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Identity Formation in the Lebanese-American Christian Diaspora

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An Honors Paper for the Department of Anthropology

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Acknowledgments

This project has been an immense undertaking and the highlight of my undergraduate experience. I am eternally grateful for all of the family, friends, teachers, and interlocutors who made this possible.

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Abstract

Since the late 1800s, people have immigrated to the United states from Lebanon and Syria, and the community's racial and ethnic position within the United States has been contested ever since. Previous research emphasizes that while people from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) are legally classified as "white" on the U.S. Census. However, many people from the region do not identify as white, and they often face discrimination or threats of violence. For people of Arab and Christian backgrounds this is further complicated because they are a part of the majority through their religion, but part of a minority through their ethnic background. In addition, media depictions of MENAs tend to be homogenizing and stereotypical. This thesis attempts to fill a gap in literature on Christian Lebanese American identities by conducting ethnographic interviews with Lebanese-Americans from a variety of generations. It pulls from theories of diaspora and race, emphasizing the importance of context and migration trajectories when understanding Lebanese American identities. My findings demonstrate wide-ranging diversity in how Christian Lebanese-Americans understand and articulate identity due to three major factors: divergent migrant pathways in multiple countries, generational difference given changing racial politics in the U.S., and generational difference given the impacts of U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East upon young Lebanese-Americans.

Key words: Lebanon, United States, race, Middle East, immigration, diaspora, whiteness, Arab, Arab-American, Christian

Introduction

With roughly one million people of Lebanese descent living in the United States, the great diversity of experiences, values, and identities held by people of Lebanese heritage should come as no surprise. Successive waves of migration from modern-day Lebanon and Syria began in the late 1800s and have continued to the present, and Lebanese Christians have established substantial communities across the Americas, Australia, Europe, the Gulf, and West Africa. Yet while the Lebanese are the largest community from the region generally known as "Middle East and North Africa" in the United States (Hage 2021; Starck 2015, 187), Lebanese Christians do not figure prominently in the U.S. public imagination or in scholarly literature. The experiences of Lebanese Christians of different generations and how they express their identities, especially how they identify as belonging to particular ethnic and racial groups, is the focus of this thesis, a focus that I hope will illuminate not only the deep pride in Lebanese heritage but also the importance of placing diversity into context, and writing against commonly held stereotypes or homogenizing narratives.

I begin with quotations from two of my research participants in order to set the stage. Throughout my conversations with Lebanese-Americans of various ages, generations, and experiences, for instance, a dual emphasis on food and family was repeated quite frequently. The following quote from Rebecca is an excellent example of "Lebanese values":

> And my dad has always made a point of teaching me how to cook certain things. I think before I went to college, we had maybe four separate conversations where he was like, okay, you know how to cook. I think he was really concerned that I would know how to

> cook Kibbeh[1] for some reason, he was like, you *have* to know how to cook this, before I send you off in the world, or whatever. And so this sense that this (Lebanese Culture) is always something that I can come back to and always a way of being that will always like feel like home, I guess.
>
> – Rebecca, 21, a 4th generation Lebanese American

Rebecca's family emigrated from the mountains of modern-day Lebanon in the late 1800s, immigrating to Mexico before eventually making home in the United States. While Rebecca has never been to Lebanon, she and her family still hold a variety of cultural traditions, such as Kibbeh, a dish based on spiced ground meat and bulgur wheat (and the national dish of Lebanon). Kibbeh is not only a recipe to learn but a requirement for moving out, adulthood, and a rite of passage. It was clear from our conversation that Rebecca and her father take an immense amount of pride in their heritage, a theme that was evident throughout my interviews with various Lebanese-Americans of different generations and life experiences. Again and again, the words people came back to were "food and family." I heard incredible stories of dinners with large extended families.

And this sense of kin not only encompassed immediate family within the United States, but an awareness and connection with cousins and relatives in Lebanon and the Lebanese diaspora across the world. For example, Nasri, a first-generation immigrant who came to the United States at the age of 18 in 1964, explained how many of his childhood friends and kin are now spread across the world.

[1] The national dish of Lebanon, usually made with minced beef, bulgur, and spices. Can be eaten baked (Kibbeh bil Sanieh) as well as raw (Kibbeh Nayeh)

> It was time for the younger generation to maybe move on, discover the world, and see if we have a better future somewhere else. Some stayed behind. I still have a cousin and a few relatives there [Egypt]. They're doing well, you know. And we're spread out all over. I have family now in Canberra, Australia, and Sydney, Australia, and Adelaide, Australia, in Southern France, in Cannes, in Paris. I have friends and relatives in London, a lot. I have relatives in Germany. In Canada, Toronto, Montreal. And in the United States also. And in Lebanon, we still have a lot of family there, too, you know. That's how my family has spread out, you know, and we imitated the Lebanese Diaspora that has preceded us for many, many years.
>
> – Nasri, 78, a first generation Lebanese-American.

In our conversation, Nasri proudly explained how his family built off the financial, social, and political success of the Lebanese diaspora. He is under no illusion that all Lebanese are great people – but he cites the success of Lebanese immigrants at the top of their fields, such as the singer Paul Anka, as a source of pride. Nasri is aware of his place within Lebanon's diaspora, which is large, successful, and a substantial source of income for the Lebanese economy.

Successive waves of migration from modern-day Lebanon and Syria began in the late 1800s and have continued to the present, fueled by the uneven development of capitalism in Mount Lebanon as well as economic troubles and war (including the 1860 Mount Lebanon Civil Conflict and the Lebanese Civil War from 1975-1990) (Hage 2021). This has created a large diaspora, which is estimated to be anywhere from four to fourteen million people spread across the globe, outstripping the population of Lebanon itself, which is around four or five million people (Verdeil and Dewailly 2019, 42-43; Haddad 2018). While all of the participants in my research indicated pride in their heritage, how participants understood and articulated this

identity varied quite widely. This was most profound in discussions of racial and ethnic identity. While some participants identified as Arab-American and non-white, others rejected an Arab identity and identified as white. My research findings demonstrate wide-ranging diversity in how Christian Lebanese-Americans understand and articulate identity due to three major factors: divergent migrant pathways in multiple countries, generational difference given changing racial politics in the US, and generational difference given the impacts of US foreign policy in the Middle East upon young Lebanese-Americans.

Why should we study the Lebanese Diaspora? And How?

Since the first Lebanese and Syrian migrants came to the United States in the late 1800s, their racial identity has been contested. Sarah Gualtieri argues that while Syro-Lebaneese immigrants to the United States fought for and achieved the legal classification of "white," they were never admitted into the white mainstream of American society (2009). She argues that their "partly white" status was further emphasized by anti-Arab racism following the 9/11 terrorist attacks (Gualtieri 2009, 11). My interviews suggest that while some people of Arab descent identify as white, others reject the label and argue that they are not seen as part of the white mainstream.

All participants in my research project identified as Lebanese-Americans and came from Christian backgrounds but were of different ages and life experiences. Thus, while a diversity of life experiences and opinions is not surprising, it does stand in contrast to typical American media coverage of Lebanese and Arab-Americans which is often stereotypical, monolithic, and racist (Starck 2015; El-Haj 2009). Hopefully, this thesis not only illuminates the diversity of

beliefs and experiences amongst Lebanese-Americans, but also how these identities are produced in and shaped by particular contexts in Lebanon, the United States, and beyond. This is particularly interesting in the current moment when there have been several campaigns to create a separate box for people of Middle Eastern and North African descent on the United States census (Mesouani 2023). As young people reconsider their race and push for the government to change its racial categorization, major news organizations have started to cover these developments in greater detail (Zraick et al. 2024). While a MENA category on the census allows for more recognition of this community, it encompasses a great deal of ethnic, religious, and phenotypical diversity. While my research and personal experience indicate that some Lebanese-Americans are excited about efforts to create a new category on the census, others are indifferent or confused as to why Lebanese-Americans would consider themselves non-white. This research draws on participants' migration stories (both their own and those of their relatives) to explore how Lebanese-Americans articulate ideas of race, ethnicity, and nationality and gain a greater sense of their nuances and complexity. This is especially important in light of the social and cultural changes described above.

This thesis primarily pulls on two areas of anthropological scholarship: analyses and theories on diaspora and migration, with a particular focus on the Lebanese context, and theories of race and whiteness in the United States. Previous work on the Lebanese diaspora is discussed further in chapter 2, where I draw on Dalia Abedlahdy's framework outlining the concepts of assimilation, multiculturalism, and diaspora, but I will include a brief overview in this chapter. Work in the fields of "Middle East Studies" or "Arab Studies" on the Lebanese diaspora by anthropologists, historians, sociologists, and political scientists has focused on the diaspora in a variety of contexts, the sociopolitical reasons for the creation and development of the diaspora,

and the interaction of the diaspora with the modern Lebanese state. Albert Hourani and Nadim Shehadi's 1992 edited volume, *The Lebanese in the World: A Century of Emigration,* includes a wide array of articles from academics on the Lebanese diaspora and has served as an invaluable resource.

More recent works, Ghassan Hages' *The Diasporic Condition,* and Dalia Abdedlhady's book *The Lebanese Diaspora* have also been key resources. Both Hage and Abdelhady employ the theoretical term "diaspora" to understand both the wide-spread nature of Lebanese communities globally, as well as to understand diasporic ways of being. Hage defines the diasporic condition as a common cultural milieu, where migration or the possibility of migration are a key parts of the Lebanese experience. He explains that Lebanon observed large scale migration over the last one hundred-fifty years, but that migration and the possibility to move to another place is a key part of Lebanese social experiences. Hage's analysis reflected well onto my own research subjects. For example, Nasri, who immigrated to the United States when he was eighteen, explained that while he was applying for a visa to the United States, friends and cousins were applying to live and work in Canada and Australia as well. For many Lebanese outside of Lebanon, this process of migration also shapes their experiences and self-understanding. I choose to use the term diaspora because it conveys the scale and breadth of Lebanese migration, something that several interviewees mentioned as a source of pride. Second, none of my research participants or the families directly "migrated" from Lebanon to the United States. Every participant or their family spent significant time in other countries but are currently living in the United States. How people create their identity is dependent on their experiences of migration, as well as the context of the country they just migrated to (Abdelhady 2011). I draw

upon Hage and Abdedlhady's use of the term diaspora, while placing greater analytical emphasis on participants' experience of race, ethnicity, and identification categories.

I use Michael Omi and Howard Winant's theory of racial formation, stressing that race is a social constructed and form of classification formed in relation to social hierarchy and power (2014, 12-13). While Omi and Winant focus on the institutional legacies of segregation, slavery, and anti-Black racism, their theory of racial formation is applicable to other forms of racial discrimination in the United States. In discussing identity, I pull from Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper's article Beyond "Identity" to articulate the manner in which participants identify and understand their own social position in relation to others (kin, political organizations, and others) (2000, 14-15). All participants are living in the American racial context, where Lebanese-Americans and others of Arabic descent experience racism, stereotyping, and discrimination. However, participants utilize different terms that largely reflect generational experience as well as migration experience, and importantly, several participants are pulling on different racial/ethnic/political contexts. For example, Arab identification in mid-20th century Egypt is very different then Arab identification in the 21st century United States. While I am focused on the American racial context, several participants pulled on formative experiences in Lebanon and Egypt. While racial categories such as white, Black, and Asian are most relevant in the American context, religious, ethnic, or national identity is often more important in Egypt and Lebanon. Thus, for first generation immigrants, they often choose identity labels that express the different national contexts they have lived in.

Given that people from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) have historically occupied a racially ambiguous place within the United States, participants understand their identity in a myriad of ways. I take inspiration from the work of Sarah Gualtieri, who utilizes

parts of the diaspora framework to understand the creation of a Syrian-American racial identity in the early 1900s. Gualtieri's book, *Between Arab and White: Race and Ethnicity in the Early Syrian American Diaspora* (2009), explicates how Syrian Americans immigrants' race was contested, but that Syrians were ultimately legally classified as white. I argue that in this current moment, the racial status of people from the Middle East and North Africa is being contested once again. These interviews provide insight how Christian Lebanese-Americans are thinking about race and their identity following 9/11 and changing racial politics in the United States.

Not all of my participants considered themselves to be "racialized" and some describe themselves as white and non-Arab. In using a race as a theory, I do not intend to refute the racial or ethnic identity that people hold, nor do I intend to reify or reinforce race as a biological or essential category. Rather, I suggest that race is a useful concept to show the way that all Americans are categorized by phenotype, national origin, and socioeconomic status. While whiteness is commonly understood to be the absence of race, I argue that whiteness is a race in of itself, with a process of racialization that denotes privilege (Ramos-Zayas 2001). All Americans are racialized, whether they are deemed white or non-white. I note that while people have the ability to self-identify their race (as several participants do in this study), racialization also entails outside categorization by people and structures of power. While there is greater efforts to become a race-blind society, race unfortunately matters and has real social, political, and economic consequences. So while a couple of participants explained that they had not experienced racism within the United States (albeit they did encounter stereotypes about the Middle East), they live in a country where there are ample stereotypes and racism about them, their family, and people who come from the same region. Thus, I think the term and theory of race are still quite useful, and they help to understand the views of participants who consider

themselves to be "non-white" and white, without assuming that race is inherent or consistent across time and space.

This thesis draws from these two groups of theories and attempts to understand the creation of racial and ethnic identity through processes of migration and diaspora. Taking inspiration from previous scholarship, this research fulfills a gap in the literature by focusing on identity formation among Christian Lebanese. In addition, my research includes several immigrants who came to the United States in the 1960s, a group that has been previously understudied. Before discussing my research methods and the outline of subsequent chapters, I turn to a discussion of what brought me to this research and my own positionality.

Positionality

My dad's family immigrated from Lebanon during the 1960s, and I identify as Lebanese-American. Ever since I was a young child, I have been proud of my family's heritage. I fondly remember and enjoy large family gatherings, where we eat delicious food, such as tabbouleh, labneh, and my personal favorite, grape leaves. I remember sitting on the carpeted floor in my grandparents' living room as the adults talked in a wonderful mixture of English, French, and the occasional Arabic. Sometimes, they would tell stories, stories of their time in Lebanon. These stories were funny and beautiful, and after every story, I would ask when we could travel to Lebanon. The adults would usually respond that I could visit Lebanon one day when it was safer or more stable. Naturally, this made me want to visit even more.

At school, none of the other students were Lebanese, and most of them didn't know what Lebanon was. If I told someone I was of Lebanese descent, the majority of students reacted

positively, but others insisted that I was lying, expressed confusion that I was not Muslim, or asked if my family were terrorists. By the time I attended college, Lebanon was a place I was interested in, but I primarily associated it with the warmth and familiarity of my extended family. In college, I have connected with students from Lebanese and other Arab backgrounds, forming friendships and sharing and learning recipes. At the same time, Lebanon has become an academic interest for me as well. I have enjoyed "filling in the gaps" of the stories I was told growing up and learning more about the politics and beliefs of a wide range of Lebanese in Lebanon and the diaspora. I completed several class research projects on Lebanon, including an analysis of the Port of Beirut Explosion in 2020 and a comparison of the 2019 Thawra and the 2004 Independence Intifada. Last summer, I interned at Georgetown's Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, which furthered my interest in the Arab world and exposed me to a whole array of writers and organizations working in the Middle East. While I have not yet visited Lebanon, I hope to visit Lebanon sometime in the future. I am currently studying French, and I hope to learn Arabic as well. [2]

While in college, I have noted the different ways that my family, my friends, and academics discuss Lebanon and the Lebanese diaspora. For example, before I attended college, I knew that Lebanon was an Arabic-speaking country, but I did not usually identify as Arab-American like some of my friends in college. I was told that my family's heritage was Lebanese, but Arab-American was never a label that we discussed or used extensively. Since attending college, and embracing the Arab-American label as well, I have been thinking about how I can hold these various ways of understanding Lebanese ancestry and heritage together. These experiences inspired me to complete a this research project on the Lebanese diaspora that fulfills

[2] While Levantine Arabic is the primary language spoken in Lebanon, French and English are also widely spoken (Embassy of Lebanon 2024).

both academic research goals, as well as personal goals. It has been an excellent way to learn more about my identity and connect with family, friends, and new people who share a similar cultural background. In addition, it touches on my academic interests in identity formation, politics, and migration.

I have close kin relationships and friendships with several of the participants, creating a sense of familiarity during the interviews. For participants with whom I had a pre-existing relationship, I spent time less time discussing basic life details because I already knew a significant amount of detail about their backgrounds. In addition, I had discussed my honors project and some of the issues at hand with some participants before I officially interviewed them. Thus, they had a good idea of some of the topics I was interested in exploring and some of the theoretical angles I was considering. This familiarity allowed me to comfortably ask a wide variety of questions, but it also raised several ethical questions. I was fulfilling the roles of friend and researcher at the same time. While I was and am interested in issues of politics and race, for example, I was aware that some of my participants were less comfortable discussing these issues. I did not want to frustrate research participants by asking to interview them and then proceeding to ask questions that they found either tedious or upsetting. Luckily, the interviews went well, and I felt that the participants were both willing and engaged. For all participants, a key concern of mine has been protecting my research subjects and depicting their answers as accurately and honestly as possible.

