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Situating Belonging Through Multi-Sited Identities: Community Building Among Middle Eastern Christians in Upstate South Carolina

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SITUATING BELONGING THROUGH MULTI-SITED IDENTITIES: COMMUNITY
BUILDING AMONG MIDDLE EASTERN CHRISTIANS IN UPSTATE SOUTH
CAROLINA

by

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Bachelor of Arts
Humboldt State University, 2011

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

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DEDICATION

To Dad, who is a constant source of inspiration; and Mom, who has enough confidence in me for the both of us.

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I would first like to thank my advisor, Dr. Caroline Nagel, whose insight and encouragement have been instrumental in my graduate education. I would also like to thank my committee members: Dr. Amy Mills, who taught me to think like a geographer; Dr. Breanne Grace for coming to my rescue and for her thoughtful feedback; and Dr. Stephen Sheehi for his help with my proposal.

A shout out to the first floor human geographers—thank you to William for reminding me to lighten up; to Catherine for your empathy; to Caitlin for your optimism, and for knowing there is a time and place for cynicism too; to Manali for your wisdom and patience (you are indeed a saint); to Elbie, fellow NorCal defector and dessert enthusiast, for your reassurance; and to Ronnie, honorary first floor office mate, for your thoughtful input from the very beginning when this was just a history paper. Thank you to Julie, my partner in crime (and much needed work outs); to Holly and Troy for making my fieldwork possible; and to Katie, Bonnie, Chris, Melissa, Pablo, and Anna for keeping me (relatively) sane during the writing process.

Last but not least, words cannot express my gratitude for everyone in the Upstate who took the time to share their lives...and food!

ABSTRACT

This thesis is a Human Geography perspective on immigrant identity and integration. Using the case of a diverse, multigenerational Middle Eastern Christian population in the Upstate region of South Carolina, I explore how Middle Eastern immigrants and their descendants have negotiated belonging and identity in the United States by simultaneously building new social networks in the Upstate and maintaining ties to the Middle East. The focus on a single case allowed for an in-depth exploration of how geographic and historical contexts have shaped the present-day dynamics of the community (broadly defined) constructed around two Catholic churches, one Latin and one Maronite. Interviews with Middle Eastern members of these churches revealed complex and fluid ethnic, national, and religious identities at multiple scales, which have social as well as personal significance for my interviewees. Historical research and participant observation augmented my understanding of how this community has evolved over time to suit the needs of its members. The result is an inclusive Middle Eastern Christian identity that in various ways has been and continues to be constructed through these faith-based communities. By drawing attention to the contingent social processes underpinning individual and collective identities, I aim to complicate ideas of ethnicity and place-making as they are typically found in studies of immigrants in the U.S.

Key Terms: immigration, identity, place, community, ethnicity, religion

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Post-interview recording, Friday, March 7, 2014:

It's interesting- the original Lebanese parishioners at Saint Mary's were Maronite. Father Bart said that the priests there were always good about keeping that heritage alive even though Saint Mary's is a Latin church... so Maronite identity is not as concrete as perhaps you'd think it is; or rather as I thought it was.

The Maronite Catholic Church is an Eastern Rite Uniate of the Roman Catholic Church. Maronites began settling in the Mount Lebanon region around the year 900, and the Maronite church has had a secure relationship with Rome since 1439 (Salibi 2003). In the years leading up to the creation of an independent Lebanon in 1944, the Lebanese national identity was crafted predominately by Maronite elites and French colonial powers who established a confessional government, resulting in the political and economic empowerment of Maronites in particular (Makdisi 2000; Salibi 2003). As a result, Christianity, and especially the Maronite Church, is woven into the Lebanese national narrative, and the Maronite Church continues to be strongly tied to Lebanon today. However, since the mid-1800s, there has been significant emigration from Lebanon, so much so that there are now more Lebanese living outside of Lebanon than in it (Hourani and Shehadi 1992). These immigrants and their

descendants have settled all over the world, from America to Argentina to Ghana. While it is true that the Maronite church has never been strictly Lebanese, the emigration of Lebanese Maronites has played a significant role in the establishment of Maronite churches (as well as dioceses and eparchies) outside of Lebanon.

Theoretical Foundation

Faith-based communities are social fields through which people can cultivate ties to multiple places and identities. This thesis strives for a more expansive and fluid explanation of how immigrants' religious identities and institutions shape and inform community formation and incorporation into immigrant-receiving societies. I will draw principally from narratives of identity and belonging as told by people from two churches with overlapping histories and communities to address three overarching theoretical questions:

- How are collective and individual identities negotiated through participation in faith-based communities?
- How do immigrants establish belonging and community through daily, lived contexts?
- How are religious identities connected to ethnic, national, political, and other secular identities in the broader field of identity formation in immigrant-receiving contexts?

