Preserving the “easy stuff” while losing connection to the Old Country allows Lebanese and Lebanese-Americans in the U.S. to be expressive of their ethnic heritage without enduring many of the burdens it might otherwise come with (Naber, 2012).

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In the case of Lebanese-Americans, one of those potential burdens is anti-Arab sentiments in post-9/11 America. Many Christian Lebanese and Lebanese-Americans pass as European-American or “white,” and often evade the constant discrimination against Arab and Arab-looking people in the United States. A 1992 study by Suleiman found that people of Lebanese heritage in the United States were more likely to discuss American politicians, feel less excluded from American politics on the basis of being of Arab descent, feel that their ethnic identity was an advantage rather than an obstacle to public office, and feel less strongly about anti-Arab discrimination. This same study notes that after Dow’s petition for Syrian-Lebanese peoples to be recognized as white by the United States, “the ‘Arab’ origins were no longer emphasized, but neither were they entirely and openly dismissed by all or even most members of the community” (p. 206). Being Christian has allowed some Lebanese and Lebanese-Americans the ability to opt out of being seen as Arab in a Whether Lebanese and Lebanese-Americans choose to accept this will probably be both a highly individualized, and politicized, decision. However, the voluntary nature of this identification indicates the emergence of a group of immigrants and their descendants whose nuances are not quite captured in any one model of assimilation: non-European white Christian ethnics.

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B. NON-EUROPEAN WHITE CHRISTIAN ETHNIC IDENTITY

Dialogue with the participants in this study demonstrated that participants’ identification with Lebanese ethnic identity is a *voluntary* identity. Voluntariness is one of the critical traits of European ethnic identities in the United States (1990). Race is one of the primary deciding factor on whether a person is left to voluntarily choose to assert their ethnic identity, or whether it is imposed by others (Alba, 1990). For all participants of this study who are second generation or further, identifying as Lebanese or Lebanese-American is a choice, rather than an identity imposed by visible difference (Gualtieri, 2001; Alba, 1990). A speculative reason for the resurgence of white European-American ethnic pride in the 1970s is that the third generation “no longer needed to be defensive about their place in America and could afford to assert pride in their ethnic roots” (Alba, 1990, p. 2). If this is the case, then expressions of Lebanese heritage, both in the landscape and as a voluntary self-identification, is also an expression of confidence that there is no tension between being both Lebanese and American.

Given the current political climate, the same cannot necessarily be said for being both Arab and American. The aftermath of 9/11 further heightened anti-Arab sentiments that had been brewing since the 1967 Arab-Israeli War. As some participants described, and many sources indicate, the U.S.’s allegiance with Israel in the Arab-Israeli War evoked feelings of difference and even betrayal among Arab-Americans (Lebanese-Americans included) (Naff, 1992; Joseph, 1999; Suleiman, 1999; Naber, 2012). Political intolerance, heightened surveillance, and everyday discrimination are tools used to mark being Arab or Muslim as contradictory with being American (Joseph, 1999; Nagel & Staeheli, 2005; Naber, 2012). While many Arab-American activists wish to resolve these tensions, they do not necessarily feel this should imply erasing

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their Arab heritage (Nagel & Staeheli, 2005). As one participant in this study put it, not all Arab immigrants and their descendants are ready to “shed [their] Arabic skin, so to speak.”

Being Christian allowed first wave Lebanese and Lebanese-Americans the option to “shed [their] Arabic skin.” Based on participant interviews, the results of that option are intensely personal. Some people have or are in the process of removing themselves from being “Arab” while remaining Lebanese, others actively identify as “Arab” and have even committed themselves to anti-discrimination activism, and still others seem to be fluctuating somewhere in between. However, the voluntary nature of this identification aligns it more with the voluntary resurgence in white ethnic identities that emerged in the 1970s than with the imposed identities on people of color (Alba, 1990). Lebanese and Lebanese-American Christians in the U.S. find themselves a unique position as non-Europeans who have been assimilated into white identity, accepted largely on the evidence of their Christianity and legal action to highlight their connections to European ancestry (Kayal & Kayal, 1975; Gualtieri, 2001). Without the second wave of Lebanese immigration, the first wave and its descendants might have all but stopped identifying with Lebanese heritage (Naff, 1992; Suleiman, 1992).