This research, as well as the methods, represent a combination of my academic and personal experiences. Thus, while some of my questions to participants were based on aforementioned personal experience, many others derived from previous coursework and academic research. Throughout the research completed before the interviews, I tried to gain a

greater understanding of the sociopolitical context of Lebanon and the Lebanese diaspora, as well as various academic opinions on the subject. During the interviews, there were multiple instances where participants had personally experienced a historical event (such as the Lebanese Civil War) that I have studied from an academic perspective. Sometimes, the perspectives of academic authors and my participants diverged.

Throughout my interviews, I tried to understand the perspective of my participants, even when I disagreed with them. While I may not align myself with some of their political opinions, I recognize that personal experience is quite different from an academic opinion. For example, I have been influenced by and cite several articles that argue that the Lebanese Civil War cannot simply be described as a war between Christians and Muslims. Instead, these authors argue that class and inequality were primary causes of the Civil War. In addition, they argue that the hegemonic "Christian vs Muslim" narrative ignores heavy intra-sectarian fighting (George 2022; Wakim 2021). While I find these theories convincing, I am determined to not simply privilege academic theories over the personal experiences of my participants. These theories may be correct; at the same time, several participants understand the war within the "Christian vs. Muslim" frame having lived in a context sectarian violence, ethnic cleansing, and difference. Understanding why the "Christian vs Muslim" frame is compelling requires attention to the ways that power is working in two different directions. On one hand, writers such as Nathaniel George (2022) and Jamal Wakim (2021) are writing against hegemonic narratives of the Lebanese Civil War, and they are trying to highlight class inequality. In addition, several of my research participants would have been part of the middle to upper classes in Lebanon, and thus occupied relatively privileged positions within Lebanese society themselves. This most likely influenced their social position in the lead up to and during the Civil War, and thus their opinions on the war.

Of course, researchers are in a position of privilege and power as well. The ability to draw on resources of time, money, and education to form an opinion and analysis of events that occurred over forty years ago leads to a very different positionally for the researcher from the participant.

Thus, I am entering these questions from a different perspective than are my participants. On certain topics, such as discussions of race, I have particular experiences including educational experiences, and a scholarly background. Younger participants tended to be more comfortable talking about race, sometimes making reference to anthropological and sociological theory. In contrast, some of the older participants noted that the way that people discuss and understand race has changed. As the researcher, I am in a position of power where I guide the conversation, and in the aftermath, I have chosen which quotes and which sections of the interview to highlight and analyze. I have done my best to accurately represent the participants sentiments, but the researcher-participant dynamic still persists.

Methods

To provide insights into these issues, I completed library research, as well as ethnographic research in the form of six interviews with Lebanese-Americans. The research primarily focused on previous literature on the Lebanese diaspora in anthropology, history, political science, and sociology. This research was divided into four roughly formed categories: theoretical approaches, Lebanese history, the diaspora itself, and present-day Lebanese society and politics. I completed research on theoretical research on the Lebanese diaspora, migratory processes, and identity. The research on Lebanese history and the history of the diaspora is utilized in the Chapter One of the thesis, where I tried to understand the sociopolitical forces that

led to successive waves of migration from Lebanon (before and after the formation of the state). In addition, the research on the Lebanese diaspora in the United States and the research on present-day Lebanon serve as important contexts for understanding the responses and experiences of research participants.

I conducted six interviews who self-identified as Lebanese Americans. The participants consisted of family members, friends, and people that I reached through snowball sampling. I reached out to participants by giving a brief overview of my honors project in person, or via email or text message. Before beginning each interview, I asked each interviewee to sign a consent form that included the subject of the study, what I required participants to do, risks and benefits, recording information, and privacy information. I answered any questions that participants had before they signed the consent form, and offered to answer any more questions before we began the interview. I stressed that the interview was voluntary, they could opt out of the interview or a specific question at any time. I requested to audio-record the in-person interviews, to help me accurately cite participant responses. Participants had the option to accept or decline. For those recorded on Zoom, I asked to either video or audio record the interviews. Participants had the option to accept or decline. Subjects could participate in the study even if they declined to be recorded, although all subjects consented to recording. The recordings allowed me to transcribe subjects' responses and analyze the ways they told their stories using narrative analysis. In other words, not only the content of the narrative but the form and performance of the narrative were analyzed.

After conducting the interviews, all research data, including interview recordings, transcriptions, and signed consent forms were physically secured on a password-protected Bowdoin OneDrive server. All identifying information given during the interviews, such as

names, addresses, and organization affiliations was deidentified and pseudonyms are used throughout this thesis. Only myself, as well as my faculty advisor, have access to personal identifying information.

I had 6 research participants, all of whom identified as Lebanese American. All participants were citizens of the United States and were the descendants of Lebanese Christian immigrants. Their ancestors were primary Melkite Greek Catholic or Maronite Catholic, while one participant had relatives who converted to Protestantism while in Lebanon. Maronites and Melkites are Christian ethno-religious groups that have historically lived in the Levant (modern day Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, Jordan, and Israel). Maronites are the largest and most powerful Christian denomination in Lebanon. The Maronite church was founded in the 4th century by the Saint Maroon, and since the 11th century has recognized the Pope while following its own rites and practices. The Melkite church split from the Greek Orthodox church in the 18th century, recognizing the authority of the pope in Rome, and continues to follow the Byzantine rites. Maronite and Melkite churches in the United States often have Lebanese-American congregations, and they provide community and a connection to Lebanon. For example, meals with traditional Lebanese food are often served following service at Maronite or Melkite churches (Rowe 2012). Lebanese Christians are often proud of their heritage, being a part of some of the oldest Christian communities in the world. Some of the participants had been baptized in Melkite or Maronite churches, but none of them regularly attended a Maronite or Melkite church. They explained to me that it was often too inconvenient. Instead, some of the participants attended either church a Roman Catholic church or a Protestant church. Other participants do not consider themselves to be religious.

Whether or not they attend church, participants' (or their ancestors') Christian background impacted their ability to assimilate within the United States. When compared to Muslim migrants, Christian migrants would most likely have an easier time entering the US and avoiding hostility from their neighbors. In addition, I surmised that a Christian faith or background would influence how immigrants would understand Lebanon politically and socially. This is particularly important due to the role religious groups play in Lebanon's confessional system, as well as Lebanon's histories of religious co-existence and animosity. I do not wish to over-emphasize or essentialize the role of sectarianism in Lebanon's history and politics; however, as my interviews suggested, religious sects do influence the experience of those living in Lebanon and the diaspora at least in some instances. For example, several participants articulated the Civil War as a conflict between Christians and Muslims, with less of a focus on issues of class, inequality, and inter-sectarian conflict. They explained how social circles and worlds in Beirut during the 1960s were often separated along sectarian lines. In other instances, participants resisted sect-based pictures of Lebanese society, highlighting friendships across sectarian lines or praising recent protests that call for the end of sectarian politics.

I chose to focus on Lebanese Christians of various immigrant generations and ages. The participants included three first-generation immigrants, one second-generation immigrant, and two participants who were third or fourth-generation. I interviewed three men and three women, with the youngest participant aged 21-years-old and the oldest 93-years-old. The three first-generation immigrants all migrated from Lebanon during the 1960s, and another participant's family had also migrated during the 1960s. In contrast, the two third-generation participants were descended from family members who immigrated during the late 1800s. Three of the participants are related. Marie, who is 93, immigrated to the United States in 1962, with her husband and her

daughter Rita, who is currently 70 years old. I also interviewed Marie's son, George, who is 57 and was born in the United States. While I conducted two separate interviews for Marie and Rita, they were both in the room together and occasionally commented on the same question or each other's responses. It is important to note that these participants do not hold identical opinions, but they are kin and share common experiences and discourses. For example, George's understanding of Lebanon and Egypt has been influenced by stories that his parents have told them. The things his parents taught him about valuing family, cultural food, and language are core parts of his identity. Nasri a 78-year-old man, Philip a man in his early 30s, and Rebecca a woman in her early 20s are not related and have different familial experiences than the three other participants.

Thus, there was a great diversity of experiences and opinions among those that I interviewed. With a small sample size, the goal of this research is not to make wide-arching claims about Lebanese-Americans, but rather to leverage this in-depth ethnographic data to try and understand how people understand their identity. This can then be examined in comparison to current dominant understandings of Lebanese Americans amongst the general public, civil society organizations, and anthropologists.

The interviews were ethnographic and conversational and took place for anywhere from an hour to two hours. While I prepared a list of questions to ask each participant, I attempted to make each interview flexible, allowing participants to talk about what was important to them, while also asking follow-up questions for clarity. I usually started each interview by asking them how they identified, purposefully leaving the question open-ended. Participants included identities such as gender, but most responded by explaining their national background, their ethnicity, and various life experiences. While I knew that each participant either immigrated from

Lebanon or had family that descended from Lebanon, I knew that these were complex questions.. There were several participants of mixed ethnic and national backgrounds, and the process of migration was not linear or straightforward for anyone I interviewed (including those recounting their families' stories of migration). Every single participant explained that their family had lived in multiple countries before coming to the United States. While three participants were born in the United States, the three first-generation immigrants were born in Egypt. (They all had kin that descended from Lebanon and/or Syria). While Lebanese-American was an identity shared by all participants, they had a wide range of opinions on Arab identity and their racial identity.

Following the discussion of identity, we tended to discuss individuals' life histories and their processes of migration. This was most fruitful for the first-generation immigrants, who readily gave stories of their time in Egypt, Lebanon, and the United States. This led to multiple follow-up questions, as they explained to me why and how they migrated and their thought processes at various points. The conversations generally progressed chronologically, but participants would often jump back in time. For example, I would ask them about identity in the United States, and they would answer by explaining an experience from their childhood in Egypt. I was particularly intrigued by the personal stories that people gave around key historical events, such as Marie's description of heading home in a taxi during the Cairo Fire of 1952. Other topics included transitioning to a new country, languages, education, identity, travel to Lebanon, and politics.

For individuals not born in the Middle East, we discussed their family's migration from Lebanon and how they learned and thought about these migration stories. This was also fruitful, but I quickly learned to not focus too much of the interview on the migration of their ancestors. This isn't to say that migration stories did not play a major role in the identities of second, third,

and fourth-generation participants – they certainly did. But, if I became too involved in asking about the details of these stories (i.e. How old was this person, what was their name etc.), it became an exercise in memory rather than a reflection of what was important to the participants themselves. We tended to discuss how they thought about their Lebanese-American identity, what was important to them, and how they engaged in Lebanese culture. While I covered similar topics with participants of different generations, what was important to them changed. For example, while first-generation immigrants discussed political events in Lebanon or Egypt, the attacks on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001 were more important to younger participants.

Findings and Thesis Structure

After the completion of the interviews, I noticed that while all participants identified as Lebanese-American, the way they understood their race and ethnicity varied widely depending on age, education, and location. This raised several questions. Why do members of this community have such different opinions on their race? And in what context(s) were my participants understanding the terms Lebanon, Arab, and race? In this thesis, I will employ library research and ethnographic data to understand how Lebanese-Americans understand their identity and place it within stories of migration. I argue that there is a great amount of diversity within this community that has not always been covered by the media or put into context by previous scholarship. Participants who identified as Arab-American and non-white tended to be younger, born in the United States, and had developed an understanding of race through college education. In addition, they had reported more overt experiences of racism than participants who

identified as white. They understood Arab-American as a term that recognized how people of Arab descent in the United States are frequently othered and stereotyped. Their identity was also linked to pan-Arab political activism. Participants who preferred to identify as Lebanese and white tended to be older, were born outside of the United States, or had family that had migrated more recently, and often discussed their identity in non-American contexts. Some understood Arabs as a reference to people from the Gulf. They also understood themselves as white, citing their light skin tone.

In short, I argue that participants understand terms such as Arab and whiteness in different ways and contexts. Identifying as white and Lebanese, or identifying as non-white and Arab can both be understood as reactions to American racism and stereotyping. Some Lebanese-Americans have historically strived to assimilate while correcting misconceptions. Others, having experienced racism, do not feel as though they are "completely" white and embrace engagement with the broader Arab-American community. In studying Lebanese Americans, anthropologists must recognize this diversity of experiences and opinions.

In the first chapter, I will provide a historical background to the Lebanese diaspora, identifying why and how the diaspora grew to become so large and influential. I will argue that political violence and the uneven development of capitalism have contributed to three successive waves of migration from Lebanon. Because migration has occurred with such regularity, it is closely tied to Lebanese identity, and many Lebanese understand themselves as a group particularly suited to migration, exploration, and entrepreneurship.

In the second chapter, I discuss how immigration has been understood with the frameworks of assimilation, multiculturalism, and diaspora. In the third chapter, I identify and analyze the differences in how nationality, race, and ethnicity are understood among Lebanese-

Americans. Then I analyze scholarship and interviewee responses on Lebanese and Arab identities in Egypt, Lebanon, and the United States to better understand the contexts and discourses in which my participants are engaging.

Chapter 1: Waves of Migration

The Lebanese diaspora is large and influential, although its exact size is difficult to determine. The population of Lebanon is currently estimated to be around four to five million people, while the diaspora is estimated to be anywhere from four to fourteen million people spread across the globe (Verdeil and Dewailly 2019, 42-43; Haddad 2018). It should be noted that Lebanon has not had a census since 1932; any figure on the population is an estimation that may not take accurate account of large quantities of emigration and immigration (Verdeil and Dewailly 2019). In addition, state-sponsored mythology on the success of Lebanese migrants and their predisposition to travel and adventure may inflate the estimated number of migrants (Hage 2021). Nevertheless, more people of Lebanese descent live in Brazil than in Lebanon itself (Hage 2021, x). Additionally, both Argentina and the United States claim Lebanese populations of around one million people each and populations of about 300,000 to 500,000 people each live in Mexico, Venezuela, Canada, and Australia. The regions of the Caribbean and Europe also each have populations of about 300,000 to 500,000 Lebanese each. Substantial numbers of people of Lebanese heritage live in Africa, the Arab Gulf, and other parts of Latin America (Hage 2021, x). Around ten percent of the diaspora has Lebanese citizenship, and much of the diaspora is politically, economically, or socially engaged with Lebanon. The connections and channels of communication between the diaspora and Lebanon, in fact, have been crucial to the formation of the modern state (Hage 2021).

Figure 1. Administrative map of Lebanon (Atlas of Lebanon: New Challenges)

To understand the Lebanese Christian communities in the diaspora, the historical underpinnings of emigration from Lebanon requires some attention. In this chapter, I will categorize Lebanese emigration into three broad waves beginning in the late 19th century before the modern borders of Lebanon were established and ending in the late 20th century. Lebanon is a small but geographically, ethnically, and linguistically diverse country (Britannica 2023). Thus,

the historical overview here does not aim to be comprehensive. Instead, I highlight these different waves of Lebanese migration, and the sociopolitical contexts in which they occurred, to provide a foundation for understanding how the creation of the Lebanese state, a sense of national identity, and a diaspora are inextricably linked.

Located on the east coast of the Mediterranean Sea and bordered on the south by Israel and the north by Syria, the territory of Lebanon contains some of the oldest human settlements in the world, including the Phoenician ports of Tyre, Sidon, and Byblos. The borders of the modern state were created by the French Mandate for Syria and Lebanon in 1920. Lebanon achieved independence from French colonial rule in 1943 (Haddad 2018). Prior to French colonial rule, the region was part of the Ottoman Empire, which I describe in more detail below. Arabic is the official language, but large portions of the population speak French and increasingly English. The ethnic character and composition of Lebanon are contentious, with some politicians favoring a closer relationship with the Arab world and others emphasizing Lebanon's unique identity and heritage. Large numbers of Christians, Sunni Muslims, and Shia' Muslims live in contemporary Lebanon with no group having a majority (State Department 2018). In total, there are 18 officially recognized religious groups in a confessional political system which distributes power based on religious sect.

Emigration began prior to the formation of the modern state of Lebanon. The first wave occurred from 1860-1914, consisting primarily of Lebanese Christian peasants. Sectarian violence, a series of unpopular Ottoman reforms, and the uneven development of capitalism in Mount Lebanon led to large-scale emigration. Emigration from Mount Lebanon continued after World War I at lower rates than the pre-war period. From 1900 to 1914 the annual rate of emigration was roughly 15,000, and this rate decreased sharply during and after the war. During

the interwar period (1918-1939), emigration was dampened by the global economic crisis; however, a net annual emigration rate of about 3,000 continued between 1921 and 1939 (Abdelhady 2011, 6). During this second wave, immigration to the United States and other countries was severely limited, but new destinations opened up in West Africa (Hourani and 1992, 5). Emigration continued at low rates from 1950-1960 due to strong economic growth in Lebanon. A third wave of emigration began in the 1960s as many Lebanese headed for oil-producing countries (annual average of 8,500 from 1960-1970). The Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990) led to a significant increase in emigration, as many fled from violence and poor economic prospects. (Labaki 1992). In the pages that follow I describe each of these three waves in more detail.