Since the early 20th century migration scholars have been grappling with questions about whether and how immigrants become part of “mainstream”

America. The fundamental concern is one of how, on a societal level, we negotiate sameness—that is, how those marked as different come to be seen as part of the national community. These questions are highly relevant in the Southern United States, which has been experiencing significant demographic and economic shifts since the 1980s (Ehrkamp and Nagel 2012). These changes have roots in social dynamics that have been unfolding over generations in locally specific but globally connected ways, and shape patterns of immigrant incorporation in the South today. Thus, studying local conditions is important for understanding how “foreigners” have, and continue to, become “Americans.”

In this thesis, I look more closely at the daily, emplaced experiences through which immigrants interact simultaneously with multiple social and geographic contexts. Doing so highlights the “multivalent and plurilocal” (Staeheli 2008) processes that constitute place, community, and belonging for both individuals and groups. To address the complexity of these processes, I borrow geographer Doreen Massey’s concept of the “throwntogetherness of place,” which posits that places are constituted by a constantly evolving mesh of attachments, histories, and social relationships. Envisioning places more as constellations of meanings and experiences rather than fixed entities advances theoretical understandings of how people connect to places and perform identities through their engagement with these places. In turn, viewing immigrant incorporation through a place-based lens co-contextualizes the large and small scale processes at work in the formulation of membership and belonging, offering

a more nuanced explanation of relationships between immigrants and dominant groups.

The Research

Until recently, rates of immigration to the South have been small relative to other regions of the country. This is not to suggest, however, that immigrants have not been important to Southern history and culture. Scholars are moving away from characterizing the South as a bi-racial, religiously homogeneous region to emphasize both historic and current instances of social diversification as well as the intersections between them.

This project was initially based on my interest in the understudied history of Arab Americans in the Southern United States and was set in motion by the chance discovery of this particular site. This case study is situated in northern (“Upstate”) South Carolina, where there are multigenerational Lebanese-origin families, some of whom settled in the area over a century ago (see figure 1.1). In Greenville, one of the major cities in the Upstate, the post-bellum emigration of African Americans to the industrial North starting in the 1910s left a gap in the labor market, posing a challenge to the city’s burgeoning textile industry (Huff 1995). The solution advocated for by many community leaders was a campaign to attract migrant laborers, specifically white European immigrants. Although the idea was controversial, establishing a Roman Catholic Church was thus seen as a potential asset for drawing such immigrants to the area. Catholics were an anomaly in the South at this time and often faced discrimination as a group

(Madden 1985). Despite the disapproval of many in the largely Protestant community, some of Greenville's political elite aided in the effort to "plant" a Catholic church, some going so far as to donate land and raise funds toward constructing a church building (Huff 1995).

The 1900 census is the first documentation of Arabic-speaking immigrants in Greenville (Whitaker 2006). These immigrants were part of a larger wave of predominately Melkite, Maronite, and Eastern Orthodox Christian immigrants from the Ottoman-controlled Mount Lebanon region to the United States lasting from about the 1880s until the 1920s (Kayal 1973; Gualtieri 2009). Most of these immigrants went to the industrial cities in the Northeast and the Midwest; but some also travelled to and eventually settled in the South. The more diffuse nature of "Syrian" immigrant populations in the region meant that, while some communities established Eastern Rite churches, many joined Roman Catholic or even Protestant churches. This was the case in Greenville, where Maronite Catholic immigrants from the Mount Lebanon region became part of Saint Mary's Roman Catholic Church, the "mother church of Upstate South Carolina" (Whitaker 2006).

For a period of time in the mid-20th century, Saint Mary's had an active Lebanese community within its parish (interview with Saint Mary's administrator, March 2013). Lebanese parishioners were, and some continue to be, major contributors to the church, which has been important to these families over several generations. However, the Lebanese community's presence and prominence in the church has faded in recent decades. At the same time, a

newer church, Saint Rafka Maronite Catholic Church, has become a community space for the growing population of Eastern Rite families throughout Upstate South Carolina. Over the past fifty years or so, a more nationally and religiously diverse group of Middle Eastern¹ immigrants has joined the historic Lebanese population. This later immigration reflects the globalization of the “New South” economy and the growth of Middle Eastern immigration to the United States in the second half of the 20th century. A significant portion of Saint Rafka’s parish is composed of such immigrants, who came to the U.S. as refugees from regional conflicts, as students and professionals, and/or as family members of U.S. citizens.

Saint Rafka church was initially the project of a Maronite woman who settled in South Carolina not from the Middle East, but from Michigan. In the late 1990s, Marlene Saad began to garner support for the establishment of the first Maronite church in the state. Mrs. Saad is second generation Lebanese and is originally from Detroit, where there is a large population of Middle Eastern immigrants and their descendants. She grew up attending a Maronite church, so when Mrs. Saad and her husband moved to Spartanburg, South Carolina about thirty years ago she soon missed the religious and cultural traditions that had always been a part of her life. A member of the National Apostolate of Maronites (NAM)², she had access to officials in the American Maronite church. According

¹ I use the term Middle Eastern as opposed to Arab because this was how my participants described themselves. In fact, most took issue with being called Arabs, which I address in chapter four.