The second wave of Lebanese immigration revitalized the first wave’s connections to “the homeland.” Several participants emphasized how much second wave families were valued as sources of knowledge and, in the words of one participant, “authenticity.” Second wave families provide relatively recent knowledge from Lebanon about recipes, culture, travel, and, quite critically, language. Participants who were third-generation descendants of the first wave, who almost ubiquitously could not speak Arabic, often expressed gratitude that their children were gaining exposure to Arabic from second generation families. Youth, for their part, have responded enthusiastically to this opportunity. Participants and community leaders also credited

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a resurgence of Lebanese and Lebanese identity among youth to a broader acceptance of ethnic identities.

FC: Now, it's cool to be ethnic.

JK: It's tough, when you're a teenager expressing your culture. Now it's cool. Back then it wasn't.

PA: I think it's easier for people today, young people today, to embrace that culture and maybe hang onto a piece of it. As I said, adding that the country, the people of that culture, we become more accepting of multiculturalism, we become more willing to take into account a person's background as to why they think they way they do or why they behave the way they do and why they aspire to what they aspire to. How to choose to live their lives.

In the Twin Cities, churches are the key factor enabling the reshaping and maintenance of Lebanese ethnic identities. Placemaking has been a venue through which Lebanese and Lebanese-Americans have shaped their own understanding of what it means to be Middle Eastern and Christian in the United States. The role of churches in the formation and maintenance of ethnic identity is not unique to Lebanese immigration. Churches have played a shaping role in several immigrant communities and their assimilation processes. Once established, churches serve as nodes for immigrants and refugees to network with others (Waldinger et al., 1990; Zelinsky & Lee, 1998; Hardwick, 2006). One participant illustrated the importance of place in ethnic identity expression with her mother's saying: “In here, you're Lebanese, but once you walk out that door, you're American.”

The church, which is technically a privately owned (albeit communal) space, provides a place for Lebanese heritage to be expressed and celebrated in safe company. For many Western European immigrants and their descendants, common religion led to churches that merged several different ethnic identities. For Maronites, though, this has yet to really happen. While

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several Maronite Lebanese and Lebanese-Americans have joined Roman Catholic churches, the Maronite churches continue to be a prominent source of Lebanese community. These churches have also opened their arms to non-Lebanese, non-Maronite members, and while this seems to have contributed to the decline of Arabic in services, it also reflects acceptance and celebration of Lebanese heritage that is not limited to Lebanese and Lebanese-American communities themselves. Orthodox Lebanese and Lebanese-Americans face a slightly different set of issues. While Orthodox is less common than Catholicism in the U.S., and therefore less likely to acquire new members overall, the presence of many nearby immigrant communities has made Saint George’s a hub for immigrants of all backgrounds and their descendants. Lebanese heritage is celebrated at Saint George’s, but it is by no means exclusive to it. Greek, Eastern European, and other Arab backgrounds (such as Palestinian and Jordanian) are also present at Saint George’s, and celebrations are communal. Though in slightly different ways, religious difference has acted as a buffer between Lebanese descendants and the descendants of white Christian European-Americans (also a pattern observed by Zelinsky & Lee, 1998). As with many immigrant communities before and after them, churches insulate and provide space for identity expression of Lebanese and Lebanese-American communities in the Twin Cities. Critically, however, these churches are *Christian*. Their difference is sufficient to remain more or less specific to the Lebanese and Lebanese-American community, but slight enough to become accepted as part of the broader fabric of what it means to be American.