First Wave (1860-1914)

From 1860-1914 the Ottoman Empire declined, Mount Lebanon obtained greater autonomy, and vast numbers of people emigrated from the area creating Lebanon's unique political system, economy, and large diaspora. All six of my participants have ancestors who emigrated from Lebanon during this period. The history of this first wave illuminates how and why the "Lebanese diaspora" formed, which required large-scale movement of people and the development of a "Lebanese" identity. Lebanese culture of emigration began during this first wave, and many subsequent migrants have employed the social and economic pathways created by the first migrants. Studying the historical context of the first wave therefore shows how the Lebanese diaspora became both "Lebanese" and a "diaspora."

Figure 2. Map of Mount Lebanon and the modern day borders of Lebanon. The Lebanese Mutasarrifiya, the political predecessor of Lebanon, ruled over Mount Lebanon beginning in the mid 19th Century (Munioz 2020).

Lebanon as a polity can be traced back to the constitution of the Emirate of Lebanon in the late sixteenth century as an autonomous region inside the Ottoman Empire (Traboulsi 2007, 3).[3] The Emirate's borders and influence changed over time, but the Emirates' center of power was Mount Lebanon (Mount Lebanon is shown in *Figure 2*). Mount Lebanon refers to the snow-

[3] For more information on the Emirate of Lebanon see Traboulsi 2007, 3.

capped mountain that Lebanon is named after, as well as the mountainous region located in the western portion of the modern-day state. The distinction between "Mount Lebanon" and "Greater Lebanon" is a geographical one, as well as distinction of political history, economic development, and demographics. Mount Lebanon is smaller than modern day Lebanon, and it was and is predominantly Maronite Christian and Druze. It was also the birthplace of Lebanese nationalism, and where the majority of Syro-Lebanese emigrants came from during the first wave of migration. Historically, the region had varying levels of autonomy, but it was not a nation-state, which is a more recent development in the region (Verdeil and Bakhos 2019).

Ottoman subjects were organized under a religiously codified millet system, which established a tiered system of hierarchy, while granting religious communities, such as the Maronite Catholic community in Mount Lebanon, relative autonomy. The Ottoman Empire was vast, and it relied on local vassals to maintain control. Mount Lebanon was run according to the *iqta'* system, which allocated tax farming rights to ethnic or tribal chiefs. Conflict between local leaders and Istanbul was common. When local leaders were powerful enough, they attempted to shake off the Sultan's authority (Traboulsi 2007, 4). The Ottoman system privileged Muslim subjects, while Christians and Jews were classified as "people of the book" and granted religious autonomy as long as they paid the *jizya*, or poll tax. Generally speaking, Christians and Jews from the Levant were barred from joining the Ottoman military or administration. Therefore, social divisions of labor tended to fall along religious lines. In the case of Mount Lebanon, the Druze community was defined by its tribal-warrior function, while the Christian community consisted primarily of peasants. In an area with great inequality between land-owning and peasant classes, these social and political divisions would eventually become sectarian ones

(Traboulsi 2007, 4). However, it is important to note that the development of sectarian tensions was not inevitable, nor are they the result of so-called "ancient hatreds".

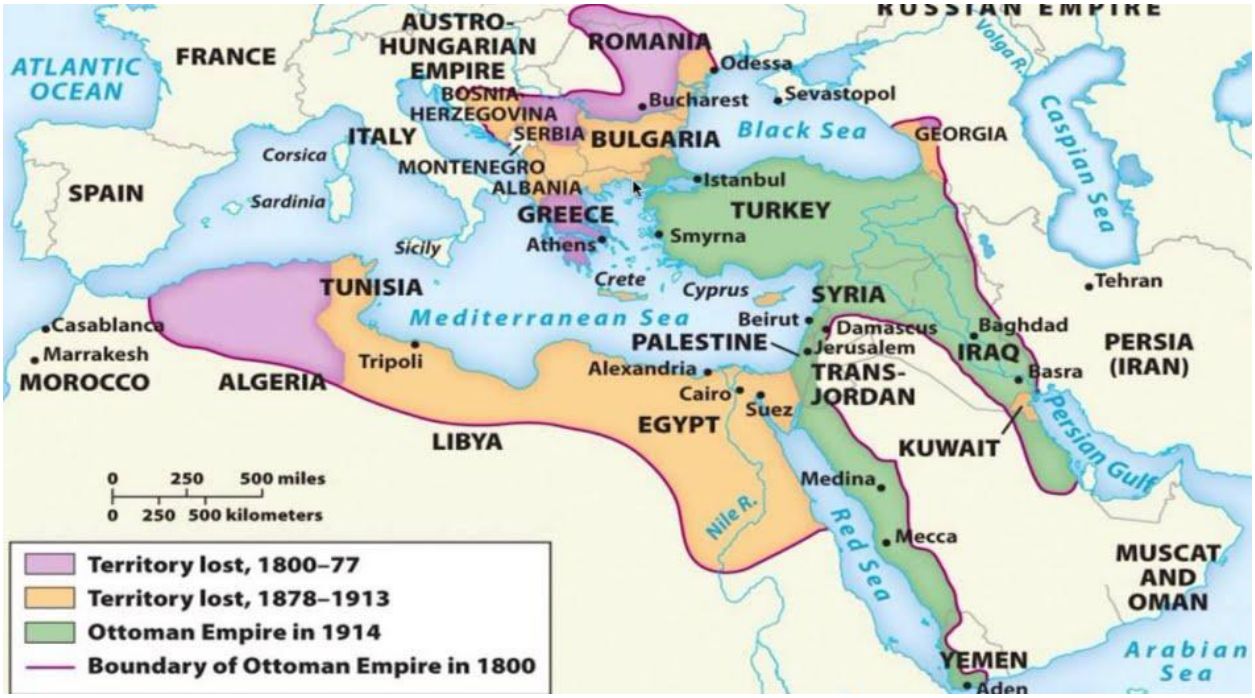

Figure 3. During the 19th century, the Ottoman Empire lost progressively more territory as European imperial powers encroached on its territory. The empire dissolved after World War I (Huang 2024).

In the late 19th century, Mount Lebanon and the Ottoman Empire experienced political and social turmoil characterized by war, class and sectarian conflict, and the beginnings of the capitalist economy, which ultimately resulted in large-scale emigration (Traboulsi 2012). At this time, the Ottoman Empire was struggling to combat the increasing influence of European imperial powers (See *Figure 3),* and it conducted a series of reforms, called the Tanzimat (1839-1876), to centralize its model of statecraft by introducing direct taxation, creating a standing army, and encouraging industry. The Empire tried to change the millet system and create a more equitable legal code that applied to subjects of all religious backgrounds. Ultimately, this failed

to combat European imperialism, and the restructuring created tension within Ottoman society along sectarian lines. The government abolished the jizya in 1856, but non-Muslims were required to pay a tax exempting them from military service, which proved to be deeply unpopular (Gelvin 2011). In addition, European powers, exerting financial and military pressure on the Empire, gained concessions within the Empire that favored various minorities. For example, the French established a special relationship with the Maronite Christians. These concessions gave special advantages to European powers and minority communities regarding trade and taxes. The European powers justified intervention under the guise of protecting minorities, but this was designed to increase European influence in the region and to gain new profits. As a result, these concessions gave minority groups valuable trade advantages, and this contributed to sectarian and class tension culminating in an outbreak of violence in 1858 (Gelvin 2011).

The Mount Lebanon Civil War began as a dispute between Maronite peasants and Maronite landlords in 1858, but soon transmuted into a conflict between Druze landlords and Maronite peasants in 1860. The conflict ended in a Druze military victory, as well as the mass killings of non-combatants (Traboulsi 2012, 35-56). In the aftermath, anti-Christian riots occurred in Damascus, Aleppo, and Nablus. In Damascus alone, 5,000 to 10,000 Christians were killed (Gelvin 2011).[4] Many peasants were displaced, and several of my participants cited this conflict as the impetuous for their families' departure from Lebanon. In response to this conflict, France and the European powers intervened militarily, with French troops landing in Lebanon. The 1860 war ended in Christian defeat, but the military defeat was transformed into a political victory for the Maronite leaders by the European powers (Traboulsi 2012, 43).

[4] For more information on ethnic cleansing during the 1860 Civil War, see Traboulsi 2012 pgs. 33-40 and Gelvin 2011

The *Réglement organique* of June 1861 gave Mount Lebanon limited autonomy within the Ottoman Empire, guaranteed by France, Britain, Austria, Prussia, and Russia. The European powers united Mount Lebanon into a *Mutasarrifiya* (governate) within Ottoman Empire. The Lebanese Mutasarrifiya was granted an unusual amount of autonomy, and it was governed by a non-Lebanese Ottoman Christian who was assisted by elected representatives apportioned based on sect (Traboulsi 2012, 41). The political structure favored Maronites, who were the majority in Mount Lebanon. This agreement is the historical antecedent of the National Pact of 1943, an agreement by leading Christian and Muslim politicians to proportion political representation by sect. This system still exists today, and it is often critiqued for being undemocratic and encouraging corruption. The Mutasarrifiya and the French mandate of Lebanon consolidated Maronite political and economic power at the expense of Lebanon's other religious groups. As I note below, this power imbalance was a cause of the Lebanese Civil War of 1975-1990. Fawwaz Traboulsi argues that there are clear parallels between these two civil wars, stating that "For those Lebanese who lived through the 1975-1990 wars, the 'events of 1860' seem strangely familiar" (2012, 39-40).[5]

In the aftermath of the Civil War, the Lebanese Mutasarrifiya established close political, economic, and social relationships with European markets. Much of this trade went through Beirut, which rapidly increased in population at the same time (Traboulsi 2012, 56).[6] It became reliant on the Syrian interior for livestock and cereals. While this contributed to its economic

[5] Traboulsi cites a poignant quote from the chronicler Abqarius: "During the fighting, a Druze got hold of a Christian. They battled and resisted each other and went on fighting until they reached the waterfront from which they fell into the water still exchanging punches and blows. A huge wave unfurled and dragged them into the open sea where they were swallowed up by the tide. The next morning, their corpses were recovered on the beach scrunched up in a tight embrace and gripping each other's hands (Traboulsi 2012, 39-40; Abqarius 1987, 144).
[6] "Beirut's population had already quadrupled in three decades (1830-60). On the eve of the creation of Greater Lebanon in 1920, it had tripled again, to 120,000 inhabitants" (Traboulsi 2012, 56). For more on Beirut during this period, see Traboulsi 2012 pgs. 52-72.

prosperity, the reliance on exports of silk to Europe would contribute to successive waves of migration and uneven socioeconomic development (Traboulsi 2012, 42). Sericulture developed at the expense of other industries such as cereal production, and this created a vast commercial deficit. A series of diseases in the 1870s devastated the industry, and Syrian and Lebanese silk makers struggled to compete with silk production from the Far East (Gualtieri 2009, 33). Thus, the economy of Mount Lebanon was simply unable to support its growing population.

Between 1860 and 1914 roughly a third of the population left the country, and the majority of emigrants were landless peasants (Traboulsi 2012, 47; Safa 1960, 187-90). Other scholars estimate that 45% of Mount Lebanon's population emigrated from 1860-1914 (Fersan 2010). Tanzimat land reforms and the introduction of capitalism led to the consolidation of land amongst a few private land holders, such the Maronite Church. The Church controlled roughly one-third of total land in Mount Lebanon, in property holdings called *waqfs.* This, in addition to a baby boom following the war, created issues of overpopulation, pushing many people to leave Mount Lebanon. This wave primarily consisted of Christians, as well as smaller numbers of Druze. The remittances of the emigrants made up 45% of the total revenue in Mount Lebanon but barely covered the commercial deficit (Traboulsi 2012, 47). As Mount Lebanon became more integrated into the global political economy, emigrants traveled to urban centers in the Ottoman Empire such as Beirut, Alexandria, and Cairo, as well as destinations aboard. While this migration was instigated by violence, a large number of people immigrated for economic reasons as well (Gualtieri 2009, 29).

The creation of the Mutasarrifiya was crucial to the beginnings of Lebanese nationalism; but it also contributed to the vast immigration of much of its population. According to Ghassan Hage (2021), Lebanese capitalism cannot be understood as separate from its diasporic culture. As

soon as capitalism began to penetrate the previously quasi-feudal Mount Lebanon, dreams of international migration began to take root. Many people began to believe, and still do to this day, that immigration represented their best chance for success and upward mobility. Even if all Lebanese immigrants are not successful, this belief continues to hold weight (Hage 2021, 24-26). This initial wave of migration thus sets the stage for several major themes of modern Lebanese history: continual large scale emigration, class and sectarian conflict, and politics organized along sectarian lines. This emigration, like all ensuing emigration, cannot be tied to one major event, like the Nakba of 1948 for the Palestinian diaspora. Rather, emigration has continued to be a very attractive proposition for many Lebanese due to poor economic prospects and political insecurity. Thus, the diaspora is quite diverse because immigrants from different communities have consistently been leaving the area for over one hundred fifty years. During the first large wave of emigration, the majority of emigrants were Christian, and they primarily went to the Americas, as well as a significant group of Syro-Lebanese who went to Egypt.[7]

Second Wave (1919-1945)

World War I led to a vast political and social restructuring in Mount Lebanon contributing to further migration (Verdeil and Dewailly 2019, 42-43). During World War I, Ottoman repression of independence movements in Mount Lebanon and Beirut was especially harsh, and the of all the Ottoman provinces, the area was the hardest hit by famine. Ottoman authorities

[7] It is important to note that at this time the Lebanese state didn't exist nor did a strong sense of Lebanese national identity. Those who emigrated to the Americas in the late 19th century would be considered Syrian or Ottoman subjects in official documentation. Therefore, it is difficult to determine how many emigrants came from Mount Lebanon and the boundaries of the modern Lebanese state. During the 20th century, many of these emigrants developed a "Lebanese" identity in diaspora (Gualtieri 2022).

restricted trade, confiscated wheat and livestock, and made military service compulsory. In addition, Mount Lebanon's reliance on the import of goods and foodstuff from overseas and the Syrian interior proved to be deadly. The shortages of the war, combined with a locust invasion in 1915 and the greed of the Mount Lebanon elite (who set extremely high rates of interest on loans) contributed to a devastating famine. In total, roughly 100,000 inhabitants of Mount Lebanon and Beirut died by the end of the war (Traboulsi 2012, 72). [8]

In the aftermath of the First World War, the Ottoman Empire fell, and in the general upheaval, new states were formed along with massive population displacements (Verdeil and Bakhos 2019). During this period, there were several conflicting propositions for the political future of what at that time was known in English as "Greater Syria" or "Syria" (Gualtieri 2009, 11). While many Arabs hoped for the creation of an independent state(s), the future of the region was directed by the European powers at the 1919 Paris Peace Conference. The European powers established the Mandate System, which was framed as well-meaning and idealistic, but was effectively a colonial enterprise. The Charter of the League of Nations stated, "Certain communities formerly belonging to the Turkish Empire have reached a stage of development where their existence as independent nations can be provisionally recognized subject to the rendering of administrative advice and assistance by a Mandatory until such time as they are able to stand alone" (Sluglett 2014, 417). France was given the mandates of Syria and Lebanon, while Britain took control of the mandates of Iraq and Palestine (Gualtieri 2009, 11). From the beginning, French Mandate rule tended to be unpopular in Lebanon and Syria. In Lebanon, the French refashioned and reinforced the confessional system that had developed in the 19th century (Sluglett 2014, 419).

[8] See Ghazal 2023, Pitts 2018, and Pitts 2021 for more information on the great famine and its impact on Lebanese nationalism.

The French created the modern borders of Lebanon, calling it the "Grand Liban," which was larger and more diverse than the Mutasarrifiya (See *Figure 2*) While the Mutasarrifiya was primarily Maronite, the Grand Liban maintained a slim Christian majority. The creation of a separate Lebanon was popular among the Maronite elite but was deeply unpopular with many Muslim and Christian residents of Lebanon and Syria, who argued that it was unjust and financially hurt the annexed areas, including the coastal cities of Beirut, Tyre, and Saida. While many Lebanese Christians wished for their own state, citing the massacres that occurred following the 1860 Civil Conflict, very few had advocated for a Grater Lebanon under a French Mandate (Traboulsi 2012, 75).