² The National Apostolate of Maronites is essentially the lay service organization for the Maronite Church in the United States. According to the organization’s website, “NAM is a link or a “bridge” uniting all Maronites across the USA. NAM helps to preserve the beautiful and rich traditions of the Syriac Antiochene Maronite Church handed on to us by St. Maron and his descendants.

to the history of Saint Rafka Maronite Catholic Church published on their website, Mrs. Saad began collecting signatures from Lebanese people all over South Carolina to petition the Maronite Eparchy in Brooklyn to send a priest (Wicket 2010). Saint Rafka Maronite mission began holding consistent services in 2006 on the campus of Saint Mary's Roman Catholic Church in Greenville until 2010 when the community had raised enough money to purchase a building of their own. In order to accommodate parishioners who come from all over the Upstate (and North Carolina), the decision was made to buy a building in Greer, SC, which is situated in between Greenville and Spartanburg.

That Saint Rafka is a Maronite church would beg the assumption that its parish is predominately Lebanese; but this church defies expectations in many ways. Although the Lebanese-origin parishioners of Saint Mary's are by and large supportive of Saint Rafka, and will occasionally attend a service or other fundraising and cultural events, most have remained with Saint Mary's which they consider to be their spiritual home. There are more recently arrived Lebanese immigrants who attend Saint Rafka, but they are by no means the majority. A significant portion of the parish is Iraqi, and there are smaller numbers of Jordanians, Syrians, and Palestinians. Additionally, the church has begun to attract more European-origin Americans. To add another layer of complexity, many of the parishioners, regardless of their ethnic or national origin, are not actually Maronite Catholics. There are people from Protestant

Through its many programs of service to the Maronite Church, the apostolate helps nurture interest in our spiritual, cultural and ethnic roots. For many, NAM's most important events are its national and regional conventions, where the Maronite Faithful are gathered along with our bishops and clergy for spiritual renewal, educational growth and social and ethnic fellowship." <<http://www.namnews.org/index.php?page=aboutnam>>

backgrounds, Roman Catholic backgrounds, and also from a number of other Eastern churches including Syrian Orthodox and Chaldean Catholics.

My aim in this thesis is to explore the significance of immigrants' religious institutions and practices through a case study of Saint Mary's and Saint Rafka. This exploration is situated in a burgeoning, multidisciplinary body of scholarship on the role of religion in the lives of immigrants (e.g. Leonard et al 2006). This literature addresses a number of themes, including the formation of transnational fields through religion, the changing nature of immigrant religious practice in the U.S. context, generational shifts in worship and beliefs, and the relationship between immigrant faith communities and civic participation. These themes in various ways address the question of how immigrants negotiate membership and belonging in a dominant "host society." Yet few works on immigrant religion attempt to arrive at a more sophisticated understanding of how integration works in everyday social contexts. In focusing on the dynamics taking place in specific churches, this thesis seeks to understand immigrant integration and identity formation as a matter of community building. Community building, in turn, is a matter of geography—that is, the unique convergence of histories, cultures, politics, and identities that creates a sense of place and belonging.

Organization of this Thesis

In the chapters that follow, I will address the questions posed at the beginning of this introduction first on a theoretical level and then by grounding them in an empirical case. The second chapter is a review of the literature that

brings into conversation theories of immigrant assimilation and integration, geographic understandings of place, and theories on the functions of immigrant religiosity and religious institutions. In chapter three I outline my methodological approach to this study and explain how the data were collected.

The empirical section of the paper is organized into two chapters. Chapter four is an exploration of the creation and implementation of ethnic American identity in the context of my study population. It begins with an overview of the history of Middle Eastern immigration to the United States, with a focus on the development of an “Arab American” identity. I then discuss how my interviewees understood what it means to be Arab, and how this affected their acceptance of the label Arab American.

Chapter five concerns interviewees’ narratives of community building, acceptance, and culture to highlight the agentic yet contextually contingent process of forging identity through place-making. I begin with a more detailed description of the demographics and daily operations of Saint Rafka Church as outlined by parishioners and affiliates. I then move on to consider the shifting, contextual nature of national, ethnic, and religious identities. Interviewees articulated these identities in seemingly contradictory but actually contextually specific, ways in order to elicit particular meanings and attachments. The negotiations of identities discussed in this chapter raise questions as to how and why particular identities are constructed and mobilized and the implications such processes might have for the integration of immigrants.