To borrow a phrase from Samhan (1999), Lebanese immigrants and their descendants are “not quite white.” That is, they more or less accepted as a white European-American ethnic identity—but with caveats. Despite being white, Christian, and for the most part economically and linguistically integrated, Lebanese and Lebanese-Americans are *not* European. Like Arab

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identity, Lebanese identity does not fit neatly into American understandings of difference (Samhan, 1999; Joseph, 1999; Naber, 2012). Choosing to identify as Arab—that is, as something distinctly *not* European, and therefore less white (Jacobson, 1998)—is a political statement. In post-9/11 America, when anti-Arab sentiments are high, *voluntarily* identifying as Arab, an identity often viewed as incompatible with being American (Joseph, 1999), may even qualify as a transgressive act.

Placemaking has been essential in providing a network for Lebanese and Lebanese-Americans to maintain a sense of community within a system poorly designed to process their difference. If American understandings of citizenship rest in property ownership, as Nedelsky (1990) suggests, then access to sites of placemaking at all is a sign of belonging as American. Ownership of private spaces such as businesses and churches are signs of participation in becoming part of the definition of “American.” Recent increases in anti-Arab sentiment are perhaps the greatest modern threat to the acceptance of Lebanese and Lebanese-American heritage as part of the American narrative (Nagel & Staeheli, 2005). Christian Lebanese and Lebanese-Americans have the ability to opt out of even this, although whether individuals of Lebanese descent choose to be seen as Arab will be for the most part a highly individualized choice.

However, the fact that this *is* a choice—a voluntary association—is indicative of the privileges Christian Lebanese and Lebanese-Americans have been afforded in the process of assimilating into and interacting with U.S. society. Here I recall the up-by-the-bootstraps tales that I was raised with, and that I have been told not only by other Lebanese-Americans, but by people of many ethnic origins. Perhaps these people did come up by their bootstraps, but societal considerations of who is considered “the same” (Nagel, 2009) affords some people more help in

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pulling those bootstraps than those who are considered “different.” In the context of the Lebanese, Christianity and whiteness were factors of perceived sameness that allowed the continued celebration of ethnic identity without being seen as in conflict with what it means to become American.

The future of Lebanese ethnic identity in the United States is difficult to predict. The second wave has revived connections between the first wave and Lebanon, and given immense advances in communication between now and the late 1800s, it is unlikely that those connections will fade as quickly for the new wave as they did for the first. Transnational literature would best shed light on this question, although it is outside the scope of this particular research. The continuation of churches and family and ethnic businesses as sites of Lebanese and Lebanese-American ethnic identity expression will depend on individual communities and the involvement of their youth, as many participants expressed. Placemaking provides a space for Lebanese and Lebanese-American communities to continue expressing their identities and redefining what it means to belong in the nebulous gray area of the non-European white Christian in America.

VI: APPENDIX

Open-Ended Interview Sample Questions

1. Tell me about your family’s history in Saint Paul/Minneapolis.
 - a. Did your family come directly to the Twin Cities?
 - b. Where did your family settle within the Twin Cities, and why?
 - c. How has that living pattern changed over time?
2. What was/is your family’s relationship with the Lebanese community?
 - a. Has that relationship changed throughout time?
3. What are the major gathering centers for Lebanese communities in Saint Paul and Minnesota?
 - a. When were these centers created?
 - b. Has the center of community changed over time?
4. Is there much connection between the Saint Paul and Minneapolis communities?
 - a. What is that connection like?
 - b. Do the two Maronite churches interact often?
 - c. Are both communities present at the two main Lebanese festivals?
 - d. Do they collaborate often?
5. In what ways do you see the Lebanese community around you physically, if at all?
 - a. Restaurants/businesses?
 - b. Architecture?
 - c. Communities?
6. How has this presence changed over time?
7. Has there been much recent Lebanese immigration to the Twin Cities? How has it changed your community?
8. Do you feel there are strong ties between Lebanon and Minneapolis/Saint Paul? How has this relationship changed over time?
 - a. Tell me about your family’s connections to Lebanon.
9. Would you identify more strongly as Lebanese or Lebanese-American?
 - a. Would you say there is a strong difference between those two? What is that difference?
10. Do you feel your family has changed their habits/lifestyles in order to fit in better in the Lebanese community? How has family tried to/resisted fitting in with MSP society?
11. Do you feel a connection/responsibility to other immigrants? Is immigration relevant to your life now?

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