The contentious creation of Lebanon itself is key to understanding the Lebanese diaspora for multiple reasons. First, the issues of Lebanon's identity and the distribution of power among religious groups continue to affect the country to this day. These questions played a key role in the Civil War (1975-1990), which was responsible for another large wave of emigration. Second, the creation of Lebanon, and a distinct "Lebanese identity," was what made the Lebanese diaspora, Lebanese. Before the 1920s, emigrants from what is now Lebanon tended to identify with their religion or as Syrian. During the creation of the mandate, the diaspora participated in the development of Lebanese nationalism, and identifying as Lebanese became more popular. As Gualtieri describes, the fate of their homeland was discussed and debated at length in the American Arab language press (2012, 81-113).

During the interwar period, immigration to the United States and other countries was severely limited.[9] However, greater numbers of Lebanese began to immigrate to West Africa,

[9] The 1924 immigration law was designed to limit the immigration of "undesirable peoples," including East and South Europeans, Asians, and Africans. Immigration was primary limited to European nations, with a small quota for Lebanese and Syrians. These quotas were changed with the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 (Massey and Pren 2012).

where British and French colonies were becoming more interlinked with the global market (Hourani 1992, 5).[10] Thus, most, although not all, of Lebanese-Americans are the descendants of immigrants who came to the United States during the first or third waves. Even while people's understandings of Lebanon as a nation and of the Lebanese diaspora as a "place" of belonging are profoundly shaped by the smaller second wave.

Third Wave: (1945-1990)

Another large wave of Lebanese immigration occurred during the late 1900s due to economic troubles and the country's fifteen-year civil war. Since Lebanon acquired independence in 1943, it has had a confessional political system where political positions are based on religious sects. The National Pact of 1943, a verbal agreement formed by Christian and Muslim leaders behind closed doors, compelled Maronite leaders to refuse Western intervention and accept that Lebanon had Arab features. In return, Muslim leaders had to renounce unification with Syria (George 2022). This agreement established Maronite control of the government, and this was justified by the slim majority of Christians in the 1932 census. In the confessional system, certain political positions are reserved for members of religious sects. The President is a Maronite Christian, the Prime Minister is a Sunni Muslim, and the Speaker of Parliament is a Shia' Muslim (George 2022). This system theoretically promotes political compromise and cooperation, but in practice it has instead led to patron-client networks and high rates of

[10] Initially, immigrants to West Africa were primarily Christians from North Lebanon. However, from the 1920s - 1940s, larger numbers of Shia' Muslims from South Lebanon began to emigrate as well (Bierwith 1997, 332). This was due to the growth and integration of Southern Lebanon into the economic system of Lebanon, creating new opportunities (Hourani 1992, 5). Presently, the majority of Lebanese in West Africa are Muslim (Bierwith 1997). See Hourani 1992, as well as Bierwith 1997 for more information.

corruption. The starkest example of this system's failure is the Lebanese Civil War, when sect-based militias carved the country into cantons.

Even before the conflict began in 1975, large numbers of Lebanese emigrated to the Arab Gulf in search of work. The oil-fueled growth of the Gulf economies in the 1960s created a demand for workers with a college education or technical skills, and many emigrants entered fields such as construction, education, and medicine (Hourani 1992, 6). This gave a boost to Lebanese emigration, which averaged around 8,500 a year during that decade (Labaki 1992, 605). Work-related migration to the gulf continues, although the rate of migration has decreased in recent decades because the Gulf monarchies have tended to fill these positions with native-born citizens (Davie 1992, 632).[11]

The Lebanese Civil War occurred from 1975-1990, prolonged and worsened by out-of-state actors such as Israel, Syria, and the United States (George 2022). It affected nearly every part of the country, crushing the country's economy and leading to widespread displacement (Labaki 1992). The first two years of the war began as a battle for control between two populist groups: the right-wing FFML, led by the Phalange, a right-wing Maronite party founded in 1936 by Pierre Gemayel, and the LNM, which was an alliance between the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) and left-wing parties that advocated for the abolishment of sectarianism and support of the Palestinian cause (George 2022). This stage of the conflict occurred from 1975-1976, and the ensuing violence occurred on a larger and more deadly scale, pushing more people to emigrate permanently (Davie 1992, 630-631). The cause of the Civil War was multifaceted: common reasons cited by analysts include the unequal balance of confessional representation,

[11] See Aljazeera 2022 for an example: https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2022/12/28/uae-firms-scramble-to-hire-locals-for-jobs-as-deadline-approaches.

economic inequality, and the spread of the Israeli - Palestinian conflict (Traboulsi 2012; George 2022).[12]

A defining and horrific feature of the war was ethnic cleansing: Boutros Labaki (1992, 606) estimates that combatants destroyed the villages or cities of 800,000 people . This marginalized communities, leaving some homeless, and forcing others to leave the country altogether.[13] Some avoided displacement or large-scale violence, but the collapse of social services and the economy affected the entire country. The economy was able to sustain itself during the first few years of the war, relying on remittances and surplus created abroad in the Gulf. However, in the late 1980s, the Gulf's economic growth began to slow, and there were fewer opportunities for Lebanese abroad. Unemployment skyrocketed, and in 1985 the value of the Lebanese pound collapsed (Davie 1992, 632). There was a marked drop in living conditions, and electricity was heavily rationed throughout the war. Because the state had collapsed, it was unable to provide water to many areas of the country (Davie 1992, 633).

Around half of the Civil War immigrants left for Arab countries, while the remaining half migrated to Europe, the Americas, Africa, and Australia. Labaki estimates that from 1975-89, 990,000 people, or forty percent of the population, left the country. Some people returned to

[12] The pre-existing political structure put forth by the National Pact privileged the Maronite elite politically and economically. For example, the president held substantially more power than the Prime Minister or the Speaker of Parliament, and Parliament had a 6:5 ratio of Christians to Muslims, irrespective of demographic changes. In the decades after Independence, the poorer Muslim population grew at a faster rate due to a higher birth rate and lower rates of emigration, but political representation remained the same. In addition, Lebanon suffered from extremely high rates of inequality. Another source of conflict was the PLO's anti-Israel military operations from Lebanon, which the right wing political parties opposed (Traboulsi 2012; George 2022). For more information and analysis on the causes of the Civil War, see Traboulsi 2012, Wakim 2021, and George 2022.

[13] This displacement has been called "demographic homogenization". Regions and villages were purged of certain religious or political affiliations. For example, Shia' living among the Palestinians at Tall al-Zaatar were expelled by Christian militias in 1976, and the Christians from the Chouf area were expelled by Druze militias in 1983. Unfortunately, the displaced were often not accepted or offered employment in the areas where they fled, even if they shared the same sectarian identity as the inhabitants of their new homes (Davie 1992, 634). See Davie 1992 for more information.

Lebanon, but others decided to leave permanently (1992, 609).[14] While previous waves of migration had primarily been Christian, in the last decade of the war the majority of emigrants were Muslim (1992, 624). This included families and professionals from all social classes, including white-collar workers and poorer citizens (Labaki 1992, 625; Davie 1992, 638). Emigrant's destination was shaped by the polices and needs of recipient countries ((Labaki 1992, 612). America received the highest number of skilled workers. Europe welcomed businessmen and students. The Gulf states received technicians and businessmen. Africa was the destination for those with fewer skills.

The Ta'if Agreement in 1989 ended the Civil War, but Lebanon continues to face political, economic, and social problems. Henceforth emigration continues, although not at the rate of the Civil War period (Hage 2021). While the Ta'if Agreement established a pathway to end sectarianism, changes to confessional system have either been minor or cosmetic. Seats in Parliament are equally split between Christians and Muslims, and the power between the President and the Prime Minister is adjusted in favor of the Prime Minister. Palestinian refugees, who make up 10% of the population, continue to have no representation or legal standing (Onstein 2016, 41). Israeli forces occupied south Lebanon until 2000, while Syrian forces occupied the north until 2004, following large-scale protests (Onstein 2016). Periodic conflict between Israel and Hezbollah (militia group) has continued to destabilize the area, with the most recent example being border clashes in October and November of 2023. The leaders of the militias, who conducted atrocities during the Civil War, remain in power, despite periodic

[14] Labaki identifies three primary waves of emigration during the war: 1975, 1978, and after 1984. In the first year, there was a large exodus from the country, around 400,00 people (15% of the population), followed by a massive return movement the following year (three-quarters of people returned) (Labaki 1992, 607). As the war stretched on many people decided to not return to Lebanon.

violence, poor rule of law, and poor governmental effectiveness (L. Khatib 2019).[15] A devastating economic crisis since 2019 continues to affect the country (Chehayeb 2023), and will likely continue to incentivize emigration.

[15] In addition, political elites have struggled to appoint cabinet positions – the country has experienced cycles of high-ranking officials resigning and then ensuing political gridlock. Large scale protests in 2019 saw the election of some independent political candidates, but the political elite retains a hold on power (Dinu 2022) (Chehayeb 2023).

Chapter 2: Assimilation, Multiculturalism, and Diaspora

In this chapter, I employ Dalia Abdelhady's framework of assimilation, multiculturalism, and diaspora to discuss how each of these concepts has been used by researchers to understand Lebanese immigrants and their descendants in the United States. In her book, *The Lebanese Diaspora,* she analyzes the experiences of Lebanese immigrants living in three national contexts: France, Canada, and the United States. In her Introduction, she argues that the concept of diaspora is best suited for analyzing her subjects, "Given the multiple identities and forms of collective life exhibited and the global outlook that is shared by members of the Lebanese diaspora in three national contexts" (2011, 39). In this chapter, I borrow from her framework to provide an outline of previous work conducted on the diaspora, and to extend her theoretical insights to my research. Abdelhady's work examines how members of the Lebanese diaspora live in three different national contexts, while my research project focuses on Lebanese-Americans. Unlike her research participants, all my participants plan on remaining in the United States for the foreseeable future, and, I am particularly interested in the heterogeneity of identities and experiences within the American context. Nevertheless the concept of diaspora is useful. For instance a third generation immigrant, who recounts their families' story and life history, from Lebanon to Mexico to the United States, is still a diasporic subject. And Lebanese-American identity is not only influenced by the effects of America on the previously "Lebanese subject," but the migratory path of people through different contexts. Thus I introduce the concepts of assimilation, multi-culturalism, and diaspora, but I primarily use the term diaspora while focusing on the American national context, with a particular focus on racial and ethnic identity formation. I argue that none of these frames alone can encapsulate the Lebanese-American

experience. The existing literature, moreover, tends to neglect how these approaches to identity are likewise shaped by race.[16] I conclude by explaining how I will use theories of race in addition to diaspora to understand the interviews I have conducted.

Dalia Abdelhady outlines three theoretical paradigms that have been used to understand the Lebanese diasporic experience: assimilation, multi-culturalism, and diaspora (2011). Assimilation, as described by authors such as Alixa Naff, outlines the process by which Lebanese immigrants and their descendants gradually identify with the host country, adopting “social attitudes, tastes, and accents" (Abdelhady 2011, 3). Studying the American context, Naff describes this as a process of Americanization (1985). However, Abdelhady argues that assimilation is unable to completely capture the experience of Lebanese immigrants. Pluralist and multicultural analysis explain the acceptance of immigrant communities as ethnic minorities (2011). Sarah Gualtieri argues that while Syro-Lebanese immigrants to the United States fought for the legal classification of “white,” they were never admitted into the white mainstream of American society. Gualtieri states that Lebanese-Americans are "not quite white," arguing that this was further emphasized by anti-Arab racism following the terrorist attacks of 9/11 (Gualtieri 2009, 10-20; 157). Abdelhady prefers the concept of diaspora, stating that it metaphorically refers to a community's historic existence across the world. She uses it analytically to "delineate the multilayered forms of belonging and contradictory forms of expression that these immigrants experience” (Abdelhady 2015, 5). Importantly, diaspora as a concept highlights the global and

[16] The study of the diaspora can be broken up by location, sub-group, or the theoretical frames being used. For example, Hourani and Shehadi's 1992 edited volume is organized into various topic areas, including a regional focus on the Americas, Australia, and Africa. In addition, authors in this volume often focus on the experiences of specific groups of Lebanese, such as Christians or Muslims.

cross-national nature of Lebanese immigrants: they tend to not only be subjects of their host nation, but people with connections, affinities, and hopes for Lebanon as well.

Assimilation

Assimilation is a commonly used framework for understanding the immigrant experience. In the United States, there has historically been pressure on immigrants from a wide variety of backgrounds (particularly those who were not white, Protestant, or Anglo-Saxon) to assimilate: to learn English, embrace American "ideals," and forgo any loyalties to their country of origin. There have been both legal imperatives as well as social pressure for Lebanese immigrants to assimilate into the American population. As Gualtieri explains, the first Syro-Lebanese immigrants to arrive in the United States fought to be legally classified as white (2009). At the time, whiteness meant citizenship, and the Lebanese-Syrian struggle for whiteness occurred while other ethnic minorities failed in American courts to gain legal citizenship. This had devastating consequences for Indian and Japanese immigrants, some of whom were denaturalized (Gualtieri 2009, 3).

Immigrants to the United States, particularly second and third-generation immigrants, tend to learn English and adopt many "American" cultural habits. Due to the marked change in cultural practices that occurs over several generations, assimilationist scholars have tended to focus on this process while studying immigrants. These paradigms also tend to prioritize the ways that the new host country has affected immigrants coming from a different cultural milieu.

Lebanese immigrants' experiences of assimilation depend on their host country. At a conference on Lebanese migration in 1992, the anthropologist Fuad Khuri distinguished three

modes of assimilation, which he labeled “northern European,” “southern European,” and “African.” The first one occurs in North America and Australia, which Khuri argued are multiracial societies where minorities are attempting to assimilate into the culture of the dominant social group. The “southern European” refers to Latin America, where Khuri claims that society is mixed in both origin and culture. Finally, he argues that in West Africa, the culture of the indigenous majority is not adopted by the Lebanese immigrants (Hourani 1992, 9). In his analysis of this paradigm, Albert Hourani emphasizes that these distinctions are ideal types that should not be used too literally. In an analysis of any society, there are complexities and contradictions. For example, Khuri argues that in the United States, some Lebanese communities live in partial isolation from the dominant culture (Hourani 1992, 10). Khuri’s three ideal types are very general, but this example helpfully indicates the focus that assimilationist paradigms place on the host society.

Alixa Naff (1985, 1992) conducted some of the earliest research on Syro-Lebanese immigrants in the United States, emphasizing their successful assimilation into American society. Naff, often considered the mother of Arab American Studies, was born in Lebanon in 1919, and then immigrated to the United States in 1921. She conducted hundreds of interviews with Lebanese-Americans, including some of the earliest immigrants, and argued that assimilation of early Syro-Lebanese immigrants to the United States was relatively easy. Early Syro-Lebaneese immigrants were extremely successful pack-peddlers, selling goods on the road. According to Naff (1992, 145-56), most early immigrants did not join factories or work on farms. Instead, they became peddlers, which suited their “individualistic nature and their impermanence.” Peddlers tended to be recruited by a supplier, a veteran peddler who opened a business and recruited kin (Naff 1992, 146). Peddling accelerated the process of “Americanization” by exposing Syro-

Lebaneese to American life and encouraging the use of English (Naff 1992, 148). By 1910, pioneers had outgrown peddling, and America's need for their services was reduced. At this point, many immigrants began to open family businesses, mostly commonly dry goods and grocery stores. "Being in business" was a source of pride for many Syro-Lebaneese (Naff 1992, 148), and this entrepreneurial spirit is often cited in the success of Lebanese immigrants.

Naff explains that Syro-Lebanese immigrants tended to move up the middle-class ladder, adopting the regional attitudes of where they settled. She argues that the Syro-Lebanese had relatively good relations with their neighbors and that they were relatively unaware of the xenophobia that spread across America before and after the Second World War (Naff 1992, 150). Newspapers, voluntary organizations, and churches began to appear in the early 1890s in New York, which was the most populous Syrian-Lebanese center. However, because co-sectarians were relatively dispersed across the country, relatively few churches were built, and very few mosques were built. By 1930 112 Eastern-rite churches were scattered across the country, but the majority of Syro-Lebanese Christians were attending "American" churches, such as Roman Catholic or Episcopalian churches (Naff 1992, 151). This trend was reflected in the experiences of my research participants, who primarily attended "American" churches, despite several of them being baptized as Melkite Catholic.

The process of "Americanization" placed a strain on the traditional patriarchal family, as well as ethnic institutions and organizations. Voluntary organizations and the Arabic language press were relatively short-lived, but the Arabic language newspapers were quite successful before World War II (Naff 1992, 155). Ultimately, the widespread use of English hurt the circulation of the ethnic press. The bonds of the traditional patriarchal family were weakened. Emboldened by their new education and economic opportunities, sons tended to form their own

households when they married. Americanization also created tension between daughters and their parents, who often held differing social attitudes (Naff 1992, 158-159). Importantly, Naff argues that the immigrant generation failed to instill pride in their Lebanese national heritage in future generations, except for a village view of Lebanese culture, and interest and pride in food, dance, and some music (1992, 160).