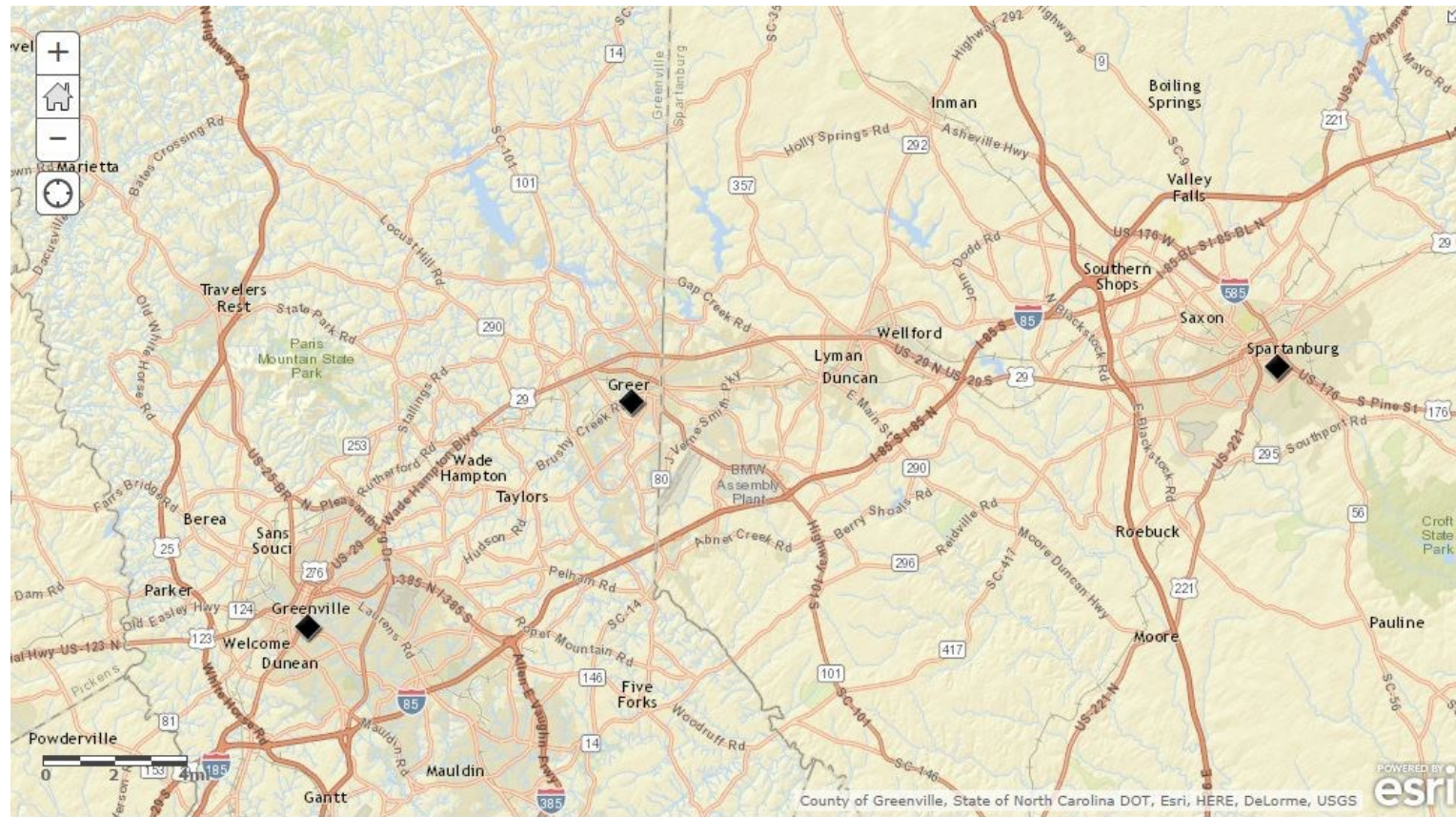


Figure 1.1: Map of the Upstate region of South Carolina (<http://www.arcgis.com/home/webmap/viewer.html?useExisting=1>).

Chapter 2

Literature

This thesis presents a case of immigrant integration and community-building that considers the importance of material places to the formulation of multiple identities and claims of membership and belonging. To frame this discussion, I will draw from literature on assimilation and integration, place, and faith-based communities. My objective is to engage with the concept of immigrant integration through collective identities, using a human geography lens to argue for greater attention to the active construction of the spaces and places in and through which integration occurs. Recently, the concept of transnationalism, understood as multi-sited identities and belongings, has been adopted by scholars as a means of highlighting that place is more than an inanimate backdrop for the recreation of “homeland.” Meanwhile, the subfield of religious geography has gained traction in the last two decades studying the intersections of “sacred” and “secular” spaces and social fields. This in turn has relevance for migration studies, and particularly immigrant place-making, as immigrants join existing faith-based communities and establish new ones. At this point it is important to note that I situate this discussion primarily in the United States. As the literature on place demonstrates, local context affects the way immigrants become incorporated (and incorporate themselves) into a receiving

context. Immigrants to this country engage with its particular, and historically contingent (Pred 1984) social, political, and cultural systems that shape understandings and negotiations of belonging. A conspicuous example, and one that is addressed by many of the authors in the sections to follow, is the way ideas of race and ethnicity are constructed and enacted in American society. Understandings of community membership in terms of race and ethnicity become important for explaining the origins of identity projects salient to my case study that I address in chapters four and five.

The Evolution of Assimilation Theory

Early scholarship on assimilation in the United States attempted to answer the question of how immigrants would (or would not) become part of “mainstream” America. The foundation of assimilation theory was pioneered by sociologists from the University of Chicago (the “Chicago School”) in the 1920s and 30s. They sought to identify and explain patterns of settlement and intergroup dynamics resulting from a large influx of European immigrants to American industrial cities between 1880 to 1920 (Kivisto 1990; 2004; Jimenez 2010)¹. “Classic” assimilation theory is often described as positing a linear progression over two or three generations in which immigrants would shed old world ways of life to become closer to, and eventually converge with, the

¹ While this migration flow was significant, Europeans were by no means the only immigrants settling in the United States at this time. Jimenez (2010, 33) for instance points out that there has been continuous Mexican immigration since the mid-1800s. (However, the first Mexican “immigrants” did not actually immigrate. In 1848, part of Mexico was annexed under the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo and became the American West and Southwest.) Another example, which I will discuss in Chapter 4, is the influx of immigrants from Ottoman Syria which began around the same time.

“mainstream” (Alba and Nee 2003). But the conceptualization of assimilation, in fact, was more complex than most contemporary scholars recognize. This complexity is very much evident in Milton Gordon’s 1964 *Assimilation in American Life*, which contemporary scholars have described as part of the “canonical account” of assimilation theory (Alba and Nee 1997; Kivisto 2004).

Jimenez (2010, 10) wrote that if the Chicago School laid the foundation for assimilation theory, Milton Gordon “constructed the house.” His 1964 treatise, in addition to laying out his own theoretical contribution, included a useful review of the prior literature on the subject. He categorized assimilation theories as falling into three camps. The first, Anglo conformity, assumes that integration into the Anglo Saxon middle class to be the ultimate “goal” of assimilation. The second, the idea of the melting pot, depicts American culture as an arena in which the respective cultures of immigrants are melded together. Whereas the first two categories envisioned the eventual “disappearance of the immigrants’ group as a communal identity,” (Gordon 1964, 132), the third, cultural pluralism, portrays American society as a collection of different ethno-cultural groups, thus taking into account the agency of immigrants in determining their own identities. Gordon himself understood assimilation from a modified cultural pluralist perspective that he termed “structural pluralism.” He developed a typology including seven nonhierarchical stages by which immigrants would be incorporated into the mainstream.² While his work is much more sophisticated

² These stages are cultural/behavioral assimilation, structural assimilation, marital assimilation, identificational assimilation, attitude receptional assimilation, behavior receptional assimilation, and civic assimilation (71). The most essential of these was structural assimilation, without which a group could never achieve successful assimilation (see his table on page 76 evaluating the

than some modern critics give him credit for, Gordon's epistemology treats the concept of assimilation as intrinsically valid. Therefore, he sought to explain the potential stumbling blocks to achieving "successful" assimilation. Gordon's approach called attention to the politics underlying "hyphenated identities" in which different groups maintained separate social institutions from one another, resulting in separate social fields and, ultimately, a divided society.

Gordon was not the only scholar to take issue with the idea of an unencumbered progression of ethnic groups into eventual sameness. In Glazer and Moynihan's (1963) *Beyond the Melting Pot*, the authors use New York City, (a place they characterize as both defined by and undefinable because of its many ethnic groups), as a case study of ethnic retention and pluralism in the U.S. Their work highlights the connection between ethnic identity and other socio-economic and cultural processes to explain the stratification in American society both historically and in the authors' present-day context. "The initial notion of an American melting pot," they write, "did not, it seems, quite grasp what would happen in America" (Glazer and Moynihan 1963, 13). Although their work does pose a challenge to *Assimilation in American Life*, which regarded some measure of acculturation to be inevitable, both books work within a paradigm of cultural pluralism. For Glazer and Moynihan assimilation signified acculturation to suit particular ethnic identities and politics. In other words, the incorporation of

assimilation levels of different ethnic/racial groups). It should also be noted that Gordon intentionally equates the mainstream with Anglo Saxon, Protestant, middle class America, which he perceived to be the dominant socio-cultural group. He provides a detailed discussion of this decision beginning on page 72.

immigrants into American society took place through the formation and retention of racially or ethnically distinct groups (Omi and Winant, 1994).

Assimilation theory—or more accurately, contemporary renderings of it—came under scrutiny in the 1990s following decades of renewed large-scale immigration to the US, much of it from Latin America and Asia (Kivisto 2004). Classic theories were found to be overly deterministic and prescriptive, uncritically touting assimilation into white middle class America as both desired and desirable³. Assimilation theory's critics envisioned a broader spectrum of immigrants' experiences, drawing attention to the importance of the social, economic, and political environment into which immigrants are to assimilate.