Naff acknowledges that in 1992, the most recent wave of Lebanese immigrants to the United States was relatively understudied. She suggests that immigrants fleeing the Civil War tended to have higher rates of education. This is also reflective of American immigration policy, which did not acknowledge Lebanese fleeing the war as refugees, and therefore tended to only accept those with higher education. In addition, many new immigrants preferred to live in groups in American suburbs and cities. Naff cites the Shia' living in Dearborn, Michigan as a prime example (1992, 163-164). One goal of this project is to augment the research on newer immigrants who have arrived after World War II and during the Lebanese Civil War.

Naff's research, and research in the assimilationist paradigm more broadly, provides invaluable insight into the lives of early Lebanese. However, it also comes with its shortcomings. The research does not discuss the dynamics of race and the ways that Lebanese and Arabs have been consistently othered. Throughout many assimilationist works, there is a consistent sense and expression of pride, pride in the Lebanese ability to migrate, adapt, and ultimately succeed. Naff highlights the success of Lebanese-American politicians, doctors, and professors. In another example, Elise Haddad argues that Lebanese cultural values such as competitiveness and resilience have led to the diaspora's widespread success and ability to assimilate (2018).

Naff claims that the Lebanese are "innately entrepreneurial" (1992, 163), something that has set them up to be successful business owners in the United States. These claims regarding

entrepreneurship are similar to other mythologizing claims regarding the diaspora and its success. Ghassan Hage explains that some of the most common claims include, "Migration is in our blood," "We are cross-continental sailors and merchants from time immemorial," and "We follow in the footsteps of our Phoenician ancestors" (2021, 1). Like Hage, I understand these claims as self-mythologizing stories, that are told by the speaker to convey deeply held values. Whether or not these beliefs are factually true or false, they must be taken seriously to understand how many Lebanese conceive of a culture that has been heavily influenced by migration and diaspora.

The primary issue I identify with assimilationist theory is that in an effort to highlight Lebanese success within American society, this framework often fails to identify the ways that Lebanese-Americans have been othered, retained a distinct identity, or maintained international connections. These beliefs do not tell us the whole story; Lebanese-Americans have also struggled and that is where other theories of studying the Lebanese, namely multi-culturalism and diaspora, are useful.

Multi-Culturalism

Multi-cultural and pluralist theories of immigration provide insights into how immigrants are othered by the host society, as well as how they maintain a distinct ethnic identity. Immigrants have repeatedly targeted with xenophobic and othering rhetoric, and American history is littered with examples of politicians arguing that immigrants represent a threat to American society. For example, in the early 1900s, North Carolina senator F.M. Simmons referred to Syrian immigrants as the "degenerate progeny of the Asiatic hoards…the spawn of

the Phoenician curse" (Gualtieri 2009). More recently, President Donald Trump issued a series of executive orders prohibiting travel and refugee settlement from several predominately Muslim countries (Immigration History 2019) and used disparaging rhetoric regarding Mexican immigrants repeatedly on the campaign trail (Lee 2015).

In her book, *Between Arab and White: Race and Ethnicity in the Early Syrian American Diaspora*, Gualtieri reviews the history of early Lebanese-Syrian immigrants that Naff researched several decades earlier but focuses on the role of race. According to Gualtieri, early Syrian immigrants were often regarded as "not quite white." From 1909 to 1923, the citizenship applications for several Syrian immigrants went to federal courts. The issue at stake was whether the immigrants fulfilled America's racial requirement for citizenship, which stated that to gain citizenship people born outside of the United States had to be "free white persons" or of "African nativity or descent" (Gualtieri 2009, 1). While the government frequently argued that Syrians were "Asiatic," and therefore not deserving of citizenship, Syrians were able to effectively mobilize and lobby for their whiteness. While Syrians and Lebanese gained legal status as "white," their whiteness was continually contested by nativists such as F.M. Simmons. Because whiteness was intertwined with citizenship, the battle for "Americanization" required Syrians to adopt a racial identity that they had not previously held in Syria (Gualtieri 2009, 4). While in Syria, their primary identities had been organized in religious terms. In the United States, this was either augmented or weakened, but like most groups that arrived in the United States, race was an unavoidable fact of life for early Syrian migrants. Syrians and Lebanese were victims of racism, but they also challenged it by claiming whiteness and claiming to be the same as those who perpetuated racism. In certain instances, they participated in white supremacy, while in others they resisted it (Gualtieri 2009, 11).

Gualtieri argues that early scholarship on Arab Americans, such as Naff's work, was celebratory. These works made a "tactical appeal to sameness," and were designed to counter the vilification of Arabs in American media, education, and government (2009, 9). While assimilationist theory was often based on empirical evidence of the prevalence of intermarriage and English-speaking among immigrants, it failed to highlight the diversity and cleavages that existed within the Arab community. This assimilationist approach regarded the racial prerequisite cases as “aberrations” to successful assimilation, rather than critically examining the consequences of immigrants accepting whiteness (Gualtieri 2009, 10). Until the 1990s race in the Arab-American community was understudied. Recently, scholars have suggested that while Arab Americans are situated outside of the (white) majority, they do not have official minority status. The racialization of Arabs, particularly Arab Muslims, has been accompanied by hate crimes and their dehumanization (Gualtieri 2009, 10).

Pluralist and multicultural theory helps us to understand how Lebanese immigrants, as well as Arabs generally, may experience this racialization differently. For example, “assimilated” Lebanese Christians with anglicized surnames may not be easily identified as Arab. In contrast, Lebanese Muslims, those with darker skin, or recent immigrants may be more likely to be othered. On the U.S. Census, people of Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) backgrounds are considered to be white, but many of them do not consider themselves to be white. Research suggests that many young people of Arab descent exist and identify between whiteness and non-whiteness. This has led to campaigns such as “Yalla, Count me In!,” pushing the federal government to create a new census category for MENA identity (Mesouani 2023).

Empirical research by Maghbouleh et al. (2022) suggests that people of "MENA" background are likely to identify with a separate MENA category rather than "white alone." This

effect is not universal, and it is moderated by perceived discrimination, religion, and generation. Those who identify as Muslim, along with those who are nonreligious, tend to reject whiteness in favor of the MENA category more often than those who identify as Christian. However, Christian MENAs are still more likely to choose "MENA and "white" or "MENA" (61%) over "white-only" when they are offered the choice of identifying as MENA (Maghbouleh et al. 2022). This research does not disaggregate participants by national origin, and I plan to delve into the question of race and ethnicity with my research participants. It does empirically indicate that there is some link between Christianity and whiteness. In my personal experience, some Lebanese Christians reject the notion that they are non-white (particularly older Lebanese Christians). They argue that due to their light skin, they are white. While they may choose both MENA and white on a sample survey, the suggestion that their race is non-white is seen as marking an unwanted difference, separating them from assimilated mainstream American society.

Diaspora

While assimilation and multiculturalism are focused on the immigrant experience in the host country, diasporic and transnational frameworks take into account the flow of ideas, people, and goods that cross national borders during and after the process of migration. Diaspora traditionally refers to immigrant populations that span multiple national contexts. Diasporic communities establish themselves outside of their home country, but they also retain customs that create a sense of loyalty and or nostalgia. Throughout history, the expression became associated with groups that immigrated due to collective trauma. Examples of cases include

Jews, Africans, and Armenians. While some people argue that a diaspora must be formed due to a disaster, present-day scholars use the definition more inclusively (Abdelhady 2011, 10). People have often left Lebanon due to political crises, while others sought better economic prospects. In any case, the vast size, spread-out nature, and connectivity of Lebanese immigrants means that diaspora is a useful term for the group. There is also a widespread understanding that despite Lebanon's beauty, its political and economic struggles have caused its people to travel across the globe (Hage 2021).

According to Abdelhady, most scholars of diaspora emphasize "collective memory, communal consciousness, homeland, and alienation" (2011, 9). Diasporic frames are particularly useful for understanding concepts of multilocularity, where immigrants describe living in multiple places at once (Hage 2021,76). They may continue to travel between Lebanon and their host country, send remittances, and communicate with people in Lebanon daily. While these factors are important, James Clifford argues that what distinguishes a diasporic community from an ethnic community or neighborhood are the connections to and desires associated with the home country that exist outside of the host nation. He argues that diaspora communities are "not here to stay," and they maintain a "myth of return" (Clifford 1994). This myth of return can be complicated, because even if immigrants plan to return "home," most diasporas will continue to persist as people create new homes in their host country. Oftentimes, as in the case of early Syrian-Lebanese immigrants, people will plan to migrate temporarily but then stay in the host country.

I argue that the myth of return is more likely to be strong for first-generation immigrants. For second and third-generation immigrants, they may maintain a connection to Lebanon, and a desire to visit. But, with each passing generation, and with intermarriage, it becomes less feasible

that people will permanently return. Therefore, this raises several important questions: Who is a part of the diaspora? Does the diaspora include all people of Lebanese descent? I find that the participants I interviewed, even those who are third and fourth generation immigrants, are engaged with Lebanon, either in the present and or through family histories.

The participants I spoke with varied in the extent to which they exhibited "diasporic" thinking. For example, several participants were aware of Lebanese communities in various countries but they did not interact with the wider diaspora regularly. However, Nasri, a first generation immigrant, explained that he is contact with various cousins across the globe, including Lebanon. While he has not visited recently due to political instability, he has continued to communicate with relatives and friends since coming to the United States during the 1960s. In a heartwarming example, Nasri, who worked for a large airline company, was able to ship gifts for children at the American University of Beirut Hospital following the end of the Lebanese Civil War. He is still in contact with the hospital, as well as various relatives following the explosion in the Port of Beirut in 2020.

The diaspora's success is a key factor in modern Lebanese identity, and the success of emigrants is often highlighted by the state as a source of national pride (Hage 2021). This is exhibited in the Phoenician origin myth, which posits that modern Lebanon traces its history to the ancient Phoenician civilization. The Phoenician origin myth has traditionally been used by Maronite political leaders to assert Lebanon's unique history and heritage (Traboulsi 2012, 93). The Phoenician's sailing prowess is often connected to the success and wide-flung nature of the diaspora (Hage 2021, 1).[17]

[17] See pages 45-46 for examples of self-mythologizing quotes.

Remittances from abroad accounted for 37.8% of Lebanon's GDP in 2022, intertwining the diaspora with the country financially, socially, and culturally (Atallah 2023, 7). None of my participants send remittances to Lebanon, and it is thus not a major factor of my analysis, but the diaspora's central role in Lebanon's economy should be acknowledged. However, not every participant or Lebanese-American will be heavily engaged with the diaspora, in constant communication. After each generation, this contact naturally tends to become less robust (although several participants provide interesting counter-examples). Thus it is important not to generalize or overstate these cross-border connections. First generation immigrants may hold strong memories of Lebanon, as well as maintain kin and financial relations. But, researchers shouldn't assume that these relations create an "imagined community" (Anderson 1982) if there isn't the requisite empirical evidence. Hage warns that researchers in migration studies tend to overstate the salience of "imagined communities." While Lebanese may have kin across the globe, he argues that this rarely constitutes a "transnational community" (Hage 2005). So while diasporic theory illuminates the cross-national, specificity is required when describing these connections.

Diaspora illuminates the global nature of Lebanese migration, across multiple political and social contexts. However, diaspora, multi-culturalism, or assimilation alone cannot analyze the lives of Lebanese migrants and their descents. I argue that to understand the social, political, and cultural position of Lebanese-Americans, race must be considered. Studying race can illuminate the power dynamics at play, and how Lebanese-Americans are socialized. Race in the United States has profound implications for how long people live, where they live, and their income and much more (Omi and Winant 2014). Assimilationist paradigms, which suggest that Lebanese-Americans have smoothly become American, and white, ignore the ways that

Lebanese-Americans retain distinct ethnic and cultural identities. Most importantly, ethnographic interviews can illuminate the different ways that Lebanese-Americans experience and understand race and identity.

Race

Anthropologists have long argued that race is culturally constructed even as racism is a lived reality. As Babüel et al. (2021) notes, "Race is a way to naturalize hierarchies and often-though not always-invoke biological traits." In the American and European context, with which race is most often associated, race is often linked with skin color, and it has profound implications for the way that society is formed. In Lebanon and the Middle East, race is not as central to social, political, and cultural organization as it is in the United States. In Lebanon for example, religious sect is a form of categorization by which political positions, public services, and neighborhoods are organized. This isn't to say that race absolutely does not exist in the Middle East, but it exists in a different context, influenced by western imperialism, enslaved labor, and post-colonial nationalists projects (Babüel et al. 2021). Societies in the Middle East and were exposed to European conceptions of race, and the colonization of Lebanon and much of the region by the French and the British has a prominent legacy. One prominent way that race "works" in Lebanon is through the marginalization of African and Asian labor (Kassamali 2021). Thus, race does exist in Lebanon, but it is very different from American society. In addition, there is substantially more research on race in the United States than in Lebanon. In Lebanon, scholars tend to use the analytical tool of sectarianism.

When the first Syrian-Lebanese immigrants arrived to the United States in the late 1800s, they entered a society with different hierarchies and modes of organization. Race was highly salient, but Syrian-Lebanese immigrants do not have a clear position in the racial hierarchy. Their racial place was, and is, contested, as they fought for citizenship and often occupied an ambiguous position in between conceptions of "whiteness" and "Blackness" (Gualtieri 2012). Therefore, when discussing race in this project I am primarily talking about a Western, and more specifically American, form of organization with its own particular histories. For example, race in the America was formed in the context of settler colonialism, the enslavement of Black Africans, and segregation. Michael Omi and Howard Winant's theory of racial formation, emphasizes that race has been socially constructed and formed to solidify power hierarchies, specifically born out of this American history of anti-Black racism. Racial formation has not only affected Black and white members of American society, but Latinos, Asians, and people from the Middle East and North Africa. Members of the Lebanese diaspora, when leaving Lebanon, entered a wide range of societies with different social modes of organization, and different trajectories of racial formation. For example, racial classification, as well as understandings of how Lebanese people fit into those classification varies widely in Brazil, Australia, Canada, and France. All my participants are currently in the American context, but they and their families have lived in other countries, such as Mexico and Egypt. This is where the concepts of diaspora and race can work together to better understand participants' cross-national histories. This research, thus, emphasizes a key facet of recent social science work on race: that race is not biological, but socially constructed and context dependent.

Race is usually understood as an adjacent category to ethnicity (often referring to cultural or linguistic differences) and nation (often referring to political claims) (Babüel et al.

2021). Sometimes, race is understood and used interchangeably with ethnicity and nation. For example, while Hispanic is considered to be an ethnicity on the US Census, some scholars and individuals use race and ethnicity interchanably when discussing Hispanics or Latino(a/e/x)s. And in 19th century European texts, race and nation are used interchangeably, with the creation of a strong and homogenous nation (cultural, linguistically, and racially) highly prized.

Throughout my interviews, I noticed two strands of identification used by participants. The first was race, and participants tended to consider themselves to be white, or they felt non-white. Those who considered themselves to be "non-white," did not have a clear racial category that they preferred instead. Rather they noted the way that their Arab ancestry and appearance meant that they were often consistently othered. (Context is important here). The second, was a divergence in opinion on the use of the term of "Arab" or "Arab-American." This can be understood to be a cultural, ethnic, national, or linguistic category. Some participants embraced the term, some felt ambivalent, while others rejected it completely. Their responses emphasize there is not one way to be "Lebanese" or "Arab".

So far, I have discussed personal racial identification, but ones "race" is not a freely made choice, and it is influenced by legal structures, social pressure, and interactions with the state. And for many people this is not a choice whatsoever, for example, a person with dark skin in the United States will be seen and treated as Black regardless of their own personal identification. People of Arab descent occupy an interesting position, because there is both diversity in their own personal identification, as well as how they are treated by the state and others. Many participants mentioned that people of non-Arab backgrounds were confused about their racial status. In addition, I argue that my younger participants have grown up in an era of increased

Anti-Arab racism, but also a moment of increased racial awareness within the United States, particularly after the Black Lives Matter protests following the death of George Floyd.

While the racial positioning of Arab-Americans is currently ambiguous, the effects and lived reality of race and racism are not. According to the theorist Ruth Wilson Gilmore, race can be understood as "the state-sanctioned and/or legal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerabilities to premature death." (Gilmore 2006, 28; Babül et al. 2021). Regardless of their personal identification, people of Arab-descent may be vulnerable to discrimination and violence. For example, Philip described to me how when he was a child, following the attacks on the World Trade Center, a man knocked on his front door and threatened his family with a gun. Philip and his family were identified as a dangerous "other," and they were threatened. This event was a key memory for Philip, and one of the first things he discussed regarding his racial identity. In this project I discuss two ways in which race operates: first, how participants identify themselves and the implications this has for their socialization, and second the legal and social position of "Lebanese" people across various contexts. I am primarily interested in the first, but it is important to recognize that these discussions do not just exist in the theoretical realm, they are directly linked to race and racial inequities.