By the 1990s, many scholars considered classic assimilation theory an inadequate description of the experiences of the immigrants who arrived after 1965. Portes and Zhou (1993) identify two major challenges inhibiting the same degree of “mainstream” (white middle-class) integration that by this point was evident in the descendants of 19th and early 20th century immigrants: First, post-1965 immigrants were predominately from the Global South, meaning that, as a group, they were less phenotypically white than their predecessors. Second, the U.S. economy had become divided predominantly into low skill/low wage and high skill/high wage jobs, limiting opportunities to gain a foothold into the middle class. Portes and Zhou thus argued that becoming incorporated into American society was not always a socioeconomically upward trajectory. There is a segmented assimilation perspective, which is primarily concerned with structural

³ Not all the critiques of early assimilation theories are justified, which I will address later in the section.

inequalities shaping the lives of the children of post-1965 immigrants. Portes argues elsewhere (Portes et al 2005) that the lack of social capital contributing to downward mobility can be at least partially compensated for through programs that, "...support selective acculturation—learning English while upholding the value of parents' language and culture—and that offer compensatory resources to deal with poverty and outside discrimination are needed to ward off the challenges confronted today by immigrant families." (1032-33). In contrast, Waters et al (2010) contend that the idea of selective acculturation, intended to retain ethnic community support, is only beneficial if these social ties connect poor immigrant families with middle class and wealthy cohorts, which is not always the case.

Looking at the critical treatments of classic assimilation theory in aggregate, migration scholars had a valid concern that the model of assimilation pioneered by the Chicago School should not be understood as comprehensive. That said, denouncing assimilation theory became something of a trend, allowing reference to academic precedent without truly engaging with it (Alba and Nee, 2003; Portes et al 2005; Nagel 2009). More so than any strides toward a more "accurate" model of assimilation, the critical literature from the 1990s is important because it began to question the effects of America's social structure on the integration process. The constructed nature of ethnic and racial categories and the systemic processes underpinning them were recognized to be under-theorized. As a result, scholarship shifted toward deconstructing ideas of

ethnicity and race in pursuit of a more complex understanding of immigrant integration that captured the multiple trajectories therein.

Deconstructing Ethnicity and Differentiating Race

The idea of “whiteness” is frequently used by scholars as a reference point for exploring degrees of inclusion and privilege within the America’s racialized social system. Although ethnicity is more prominently featured in classic assimilation theory, conflating the two falsely diminishes the significance of race as a force in its own right (Omi and Winant 1994). Regarding race as a derivative of ethnicity dismisses the different challenges posed by the American social structure for racially identified groups as opposed to the ethnicity-based categories used to differentiate Caucasian Americans (Omi and Winant 1994, 22). As assimilation theory evolved over the 20th century, migration scholars came to understand immigrant incorporation as partly a process of racialization, in which supposedly rigid racial boundaries were continually being reconfigured, resulting in the inclusion of some groups but not others (Jacobson 1998). For instance, although the descendants of Italian, Jewish, and even Lebanese immigrants from the 19th and early 20th centuries are today considered white Americans, this was not always the case. This shift toward whiteness over time is an example of the mutability of racial categories (Jacobson, 1998).

By the second half of the 20th century, the descendants of immigrants who had been the subjects of the early assimilation literature had effectively become part of (white) “mainstream” America. The question then became not if, but *how*

the descendants of these immigrants had become white. Sociologist Mary Waters (1990) undertook a large project of structured interviews with descendants of European immigrants to understand the way ethnic identity factored (or did not factor) into her participants' lives and identities. She found that various "white ethnic" identities were significant mostly on a symbolic level; they could be claimed at will as a way of asserting both uniqueness and belonging to a cultural community within the homogenizing white American mainstream. Significantly, whether people claimed an ethnic identity or not had no bearing on their ability to access the social privileges inherent in a white identity.

Some scholars write about whiteness with a focus on the power and privilege tied to whiteness that can be accessed at least partially by some groups who would not be "obviously" white (Yeh and Lama 2006; Ajrouch and Jamal 2007; Jamal and Naber 2008; Jimenez 2010). The work of sociologist Tomas Jimenez on integration and identity among Mexican Americans is a particularly important frame of reference for my research in the way he folds shifting ideas of whiteness and generational differences into his understanding of immigrant integration. While an ethnic identity is more accessible and also more relevant in the present day for Mexican Americans due to a continuous immigration, Jimenez also observed that many later generation Mexican Americans are middle class or above, do not speak Spanish, and are culturally more American than Mexican—effectively part of the "mainstream". Over time, the Mexican American population has become socioeconomically diverse—a diversity that

maps partly onto generational differences. There are parallels to be made between Mexican Americans and Middle Eastern Americans⁴ in the sense that people within these broad categories not only represent different degrees of assimilation, but also different degrees of “assimilability.” Jimenez raises the important point that the effects of racialization are not uniform within immigrant groups. The resources and motives with which immigrants navigate racial hierarchies vary with different generations and cohorts.

Rethinking Assimilation through Transnationalism

Efforts to rethink assimilation coincided with the development of a literature on transnationalism, which has drawn attention to the effects of border-spanning processes on immigrant belonging. Like segmented assimilation theorists, migration scholars writing about transnationalism were skeptical of post-1965 immigrants’ ability to simply assimilate into the “mainstream.” In the 1990s, this literature was mainly concerned with immigrants’ political, economic, and social ties to places of origin which, scholars thought, hindered immigrants’ ability to integrate (Nagel and Staeheli 2008). Though earlier work tends to establish a dichotomy by which immigrants are caught between their “homeland” and where they settle, more sophisticated versions ask how individuals and communities establish and maintain connections to multiple places. This more

⁴ This is not a perfect analogy because, as Jimenez notes, Mexican immigration to the U.S. has been continuous. In contrast, Middle Eastern immigration was largely stalled for a period of about 40 years in the mid-20th century. It is interesting, however, to consider how the immigration history of Middle Eastern people mimics that of “white ethnics” in some ways and that of non-white immigrants in others. This is yet another product of the highly diverse population that falls under the Middle Eastern American or “Arab American” category.

expansive transnationalism, a multi-sited collection of political, economic, and cultural practices and relationships, offers an alternative way of understanding immigrant identities and processes of settlement and integration into local contexts. Place has both theoretical and a material significance because present and past lived experiences form attachments to both actual and imagined places and communities, which in turn affects the way immigrants interact with a new setting (Ley 2004; Glick Schiller 2012). On the one hand, integration is shaped by daily interactions with the inclusive and exclusive policies, institutions, and communities in places of settlement (Ehrkamp 2005). On the other, immigrants can also exert control by adapting (and leveraging) certain facets of their identities to cope with marginalization and incorporate themselves into the “mainstream” (Glick Schiller 2012). Looking at the different processes that shape immigrants’ incorporation reveals integration to be more of a negotiation than a zero-sum game. Thinking about immigrant integration as a differentiated process also makes it possible to reconcile ideas from both classic assimilation theorists and their critics. For instance, Nagel (2009) does not regard the concept of transnationalism as a replacement for the concept of assimilation, but rather as an expansion of these theories that highlights the importance of multi-sited attachments in shaping migrant identities and belonging. Seeing the two as intersectional makes for a more flexible theoretical base, but more can also be done to engage with the people and contexts shaping the highly variable process of immigrant integration on the ground. This is where studying place and place-making become valuable. Since cultivating relationships and belonging occur in

and through places, the dynamics of place affect how immigrants and their families situate themselves within different identities and communities.

Placing Immigrants

As the critical approaches to transnationalism demonstrate, the process of integration is both embodied and *emplaced*, as immigrants engage with their “sending” and “receiving” contexts at interpersonal, community, and societal levels simultaneously (Gilmartin 2008). It follows that this dialectic varies depending on the people and the places. Therefore, there is value in considering the nature of place in a theoretical sense, and how places are experienced by the people who inhabit (and create) them.

As a theoretical construct, place is widely understood to be more tangible than its abstract relative, space. Geographer Tim Cresswell (2004) defines place, most basically, as a “meaningful location.” Though the concept of place is a constant presence in geography and related disciplines, its nature as well as its significance to contemporary life are subjects of debate. Agnew (2011), while acknowledging that understandings of place are diverse and contested, maintains that there are basic tenets spanning varied definitions of place that are furthermore empirically relevant. Place, he writes, has three fundamental dimensions—place as location, where it is spatially situated; place as locale, or an experiential setting (which may or may not be tied to a particular location); and a “sense of place,” the attachments and associations that make places meaningful (Agnew 1987; 2011). Although some scholars express doubt in the

modern (and post-modern) relevance of place,⁵ others contend that place retains its importance as an element of emotional attachment, relationship building, and identity formation. Places, they argue, are central to forging meaning. Escobar (2001, 140), for instance, writes that,

“place continues to be important in the lives of many people, perhaps most, if we understand by place the experience of a particular location with some measure of groundedness (however, unstable), sense of boundaries (however, permeable), and connection to everyday life, even if its identity is constructed, traversed by power, and never fixed.”

It is from this premise—that place matters as a component of people’s social worlds—that I approach the following discussion of place and its role both theoretically and empirically in migration studies.

A branch of the literature on place that is particularly useful to the study of immigrant identity and belonging is that which treats place as open and permeable. As geographer Allan Pred (1984) wrote, places are in a “continual state of becoming.” People simultaneously operate within pre-existing social and material constructs and perceive (and act upon) these preconditions in their own ways. Places, then, are constantly subject to change; however, a place’s history influences the realm of what seems possible to create in that place, which is why Pred also argued that place is “historically contingent.” Similar to Pred, Massey (1991) based her seminal essay “A Global Sense of Place” on the idea that places are dynamic. Her work explores the concept of places constituted by social processes; as nodes within vibrant, multiscale networks that render the supposedly fixed boundaries to be continually negotiated. Even a place with a

⁵ Notably the work of Relph, who coined the idea of “placelessness,” described as, “both an environment without significant places and the underlying attitude which does not acknowledge the significance of place” (1976, 143).

narrative so dominant as to make its identity seem obvious is fluid by virtue of the shifting collection of daily lived interactions in that place.