Chapter 3: Differing Contexts of Arab and Lebanese Identity

In this chapter, I will explore the ways that members of the diaspora understand the formation of their racial and ethnic identity within the United States. I will examine the ability and desire to assimilate, as well as issues of race and ethnicity and how they connect to stories of migration and familial experiences. I will argue that the generation of migrants, social class and experiences in the Arab world, and experiences in the United States influence Lebanese-Americans' identity formation. The most influential factor on identity among participants in my research was generation and that differences occur in three key areas: ethnic or background identifiers (i.e. Arab and/or Lebanese), race, and discussions of assimilation. While these three concepts are different, they are correlated. In my interviews, I observed that a desire to assimilate, whiteness, and a rejection of an Arab identity were linked. Participants who identified as white were more likely to identify as Lebanese and not as Arab. I don't have a large enough sample size to make a causal claim, but this does follow previous research on race and ethnicity among Arab-Americans and Lebanese Americans (Maghbouleh et al. 2022; Kayyali 2018).

The goal of this research is to provide more detail on the ways Lebanese Christians understand and describe their race and identity. As discussed previously, Lebanese and Syrians in the United States occupy a racially ambiguous place, and their race has been contested since the first immigrants arrived in the United States in the late 1800s (Gualtieri 2009). In the early 1900s, Lebanese-Syrians fought to be classified as white (Gualtieri 2009). However, changing American racial politics means that identifying as white is no longer a legal imperative for citizenship, and many Arab-Americans no longer consider themselves white. While people from the MENA region are currently considered to be white on the United States Census, this has been

contested by activists, researchers, and community members. This has led to campaigns such as "Yalla, Count me In!,", pushing the federal government to create a new census category for MENA identity (Mesouani 2023). Crucially, these campaigns often revolve around a boarder, Arab- American identity. Concurrently, my interviews and other research indicate that many Lebanese-Americans still identify as white and do not identify as Arab.

Due to the ambiguous nature of race amongst Lebanese Americans, as well as the diversity of religious background, experiences, and phenotype, the diversity of beliefs among the Lebanese community is unsurprising. While some of the older research participants felt that their whiteness was clear and uncontested, younger participants had spent substantially more time thinking about their race and other racial issues. This contradicts general American and Western beliefs that hold Arab-Americans and other minority groups as monolithic. I argue that Western media and public opinion fail to capture the diversity among Arabs, which is a large part of how they are both othered and racialized (Starck 2015). While it is often Muslims who are portrayed as a threat to the United States, stereotypes are often conveyed about Arabs in general. In addition, Arab Christians are rarely depicted in the media or research (Kayyalli 2018). Throughout my entire life, Americans have been surprised to learn that there are Lebanese Christians. Several research participants lamented what they perceived as misconceptions and misunderstandings regarding Lebanon, the region, and their own culture. Thus, research that combats orientalist stereotypes and illustrates the diversity of the area is still needed. Previous work on the race and identity of Arab-Americans and MENAs has been completed (Khabeer 2017), but there is a lack of literature on the ethnographic experiences and thoughts of Lebanese American Christians specifically (Kayyalli 2018).

In this chapter, I will employ ethnographic data to display how the differing opinions on race, ethnicity, and assimilation among different generations of Lebanese immigrants are linked to stories of migration. While each of my interviewees considered themselves to be Lebanese-American, their experiences of community and interactions with other Lebanese-Americans and Arabs in general were different. Several younger interviewees sought out the community with other Lebanese Americans and Arab-Americans, by joining college affinity groups for example. For several older interviewees, while their heritage was important, they did not seek out community beyond family ties. The younger interviewees were more interested in Arab American activism and politics, and they had a greater desire to return this Lebanon. This created an interesting dynamic: the older interviewees had spent more time in the Middle East and had greater command of culture, food, etc., but at the same time they were less involved with the broader Arab-American community. Moreover, they made more choices that we might associate with assimilation, such as identifying as white and being less outspoken about their political beliefs. This generational split was not necessarily clear cut. I talked to other interviewees that held beliefs somewhere in between these two "groups."

Differing Contexts

Interviewees expressed a wide range view of opinions regarding Arab and Arab-American identity. Two interviewees, including Philip, a fourth-generation immigrant in his early 30s, identified as Arab-American at the beginning of our conversation. He stated:

> I'll say I identify as Arab American. Lebanese Arab American, and I see that as a deliberately capacious term. And I kind of reject myself as purely white. And that's

> partly, because of knowing, my family's legacy, my family's heritage from Lebanon. But it's also more understanding what it means for me to be someone of an Arab descent living in America. And, particularly living in America, post 9/11. And even in this current moment.[18]

Philip explains that his identity is based on his Lebanese heritage, but also emphasizes his experiences as "someone of an Arab descent living in America." Philip's maternal great-grandparents immigrated to the United States, and he explained he has always seen himself as Lebanese American. (His father is not Lebanese but is not involved in Philip's life). During our interview, Philip highlighted the racism that he and his family have faced. He explained that while his mother was initially from Massachusetts and took pride in coming from the more "liberal" American northeast. When Philip was young, he and his family moved to Tallahassee, Florida, where his mom worked as a minister for a Methodist Church. Philip and his family were aware of and experienced racism. He explains that growing up he was aware both of anti-Black racism in the South, as well as that which was directed against other minorities, such as Arab-Americans. With an Arabic last name, Philip and his family were targeted as a potential threat by their neighbors. He recounts:

> "So, after 9/11, for example, we had, like, a neighbor that was otherwise a friendly neighbor. Who is an ex-sheriff. And he, like, knocked on our door, after 9/11, kind of holding a gun, holding a shotgun, saying, he's gonna keep an eye on us."

This example indicates how Arab Americans and Muslim Americans were targeted as potential threats to American safety following the terrorist attacks of 9/11. While in this instance, a neighbor threatened physical violence, other participants reported being profiled. This and other

[18] This interview was conducted in January 2024, during the Israeli-Hamas War, and a moment heightened racism and hate crimes directed against Arab-Americans)

experiences with racism in the South had a deep effect on Philip. He explains that attending college for an Anthropology degree, and learning more about race, helped him to better articulate childhood experiences that he previously struggled to put into words. While college education and the work of anthropologists and other scholars are not "creating" an Arab-American identity, they can in many cases provide frames to help people of Arab ancestry to understand their experiences. Education, and the development of a "racial consciousness," are key factors in the development of an Arab-American identity for some of my participants. The older research participants I interviewed did not have the same experience learning about and discussing racial issues.

Philip states that his Arab-American identity contains the recognition that he is sometimes understood as part of whiteness, but also as outside of it at the same time. He explains that he benefits from white privilege, and that he sometimes feel as though he is accepted into white America, but that he often feels othered. For Philip and others who identify as Arab-American, the label serves as a recognition of their experiences and their solidarity with others from Arabic-speaking countries. Importantly, Philip's identity is located by his ancestry in Lebanon, and his experiences with American racism and society. For other participants, who have lived in Lebanon or the Middle East, their identity pulls on their lived experiences in those places, as well as their familial experiences of language, food, and culture. Importantly, for many participants their Lebanese identity is focused on the private realm. Assimilationist forces push immigrants to separate the public and the personal, to assimilate into American society while retaining some cultural practices in the privacy of the home. With their family, they may speak French and make kibbeh for example, but, in public, they are not engaging in a type of politics that instrumentalizes their identity as someone from the Arab world. In contrast, Philip's identity

affects his public actions in a multitude of ways: he engages in activism and his identity influences his work as an anthropologist.

Other interviewees identified as Lebanese-American or Lebanese-Syrian-American with no mention of Arab identity. For example, Marie, a 93-year-old first-generation immigrant who was born in Egypt to Romanian and Syrian parents, identified as Lebanese-American. While she and her husband were born in Egypt, their families had immigrated from the Levant in the late 1800s, and they were part of a Syrian-Lebanese Christian community in Egypt. Her husband's family was Lebanese, and they moved to Lebanon in 1954. She spent 8 years in Lebanon, developing a strong connection. She told me, *"*So when they ask me, 'What are you?' I always say Lebanese. Maybe because of the years that I spent in Lebanon. I felt that was the country that was my country." Like many of the migration stories I heard, Marie's was not straightforward. She lived in and traveled through multiple countries, and she has family from different backgrounds. However, as she explained, Lebanon was the first country where she became a citizen. In addition, it must be noted, that despite political disagreements between Lebanon and Syria, she does not see large differences between the peoples or countries. She recounts that while living in Egypt in the 1930s and 1940s, and attending social events at the Syrian Lebanese club that her father was a part of, little distinction was made between Lebanese and Syrians. This is a recognition that the territory that now includes two states, modern-day Syria and Lebanon, was once a single region. Today it shares a common language and similar cultural practices. The creation of separate countries, and thus divergent nationalisms, has created divisions. She rejects the idea that Lebanon and Syria are substantially different and uses the example of cooking to explain. She contends that Lebanese and Syrians have the same recipes, just cooked slightly differently.

When I asked interviewees such as Marie, or her daughter Rita, about Arab identity, they made it clear that they had never identified as Arab or Arab-American. “Arab? No. No. Even though they say we are Arabs… So Lebanese, why would they be something else? Why would they be, Arab? No. Is it because of the language? I don't know. This I cannot explain. It's the way I feel, and other people feel differently.” Marie explains that she has never considered herself to be Arab, although she did speak Arabic while living in Egypt and Lebanon. She went to a French Catholic school, and spoke French at home, in part because her mother, who was Romanian, did not speak Arabic. She recounts that her father always identified as Syrian, not as Arab. Moreover, during the interview she refers to the local Egyptians as Arab, stating that Lebanese and Syrian were a different nationality.

When I first asked Marie if she ever identified as Arab, she turned to the example of food to explain the differences in identity. Throughout her interview, she utilizes food to explain her culture, and the way she has developed kin relationships (for example, with her mother-in-law), and to emphasize both differences and similarities. She explains that she always used the term “Syrian bread,” which is a flatbread with an interior pocket, to describe a staple food commonly used in Lebanese and Syrian cuisine. This bread is very popular across the Middle East and the Mediterranean and is often known as "pita" bread in the United States. She explains, *“*I call it Syrian bread; because in Egypt you have the Arabic bread, the way they do it in Egypt, which was very good. But when we wanted the Syrian bread, the guy used to come to the door and sell [it to] us.” She has continued to call it Syrian bread while living in Lebanon and the United States.[19] However, when she recently went to a nearby Lebanese food store, the bread was

[19] The bread is most commonly called Syrian bread by Lebanese and Syrian migrants in the US. Other terms occasionally used include *khoobz* (bread) or *khoobz marook* (or *marouq*), meaning mountain bread (Rowe 2012, 228).

labeled as “Arabic Bread.” She was quite annoyed by this label and feels that people in the United States are mislabeling a beloved staple that she has eaten all her life. In this context, Syrian and Arabic not only denotes different breads, but different identities and groups of people as well (and in this context Syrian and Lebanese are considered to be interchangeable). Her explanation suggests that this mixing up of the naming of bread is emblematic of other frustrating experiences in the United States, when people have misidentified or mislabeled her as someone who is Arab or Egyptian.

Thus, Marie’s understanding of Arab identity is quite different, and formed in a different place and time, than Philipp’s. Philip explicitly linked his identity to experiences of race and power, which for now I am going to call political experiences. Marie did not explicitly link her identity to political experiences, but her experiences of race and identity have also been influenced by political developments. She was part of a Christian Syrian-Lebanese community in Egypt that were regarded as “foreigners,” and that often occupied social and economic positions between British colonizers and indigenous Egyptians. Marie did not cite political disagreements in her formation of identity, although such disagreements did come up in her interview while discussing some of the reasons she left Lebanon. My goal in writing about understandings identity in relation to politics in Egypt is not to overwrite or deny Marie's understanding of her identity but rather to provide some political context in which these identities are understood and experienced.

Marie’s daughter Rita, a seventy-year-old first-generation immigrant who moved from Lebanon to the United States when she was 10 years old, cited genetic differences between the Lebanese and what she described as Arab peoples: “And it's a different group of people (Arabs), it's like the Saudis. It's a different group of people. I mean they are from the Middle East, but,

you know genetically it's – they're different (from the Lebanese).” Here Rita makes a clear argument regarding genetics, citing what she sees as essential, biological differences between the two groups of people. While discussing this issue, Rita, like Marie, expressed frustration that some people would lump the Lebanese into a “different group of people.” For them, the category of Arab-American obscures difference and is often the work of people who are ill-informed about the Middle East. Participants such as Marie and Rita are very proud of their heritage, but they did not actively seek out community and friendship with others from the Arab speaking world.

Marie’s son, George, who is a fifty-seven-year-old second-generation immigrant, did not initially identify as Arab, but when asked, recognized the variety of influences on Lebanon’s people and culture.

> Bottom line is, I would say yeah: I probably got some Phoenician in me, I probably have some Arab in me. Maybe even have some Turkish and some Greek and who knows what else – who knows… The way I see it, the way we were raised in our family and in our culture, being told “Yeah, we’re Lebanese.” “Yeah, sure Lebanese-Syrian.” That’s the culture and the food and the family, the way we get together and celebrate holidays, that’s what we were. I mean there were absolutely Arabic parts. I mean my parents enjoyed Arabic music and watching belly dancing… So, under, in a certain context I think - think of yourself as Arab. And in other contexts you differentiate a bit more.

George understands his identity in a contextual fashion. First, rather than making one outright claim on the ethnic or cultural nature of Lebanon, he recognizes the various cultural and genetic influences on Lebanon and its people. While he tends to identify as Lebanese, he says that how he labels or expresses identity depends on who he is talking to.

> So, I mean there is absolutely an Arab identity. But it's like…the United States. Well sure, someone says, "I'm an American" when they are talking to someone from Europe. Then, when they are talking to another American, "Oh I'm from Boston, or I'm from New York, or I'm from Virginia". You know, you go to that next level. So, in a certain context I think - think of yourself as Arab. And in other contexts, you differentiate a bit more, you say no "I'm different from someone who's from Saudi Arabia, or Palestine, or Iraq, I'm Lebanese. And there is a difference.

This comparison is quite instructive, and something I think that other interviewees such as Philip might agree with. Philip for example, explains that he tends to identify as Arab-American, but he also uses the term Lebanese-American as well. For example, during our conversations, our shared Lebanese heritage was discussed and emphasized. However, a key difference between Philip's and George's testimonies is that Philip is much more likely to use, in his words, the "deliberately capricious" term of Arab American. He feels that in America's racial climate and context, that is the most appropriate and accurate term, while George appears to have a different understanding of his own race and America's racial context. George does not usually identify himself as Arab; however, there are cases where George does use the term Arab. He explains that it really does depend on the context, and who he is talking to.

He recounted that while in college, he was with his dorm mates discussing their familial backgrounds. And, as he normally does, he explained that his parents were born in Egypt, but his father had a Lebanese background, and his mother had a Syrian and Romanian Jewish background. All of a sudden, a classmate looked at him, and said, "Wait, you're a fucking Arab?" George checked to make sure the man was serious, and realizing that he was, responded "Yeah, I'm a fucking Arab." This classmate clearly regarded "Arabs" with derision, and at this moment,

George confirmed that he is indeed Arab, refuting the dorm mate's insult. One thing I noticed in the stories told to me by my interviewees is that the term "Arab" is sometimes used with derision by Americans who are not from an Arabic-speaking background. If a person from a Lebanese background is insulted, the aggressor tends to use a term such as "Arab" or "terrorist" rather than "Lebanese." This, along with Philip's discussion, suggest that the term Arab is a more racially charged than the term Lebanese.

George explained that for a period of time, his family would often claim that they were descended from the Phoenicians. The Phoenician origin myth has traditionally been used by Maronite political leaders to assert Lebanon's unique history and heritage (Traboulsi 2012, 93). Phoenicianism is something that I previously understood as political, an identity that separates Lebanese people from Arab countries and is itself in opposition to an Arab identity.[20] However, George does not understand these identity movements as being in total opposition, citing that he probably has genetic and cultural influences from both. He explains that his family has both embraced a Phoenician position and an Arab position, explaining that a descendent "served with the Arab troops with Lawrence of Arabia, fighting the Ottomans." When he was younger, his family would mention their Phoenician ancestors, although often in a tongue-in-check manner. At the current moment, he says that he has Middle Eastern or Arab background when using a

[20] Phonecianism is the belief that the current residents of Lebanon are the descendants of the ancient Phoenician civilization. This connection to a Phoenician national idea gained traction during the late 1800s and plays a key role in some visions of the "Lebanese" Nation and the myth making that supports all forms of nationalism. The Phoenician's sailing prowess is often connected to the success and wide-flung nature of the diaspora. For example, in his ethnography on the Lebanese Diaspora, Ghassan Hage includes several common quotes from Lebanese people discussing migration. They include "Migration is in our blood", "We are cross-continental sailors and merchants from time immemorial, and "We follow in the footsteps of our Phoenician ancestors" (Hage 2021, 1). For more information on Phoenicianism, see the introduction of Hage 2021, and Kaufman 2014.

broader identifier then Lebanese. He believes that there are Phoenician influences on Lebanese culture, but he does not identify as “Phoenician.”

After these examples, George once again emphasized the use of words in context. He explains that there are clear differences in dress, culture, and complexion between people from Lebanon, parts of Syria, Palestine, and Iraq and people from the Gulf. So while he sometimes uses a more general identifier such as Arab or Middle Eastern, he appears to prefer the more specific of labels of Lebanese, Syrian, and Romanian Jewish. While Marie and Rita were stronger in their preference for a more specific "Lebanese" label, all three seem to be struggling against media and general public opinion that paints all Arabic-speaking peoples as the same. To them, putting Lebanese living in the mountains and Saudis living in the desert into the same box is ridiculous.

There are key differences between the use of the term “Arab Americans” by people like Philip, and people such as George's dormmate. Philip recognizes that the term Arab American is “deliberately capacious,” and I think he would not deny the differences in culture, language, and history between Lebanese and other Arabic-speaking peoples. Unfortunately, the category is also used as pejorative. I suggest that Philip, Marie, Rita, and George are responding to Orientalism (Said 1978) and other stereotypes about people from Arabic-speaking countries within the United States. For Rita, Marie, and George to a certain extent, some of their main frustrations were being misidentified and being painted into broader groups that they did not feel accurately represented their experience. For Rita and Marie, the response is often to correct someone, and explain that they come from Lebanon, which a distinct culture and nationality. But for Philip and others, who are thinking in a Post 9/11 context, they reaffirm that they are Arab-American, embracing a larger identifier that encompasses various nationalities, dialects, and dress.

Following their experiences of racism, people such as Philip, or Rebecca, a 21-year-old Lebanese immigrant, have reconsidered the whiteness that their ancestors previously embraced. And so, all these participants are Lebanese-Americans operating in a similar national (American) context, but they express their identities differently and respond to tropes, stereotypes, and racism differently.

Rebecca gave several examples of orientalist imagery that influenced her understanding of her Arab and Lebanese background as a kid. She explained that her dad read her the *Chronicles of Narnia* books series before she was 10 years old, but he refused to read *The Horse and His Boy* due to stereotypical depictions of evil people who live in the desert, have darker physical features, and cook weird, spicy food. Her dad explained that he did not want her to see a narrative where people from where they came from were painted in such a negative light. She explained that it was a formative experience to recognize that the Western world had "something to say about like my family's like heritage and that it might not always be positive." Another moment of recognition of orientalist tropes occurred when she watched the Disney movie "Aladdin" in class during her freshman year of high school.

> I'd never seen it as a kid, I think, probably for similar reasons, as my dad didn't want to read me that book. And I remember thinking it was so funny that all of you know I was probably like a I think I was a freshman in high school, and I saw the person, and I first thought was like, Oh, my gosh! Like this is every single like stereotype that I've heard, you know, just like all in one film, and it was funny to watch my white classmates, realize for the first time that there were all of these kind of like biased kind of images, painted and that that was something they had clearly just grown up with and hadn't questioned.

> But because of the way that I grew up and what my dad had shared with me, you know, from like a very young age [I understood].

I was particularly interested in Rebecca and her father's responses to these orientalist tropes. She states these stereotypes, which present Arabs as migratory desert peoples, are depicting people from where her family comes from, i.e. Arabs. As a child, I personally remember being confused by the movie "Aladdin." It was so completely different from what I knew about my family's heritage, that I didn't recognize it as a stereotype about Lebanon or my heritage. However, Rebecca's dad, who is a poet and scholar who writes about Lebanon and Palestine, made her aware that these are stereotypes that often encompass all Arab peoples. These orientalist tropes are one example of anti-Arab sentiment and racism often experienced by people from the Middle East. Rebecca and Philip argue that there is a process of racialization here. In the quote above, Rebecca contrasts herself with her "white" classmates, who previously held certain biases about Arab people. In this context, Rebecca doesn't consider herself to be white. Marie and Rita did not mention stereotypes in media, but they did express frustration in being depicted with broad strokes. Attributing this to a lack of knowledge of the region, they expressed that there were differences between groups of people. Thus participants both had different experiences with racism and anti-Arab sentiment, but also the way they understood these instances differed as well. Some of this is indicated in the identity labels that people prefer.

As shown by these quotes, there were very clear differences in opinion regarding Arab identity. All people interviewed identified as Lebanese-American and had either lived in Lebanon or had family that had immigrated from Lebanon. But their utilization of the term "Arab," which can be thought of as a cultural label, a political one, or a pan-national identifier, was correlated with generation. While many Americans assume that the Arabic language would

mean that Lebanese people would identify as Arab, this indicates that the identity is much more situational. Older research participants argued that they were not Arab and expressed frustration that some people would lump them into the larger category or confuse them with people from other Arabic-speaking countries. However, for other, younger interviewees, embracing a Pan-Arab identity was important. They connected this to experiences of racism, where they described being "othered" due to their Arab ancestry and background. In contrast, experiences of racism or discrimination were not a major theme during interviews with older participants who rejected the "Arab" or "Arab-American" label.

In the case of Arab identity, various interviewees are pulling on different political and social contexts. While Pan-Arabist movements within the Arab World and the rise of an Arab-American identity have some obvious crossover, they are operating in different political contexts. In the ensuing sections, I will explore some of those contexts.

Lebanese and Arab Identity in Egypt during the early 1900s

The two oldest participants, Marie and Nasri, were born in Egypt but left following the rise of Gamal Abdel Nasser and his Pan-Arabist government. Both Marie and Nasri were part of a Lebanese-Syrian Christian community within Egypt. Much of this community had migrated from modern-day Lebanon and Syria in the late 1800s, fleeing political violence following the 1860 Civil War and in search of better economic fortunes. Given that Nasri and Marie grew up in Egypt during this time, I suggest that their identities were formed in the context of this community and its relationship to both the British colonial power and the native Egyptian community. While neither Marie nor Nasri explicitly stated that their identity was formed due to

certain political developments, they did discuss their identity and experiences being formed in the context of political change in Egypt. In this section, I will use Albert Hourani's article to provide some historical context around this Lebanese Syrian community that formed in Egypt.

The community was generally wealthy and more well-educated, and the wealthier families belonged to the cosmopolitan societies of Cairo and Alexandria (Hourani 1992, 505). While Sunni Lebanese often assimilated into Egyptian society, Lebanese and Syrian Catholics tended to remain separated, wishing to retain their own religious practices rather than assimilating into the local Coptic population (Hourani 1992, 498-499). Thus, the Lebanese and Syrian communities represented a bourgeoise class, who were not considered to be local but were also not French or British. Their advantageous positions in government or commerce were resented by local Egyptians, while the British ensured that Syrians or Lebanese would not gain too much influence (Hourani 1992, 502-503).

Marie and her family, like a lot of the Lebanese Syrian community, obtained a European education in Catholic schools. The knowledge of a European language (most often English or French), as well as Arabic, benefited the community, which was heavily engaged in commerce, journalism, and government. Marie explained to me that she spoke French at home, but also learned Arabic and English.

> Personally, my Arabic was not very good. My husband? Yes, he learned very well. The thing is, we spoke French at home. My husband and his family they had they all had French education. But they spoke a lot of Arabic in their home. We did not because my mother being from Europe, [she was] Romanian. And that [French] was the only language that she spoke with my father. She knew French. And he [her father] had a French education in, in Lebanon. And that's why we spoke French and we went to French

> school. Me, after the French school, I went to an English school over there [in Egypt]. And then we went to Lebanon. In Lebanon, I was working in a British bank…When I left the English school, believe it or not, I could not speak any any word of English, I could not understand. Because I didn't have any practice. But it's only when I worked. And it was in Egypt. I worked with engineers. They were Egyptian engineers, but they knew English, and all the work was in English. And this is how I practiced my English, especially when I went to Lebanon, working in a British bank. So when we came here [the United States], I knew English. I didn't have to go to school.

Marie has a different experience than the one described by Hourani because her mother was Romanian and did not speak Arabic. However, like much of the Lebanese Syrian community, Marie acquired a knowledge of English, French, and Arabic. The experiences of her father and her husband were more typical and being trilingual certainly helped them to acquire jobs in Egypt, Lebanon, and the United States. Having a prior knowledge of English and French most certainly helped with assimilation into the United States as well. Throughout our conversation, Marie consistently emphasized the importance of education, particularly in how it can help improve one's economic situation.

Hourani explains that following British control of Egypt in 1882, British officials required subordinates who knew Arabic, English, and French. A lot of the community became "middlemen," who were often favored over native Egyptians for certain positions but still worked underneath the British and other Europeans in business and government. The Lebanese-Syrians helped to facilitate communication between the British and Egyptian colleagues and subordinates, and the Lebanese and Syrians were also favored because they were relatively insulated from the pressures of local interests (Hourani 1992, 502-503). Like Marie, Nasri was

also educated in French Catholic schools, and at the beginning of our conversation, he described the privileged life that he had growing up.

> I was born in Egypt, in the Suez Canal Zone, in the town of Ismailia, which was the headquarters of the Suez Canal. And in those days the Suez Canal company was a French company that managed the whole system and my dad worked for them. And it was a beautiful life. Really. It was wonderful life, privileged life, the way we had, with many, many, many foreigners and nationalities living there, from Lebanese and Syrians, and French and Romanian and Yugoslavian, and you name it, and Germans, you know. So we had tremendous amount of, you know, culture mixing with different nationalities. And we all spoke 3, 4, 5 languages very easily.

Later in our conversation, Nasri highlighted that being able to speak various languages (English, French, and Arabic fluently) was extremely beneficial throughout his career while working for an American airline. With his knowledge of several languages, he traveled for work and was in charge of negotiations for the airway for traffic rights between the United States and other countries. The knowledge of European culture, as well as European languages, helped to facilitate immigration and economic successes within the United States. I argue that this cosmopolitan upbringing most likely helped Marie, Nasri, and their families to assimilate into whiteness in the United States.

Some members of the Lebanese-Syrian community held high-ranking positions in business and politics, but most held intermediate positions in which they served British rulers but were unable to challenge them (Hourani 1992, 501-503). Lebanese and Syrians were also heavily involved in literature and drama, as well as journalism, where they served as a "bridge" between the two worlds (European and Arabic) that they knew. According to Hourani, the community was

Arabic-speaking but receptive to ideas and culture from Europe and America. From the 1860s to the outbreak of World War I, a large portion of newspapers in Egypt were owned and edited by the Syrians and Lebanese (Hourani 1992, 503-504). When I asked Marie about how she and her family interacted with the native Egyptians, she mentioned that she and her family admired and emulated European culture.

> We acted as if we were Europeans. Believe me. Yeah. The French, all the restaurants that we would go to were European. I don't know to whom I was saying that. I don't remember a Lebanese restaurant in Cairo. It's funny. There was maybe some groceries that would do certain things like the sausage, the *ma'aneh*. But it was not a lot.

This further underlines the cosmopolitan life and role that much of the Lebanese-Syrian community experienced in Egypt. In addition, Marie and Nasri suggest that their social circles included a lot of Lebanese Syrians and Europeans, but they do not mention Egyptians being in the same social circles. I argue that in this context we can better understand the differences between Lebanese/Syrians and Egyptians that Marie disucssed earlier. In her experience, Lebanese and Egyptians not only had different bread but also represented fairly separate communities.

According to Hourani, the position of Lebanese Syrians from 1918-1952 continued to be good, although more of the community entered the free professions, becoming doctors, lawyers, and engineers (1992, 506). However, the creation of the Lebanese and Syrian states, and the accompanying growth of patriotism in Egypt, Lebanon, and Syria, made their position within Egypt more precarious. As the educated class of Egyptians grew, there was less need for professionals and bureaucrats of foreign origin. In addition, ease of travel and the creation of the Lebanese and Syrian states encouraged more connections with the community's area of origin

(Hourani 1992, 506-507). Much of the Lebanese-Syrian community in Egypt, such as Marie's husband, went on vacation to Lebanon fairly regularly during the interwar period. Over time, the cultural life of Lebanese-Syrians tended to occur in French or English rather than Arabic, which Hourani argues was a growing sign of alienation from Egyptian society (1992, 507). Following the change of government in 1952, private companies were nationalized, limitations were placed on land ownership, and there was a series of political disturbances. The majority of the community left, losing their distinct place within Egyptian society (Hourani 1992, 507). This included Marie's family, which left in 1954, and Nasri, who left Egypt in 1962.

Marie explained that she and her husband decided to leave Egypt following rising unrest and what she described as rising anti-European and anti-foreigner sentiment. This included decreasing economic freedoms, as well as rising Egyptian and Arab nationalism. A key turning point was the Cairo Fire of 1952 when foreign-owned businesses were burned to the ground. Marie explained to me that there were frequent demonstrations against foreigners and that during the Fire of 1952, lots of businesses were burned. During the riots, she was out in the city but quickly returned home. She lamented the loss of several beautiful buildings, including a hotel (see *Figure 4)*.

> And we had beautiful hotels. Like there was the Shepheard's hotel that was burned. In '52. It was a hotel that was known. People would come from Europe, and stay in that hotel. Ambassadors would come and say that it was it was very nice. They burned it. In '52. They burned all those stores that I'm talking about, all the department stores. They burned all the movie theaters, because it was something foreign. Because the movie theaters would bring either French or American movies or British movies. All the bars

there were a lot of British bars, they burned them. The place stunk for weeks and weeks and weeks.

This event increased tensions between Egyptians and foreigners, and ultimately Marie and her family left for Lebanon, where they were able to gain citizenship due to her husband's Lebanese parents. Interestingly, her interview, Marie often uses the terms Egyptian and Arab interchangeably. In addition, the theme of class, and the differences in socioeconomic class between the Lebanese-Syrian community and most Egyptians are an underlying theme in her interview. Nasri specifically mentioned his family's "privileged" position. Her family's positionally in Egypt, attempting to become closer to European culture and ideas, and their migration from Egypt following Nasser's Pan-Arab government, shaped the context in which she understands "Arab identity." And while both Marie and Philip identify as Lebanese-American, they grew up in very different contexts, where Arab meant something different. When sweeping generalizations are made by the American media regarding Arabs, the dynamics of class are often overlooked. In this instance, in Egypt prior to the revolution of 1952, differences in class often divided Egyptians and Lebanese Christians, even though both groups spoke Arabic and would nominally be considered Arab.

Figure 4. A colorized image of the Shepard's Hotel in 1906 (Baker / Getty Images 2023).

Arab Identity in Lebanon in the 1940s-70s

As I discussed previously in Chapter 1, the ethnic character and identity of Lebanon has been fiercely contested since its founding. Before beginning the interviews, I expected participants who didn't identify as Arab to make a direct linkage between Arab identity and political developments in Lebanon. However, this was not the case. Marie and Rita, who both lived in Lebanon for substantial amounts of time, explained that they had never identified as Arab. As discussed previously in the chapter, they cited biological and cultural differences between themselves and Arabs. Marie, who lived in Lebanon from 1954-1962, said she identifies as Lebanese. Her daughter Rita, lived in Lebanon from 1954-1962, and then once again during

the mid 1970s. Thus, we discussed their impressions of Lebanon during this time period, why they decided to leave, and their understandings of the Civil War and the lead up. All of the participants who lived in the Middle East during this time mentioned that the outbreak of war destabilized their livelihoods and that it was factor that pushed them to leave the region. Rita discussed the conflict as a conflict between Muslims and Christians, discussing the terrible effects that the conflict and animosity between different groups had on the country of her youth. While neither Marie and Rita made a direct linkage between their identity and the Civil War, they both expressed sympathy for Christians during the civil war.

In this section I will briefly discuss understandings of Arab and Lebanese identity from the 1940s to the 1970s, and how my participants follow or contradict hegemonic understandings of Lebanese identity politics. Arab identity in Lebanon takes many forms; for example, it can be understood as a nationalist secular movement that crosses across sectarian difference, a linguistic identity, or an anti-colonial identity that resist the creation of separate nation states in the Arab world. Thus, I will not try to provide an extensive analysis of Arab identity in Lebanon, but rather to provide some of the political context that Rita, Marie, and Nasri were a part of while living in the country.

The National Pact of 1943, a verbal agreement between Maronite and Sunni elites, was both a political and identity compromise. The Christian elite accepted Lebanon's "Arab Face" and forsook the political protections of Western empires, while Muslim elites renounced unification with Syria or a larger Arab State (George 2022). Thus, at independence, Lebanon was Arab in some contexts and non-Arab in others. While Christian elites were concerned about the intervention of Arab countries, such as Syria, Muslim elites were concerned about the intervention of Western powers such as France and the United States. This was not simply a

debate over ethnic identity but rather a debate over the distribution of power and Lebanon's economic future. These elites created an economy that relied on tourism and the banking sectors, playing an intermediary role between the European and Arab worlds (George 2022; Traboulsi 2012, 110-28). This precarious alliance was destabilized by the Nakba in 1948 and the ensuing Arab-Israeli War. After 1971, Lebanon became the PLO's sole base of operations, and the Palestinian question became intertwined with control of the Lebanese state (George 2022).

The discussion of Lebanon's Arab identity was central to the outbreak of war in 1975. Prior to the outbreak of war, the various factions attempted to form another compromise. The conservative right wing Lebanese parties, such as the Phalange party, insisted on retaining the sectarian system. Pierre Gemayel, the president of the party, insisted that the National Pact "gave the Lebanese Christians guarantees which freed them from fear." To upset this pact and the current system, "will lead to making Lebanon the twentieth Arab-Islamic state" (George 2022). Christian politicians were invested in the system both to retain their own power power and to assuage fears of persecution. The legacy of the aforementioned massacres from 1860-1861 loomed large in the minds of many Lebanese Christians. Thus, by asserting a non-Arab identity of the state, Gemayel is attempting to retain control (George 2022). In contrast, the leftist Lebanese National Movement (LNM) called for "a progressive, democratic, Arab national Lebanon" (George 2022). In 1975, war broke out between the Front for Freedom and Man in Lebanon (FFML), which was led by conservative Christen parties such as the Phalange, and an alliance between the LNM and PLO.

Speaking generally, Christian elites tended to identify as "Lebanese," while Muslim elites tended to identify as "Arab" (Salibi 1971). Marie and Rita asserted that they were not Arab, but rather that they preferred to be understood as Lebanese, describing "Arabness" as something

foreign. This echoes some of aforementioned rhetoric of Christian elites in the leadup to the Civil War. However, it would be an oversimplification to understand the Civil War as a conflict between Christian "Non-Arabs" and Muslim "Arabs." In 1976, Syria intervened in the Civil War on behalf of the Front for Freedom and Man in Lebanon (FFML), which was led by conservative Christen parties such as the Phalange. The Syrian army fought, and eventually defeated the LNM. This led to a "Crisis of Arabism," and the Lebanese Civil war became a true Arab Civil War. Throughout the Civil War, alliances would change throughout, as various regional actors became involved (George 2022).

This further complicates Arab identity amongst Lebanese-Americans. Thus, it is impossible to make a general assumptions regarding Arab identity along religious or sectarian lines. Particularly for people such as Marie and Rita, who have lived in three different countries, there are a multiple of analytical factors beyond Lebanese political developments that influence their identification.

Arab Identity and Race in the United States

Early immigrants from Arab backgrounds, including Lebanese immigrants, tended to favor assimilation and placed a high value on proving "their worthiness to mainstream society" (Starck 2015, 186). Both Rebecca and Philip, whose families immigrated to the United States in the late 1800s, mentioned that some of their ancestors were embarrassed by their Arab background. For example, Rebecca's grandfather doesn't speak fluent Arabic because his mom felt that speaking Arabic was something for a lower class. She had attended a French boarding school, and she preferred to speak French. Rebecca and her dad lament this loss of cultural

identity, and they have both tried to learn Arabic. Rebecca is currently taking Arabic in college. This echoes previous work by Sarah Gualtieri, who argued that while Lebanese-Americans often assimilated and were legally classified as white, their whiteness was frequently contested (2009). In this case, Rebecca's ancestors were legally classified as white and thus were able to gain citizenship. They also "made it" in a new country, establishing themselves and entering the middle class. But, doing so also required her ancestors to lose the Arabic language.

Philip explained that different ancestors valued whiteness more than others. For example, he explains that his grandmother was ambivalent about her ethnicity and heritage. Although her parents and grandparents spoke Arabic, she did not learn, and Philip believes that she wanted to forget or have nothing to do with the language. In addition, she saw and understood herself as explicitly white.

> And she wanted to… I think, fit into a more squarely white middle-class American [life]. And I think that was her vision of a good life… Where she was involved in, you know, like white American culture, and I think would probably adopt some, maybe even racist sentiments here in order to appear as white, and by racist I mean probably more explicitly anti-Black sentiments, even anti-migrant perhaps even though, of course, her grandparents came from Lebanon and were migrants. But because she was born in the States, and maybe even because her parents, I think both of her parents were born in the States. She viewed herself probably more explicitly as a white American with a kind of Arab flavor, you know. And like literal flavor in terms of food. But also like knowing that. Yeah. But she, I think, from my understanding was quite proud of her more fair skin.

In this quote, Philip explains how his grandmother was quite tied to the idea of whiteness, even adopting anti-Black sentiments. He told me that he thinks his grandmother would bleach her skin

in order to appear lighter. In contrast his grandfather knew some Arabic and was proud of his heritage and background. These examples all show how many Lebanese Americans responded to the pressure to be white by giving up their cultural identity and assimilating into the American mainstream.

However, in the 1970s and 1980s, "the United States Civil rights movement, along with revulsion over media coverage of the Six-Day War, which depicted Arabs as evil, rekindled ethnic consciousness" (Starck 2015, 186). A number of Arab-American social and political organizations were formed during this time period (Starck 2015, 186). While previous Arab American organizations focused on social and religious activities, the Six-Day War indicated that Arab-American voices needed to be heard in political and foreign affairs. The first national organization to promote Arab-American interests was the Association of Arab-American University Graduates (AAUG), founded in 1968 (Starck 2015, 198). The organization tries to disseminate accurate information on the Arab world and provide support to its members (Starck 2015, 198). Other organizations include the National Association of Arab Americans (NAAA) established in 1972, the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC) established in 1980 by former U.S Senator James Abourezk of South Dakota, and the Arab American Institute (AAI) in 1985 (Starck 2015, 198; Cainkar, Homsi Vinson, and Jaramakani 2022, 4). Lebanese or Syrian social and political organizations have existed since the first immigrants arrived in the U.S., but these new organizations were organized around a pan Arab identity. They are more invested in political activism, identifying and combatting acts of discrimination, and increasing the profile of the community. They emphasize the "importance of maintaining transnational ties to the homelands and the key role of language in the connection of homelands (Cainkar, Homsi Vinson, and Jarmakani 2022, 44).

Rebecca identifies as Arab-American, and during our conversation she went into detail about what kinship with other Arab-Americans means to her.

> I certainly feel, probably because of growing up in the U.S., I feel I have a kinship with anyone who's remotely like Middle Eastern at all, you know. Like I said, I didn't grow up with like a wider sense of community around it, I guess.

In high school, Rebecca became a leader of her school's affinity group for Arab-American and Middle Eastern students. She was able to meet other students from an Arab background, and they were able to share their identity, culture, and food with other students in the school. This inspired her to learn more about other familial traditions that had been lost to time through the previous generations. She has taken Arabic classes in college and remarked that she knew very little Arabic before starting; however, after taking classes she realized that her dad had been using Arabic words all her life. For example, every time she sneezes, her dad says *saha,* which means "To Your Good Health." As a young girl, she only heard her Dad say saha*,* and she assumed this was a word her Dad made up. Discovering that saha and other phrases were Arabic words gave her a greater appreciation for her heritage and upbringing. Arabic classes also gave her the opportunity to connect with other students of an Arabic background, which she didn't have many opportunities to do when she was younger. Rebecca's family is an interesting example of how assimilation is not a linear process. While her family has been in the United States for four generations, they retain a distinct ethnic identity, speak some Arabic, and maintain connections in the Middle East. Importantly, this hasn't occurred because her family lived in neighborhoods with other Lebanese, rather their identity has changed. When Rebecca and her family recuperate old family traditions, they aren't creating an exact replica of their families' old practices, rather the reproduction of language and culture is dynamic. Thus, the label Arab American encapsulates

the manner in which they are a part of American society while engaging in new and old Arabic cultural practices.

She also discussed how political activism, particularly activism in support of Palestinian Liberation, has been a major part of her Arab-American identity. During our interview, she discussed what that meant during Israel's bombardment and invasion of the Gaza strip following Hamas' attack on Israel on October 7th, 2023.

> My Dad and my aunt in particular, have become very active in the activist sphere of things, [in a] kind of a broader, Arab American sense. And so certainly I feel like with, what's been going on recently in Palestine. My dad has so many friends there, and so it does feel like a personal thing almost that I really have like… I feel as an American citizen and someone who's grown up here, the idea that my like tax money is going to like, funding. I don't know. Funding the systemic murder, of people that, my Dad knows is crazy to me, and I think, it's strange to be an American citizen, and to have grown up here and to know that, our country is capable of [using] this force, and this might on these people, who in many ways, I think, like culturally or linguistically, share these traits that I feel like are so core either to me or to my like own roots. And so that is [a] very heart-wrenching spot, to be in. And so, it feels very important to me to…be as active as I feel is reasonable for me to [be]… to try to combat what our government is doing from the inside, I guess.

Through her dad and aunt's activist work, Rebecca's family have developed friendships with people in Palestine and the rest of the Middle East, in turn inspiring Rebecca to support pro-Palestinian activism. As discussed previously, Palestinian activism has often been a major catalyst for Arab-American political activism. Not every person of Arab descent will support

Palestine or the Palestinian cause, but it can serve as a common unifier for those who identify as Arab-Americans.

The category Arab-American can be powerful for individuals such as Philip and Rebecca, but it can also "subsume groups who contest or reject it." Research by Rebecca Kayyali on Levantine Christians around Washington DC indicates that many people, like Marie and Rita, reject the Arab label, despite coming from an Arab-speaking background (Cainkar, Homsi Vinson, and Jarmakani 2022, 4; Kayyali 2018). This category can elide distinctions between religious groups, as well as obscure the existence of non-Arab ethnic and linguistic communities (Cainkar, Homsi Vinson, and Jarmakani 2022, 44). For Lebanese Christians, their "Arabness" is contested in Lebanon and the United States as well. Some, who tend to be more conservative politically, reject this label, while others, who tend to be more liberal, embrace it. Thus, while the term "Arab-American" appears to be a more inclusive term, it is important to acknowledge those who are left out or "nonconsensually subsumed" within the term (Cainkar, Homsi Vinson, and Jarmakani 2022, 45). The ethnographic interviews I have conducted indicate that acceptance of an "Arab-American" identity is dependent on generation, class, and political beliefs amongst other factors. My research loosely correlated with previous findings that the younger generation is more likely to accept Middle Eastern ethnicity and assert a non-white identity (Kayalli 2018; Tehranian 2009, 87). As Kayalli's ethnographic research suggests, those who identified as Arab American and non-white tended to be on the left politically. Several who identified as white would consider themselves to be liberal in an American political context, but were not active in leftist politics like Rebecca and Philip.

Importantly, the acceptance of this identity can vary amongst family members: Marie, Rita, and George all articulate different understandings of who an "Arab" is. Philip explained to

me how his families' understandings of race and identity have changed over time. While he embraces an Arab-American identity, some his ancestors have fiercely rejected it. However, despite any differences in political opinion or identity, all participants emphasized that family was a core value.

Conclusion

When starting this research project, I was interested in studying the Lebanese diaspora, and I discussed stories of migration across national contexts with all of my participants. I was struck by how all participants were proud of their heritage and culture, naming family as a value of the utmost importance. At the same time, the identity terms used were extremely diverse. While some participants preferred to use the term Arab-American and identified as non-white, others rejected the Arab-American label while claiming whiteness. Thus, I decided to delve deeper into this question, pulling from anthropological theory on diaspora and race.

Hegemonic understandings of Lebanese-American Christians, and people from the Middle East in general, are often simplistic and stereotypical. Politicians, general opinion, and media within the United states often use orientalist tropes. This discourse portrays Arabs as a threat to the United States, and a terrorism risk, and the discourse has only been exacerbated by war and conflict in the Middle East and the 9/11 Terrorist Attacks (Starck 2015). Yet, despite the rise in anti-Arab and anti-Muslim discrimination and hate crimes, Lebanese Americans are legally classified as white. This research confirms previous research indicating that Middle Eastern and North African's (MENAs) occupy a racially ambiguous and contested place in American society. There are divergent opinions and occasional confusion amongst Arabs and non-Arabs alike on the racial and ethnic identity of Arab-Americans. Often, all Muslims are considered to be Arabs, and all Arabs are considered to be Muslims. This problem is further exacerbated for Christian Lebanese-Americans, who align with the U.S. majority through religion, but are often othered for their Arabness (regardless of their personal identification). In addition, their Christian identity and practices are often questioned or delegitimized by

Americans (Kayalli 2015). Research on this community is particularly crucial at this time, as American society is reckoning with race, ethnicity and its consequences. The race and ethnicity of MENAs has started to enter public conversations, often through recent campaigns to create a new category on the census for people from the region (Zraick et al. 2024).

I completed library research as well as six ethnographic interviews with Lebanese-Americans from a range of generations. The participants included friends, family, and others gathered through snowball sampling. Each interview was designed to be conversational, and I tried to focus discussions on what participants were most interested in. In every interview, we discussed the participants identities, as well as their stories of migration (or their families history of migration). The library research focused on literature in the fields of anthropology, sociology, history, and political science, covering the history of the diaspora, Lebanese-Americans, and present-day Lebanese society. The history provided ample context for the phenomena discussed by research participants. In addition, I conducted research on theoretical approaches to diaspora, migration, and race to aide in analysis. I pulled on recent work done on the Lebanese diaspora (Hage 2021; Abdelhady 2011), which emphasize cross-national approaches to the study. However, I decided to focus on the manner in which race intersects with understandings of diaspora, exploring how my participants experiences in multiple different countries influences their identities.

My research findings demonstrate wide-ranging diversity in how Christian Lebanese-Americans understand and articulate racial and ethnic identity due to divergent migrant pathways in multiple countries, generational difference given changing racial politics in the US, and generational difference given the impacts of US foreign policy in the Middle East upon young

Lebanese-Americans. Lebanese-American Christian identity formation is also affected by immigration history, education, and life experiences of discrimination and racism.

This research affirms the wide body of social scientific research arguing that race is socially constructed and context dependent. It also suggests that to understand the identities of Lebanese-Americans, they need to be seen as both national and diasporic subjects. All of my participants are national subjects in the sense that they are citizens of the United States and currently plan to live there for the long-term future. Yet, they were also diasporic subjects.

Participants' identities have political, social, and economic ramifications. Philip, for example, has chosen to become an academic working in Lebanon, which has allowed him to connect with his families heritage and return to the birthplace of his ancestors. "Arab American" identity is not only a phrase, but also a unifying label that can be used for consecrated political action, such as pro-Palestinian activism. While the Arab-American label can be liberatory for many people of Arab descent of the United States, it can subsume those who reject it. Some of my participants, like many Lebanese Christians, feel that the label describes another group of people. This poses a multitude of questions for activists, community organizers, and academics.

As discussed previously, there is substantial political and social activism that leverages an Arab-American label. To me, it is unclear whether activism influences people to adopt an Arab-American identity, or if this identity and outlook pushes people to consider the political and social problems of others across national context. The answer is probably both, and thus organizers who wish to attract people with Arabic cultural or linguistic descent should consider the advantages and drawbacks of recruitment and messaging that uses the term "Arab-American." This is particularly important for social organizations that are trying to reach as wide range of a population as possible. For example, if a non-profit is trying to estimate the number of

people from “The Arab World” living in a state, and they solely use “Arab-American,” they may fail to accurately estimate the population.

Academic research over the past several decades within Arab and Arab-American studies has provided substantial insights into the cultural, social, and political practices of Arab-Americans. However, researchers should be careful when using the term Arab-American as to not mislabel, alienate, or offend their research subjects. While there are significant similarities between Arabic speaking peoples, this term can obscure many minorities who reject the term, such as many Maronite Christians and Amazigh. Therefore, researchers may want to consider alternative terms, such as Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) or South-West Asian and North African (SWANA). Finally, while there has been substantial research on Arab-Americans, and Muslim Arab-Americans more specifically, I echo Kayyali’s call for further study of Middle Eastern and Arab Christian’s racial identities, as well further study of religious minorities living in the United States.

Several of my participants were from the same family, and each member understood and explained their identity differently. One fruitful avenue for future research is how family and kin who hold different identities socialize. Does this produce tension? How do younger people understand holding an identity that is different from parents, grandparents, or religious leaders? How could this affect political activism? For example, a young Christian Lebanese-American may be very supportive of Palestinian liberation, while their grandparents, who lived in Lebanon during the civil war, may distrust Palestinians and the PLO. I am interested in how families address cases such as these, where family members hold different political, social, and cultural beliefs. Potential disagreements over identity could be an important avenue for study, particularly because most Lebanese-Americans hold family as a core value.

This thesis has focused on identity formation amongst Lebanese-Americans, with a focus on race and interactions with the state. In particular, I have been interested in the diversity of a community that is far too often depicted as monolithic. However, race and politics are not the primary facets by which a community thrives. Ultimately, what makes Lebanese-American communities so beautiful includes the diversity of language, food, and stories. Hopefully, my thesis adds to a growing body of literature that represents the richness of a community that is near and dear to my heart.

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