May (1996) grounded the concept of a global sense of place in the context of his own case study, using Harvey's idea of places as social constructs that are materially fixed (and therefore incongruous with highly mobile capital) as a foil to Massey's idea of more open, progressive place. His work supports the concept of multiple, coexisting place identities, but also demonstrates that a global sense of place does not automatically infuse places with progressive identity politics (Cresswell 2004). Nevertheless, May provides an example of how the idea of pluralistic and shifting social geographies underpinning Massey's global sense of place has empirical resonance. To locals places can seem timeless, such that it is easy to miss their constant "becoming." This supposed constancy, however, can be disrupted by "outsiders" with different and perhaps contradicting notions of those places. The benefit of focusing on immigrant place making is that it complicates and makes visible dominant narratives of belonging. Such understandings of place are useful to migration studies because they help explain socio-cultural implications of migration.

Making Place

In her 2005 book *For Space*, Massey writes that,

"Place as an ever-shifting constellation of trajectories poses the question of our throwntogetherness...The multiplicity and chance of space here in the constitution of place provide (an element of) that inevitable contingency which underlies the necessity for the institution of the social and which, at a moment of antagonism, is revealed in particular fractures which pose the question of the political" (151).

Juxtaposing the “throwntogetherness of place” with place-making by immigrants throws into relief the multiple layers of meaning within any given place.

Furthermore, doing so highlights the role of places as sites of encounter and negotiation as “old” and “new” populations simultaneously attempt to organize space and create meaning.

Early discussions of transnationalism posited immigrants as living in one society but identifying with another. This approach, like earlier discussions of ethnic enclaves, failed to capture immigrants’ complex connectivity to multiple places and the ways that different place-based identities and attachments interact. The attachments to multiple places that create a transnational consciousness are influenced by daily lived experiences as well as by memories and ways of being from previous “homes” (Ehrkhamp 2005; Butcher 2009; Grenier and Sakdapolrak 2013). Transnationalism, contextualized in Massey’s work on place in particular, is thus useful for understanding integration as a process that is indeed fragmented, but not mutually exclusive to the maintenance of ties to other places. These ties, in fact, can be cultivated *through* engaging with local contexts. What integration actually looks like is variable, dependent upon a multitude of social processes and relationships, and structures physical boundaries as much as social ones. Immigrant places and communities are not created in isolation from their situated social contexts.

The way immigrants occupy and utilize space depends upon what social networks and resources they can access, which is partially a product of racial and ethnic identities. Anderson’s (1987) account of the development of

Vancouver's Chinatown is a well-known example of how "ethnic" (immigrant) places are created as much by outsiders as by the immigrants themselves. She chronicles how the city's Chinatown was created along the lines of the society's preconceived and racialized "cognitive categories" (583). Anderson does not disregard the importance of immigrants' agency in making place; however her analysis is focused on how socio-historical constructs shape, and to some extent limit, how places are created. Her work demonstrates that, while enclaves such as Chinatowns are often regarded as places to soften the transition into a new society, the systems of power and social structure entangled in the creation of these places can also infuse them with more insidious dynamics. The formation of immigrant enclaves, therefore cannot be explained as simply the result of immigrants seeking out co-ethnics or as indicative of a desire to form insular communities.

Mazumdar et al's (2000) case study of "Little Saigon" in Westminster, California deconstructs the processes of establishing multiply situated belonging through place, and specifically through the creation of an ethnic enclave. The authors argue that such enclaves are more than just economic entities (and, by extension, that integration of immigrants is not merely an socioeconomic process). They emphasize the role of ethnic enclaves in asserting a community identity for the purpose of making the unfamiliar familiar by creating place. While such enclaves are certainly more than business arrangements, economic and class dynamics, entangled with ethnic and racial differences, do significantly affect how immigrants claim space and create "their" places.

Some authors engage more directly with the politics resulting from “throwntogetherness” in place, in the sense that it focuses on different groups of people respectively forging meaning, creating place, in the same space. Research on immigrant place-making is fundamentally concerned with the question of how “outsiders” come to belong in and to a place. In their work studying the ways Ecuadorian migrants in Italy create belonging through place-making, Rafetta and Duff (2013) stress the importance of considering the “affective dimension” of place in addition to the more widely discussed social and material dimensions. The way immigrants experience their immediate physical and social surroundings informs the situated attachments they create. “In this respect, the production of place [and belonging] is first and foremost the creation of a structure of feeling” (Rafetta and Duff 2013, 341). In contrast to the relatively peaceful coexistence of immigrants and “locals” in Rafetta and Duff’s study, Smith and Winders’ (2008) study of Latino immigrants settling in the U.S. South considers the tension that can arise not only when immigrants arrive and settle but when they begin actively creating attachments to where they have settled. The authors characterize place-making as a process of social reproduction associated with the desire to establish (claims to) rootedness. The oft repeated complaint that Latino immigrants are taking “American” jobs as justification for nativist sentiments and exclusionary practices is not merely based in concern over economic competition. It also speaks to tension over who has a right to space and place—whose place is it? May (1996) documented similar narratives from working class residents of Stoke Newington, who felt immigrants were

encroaching on their place and tarnishing the “Englishness” of the town. Other interviewees, however, saw these immigrant businesses and areas of Stoke Newington as giving the place more of an international flare; easily accessible “culture” that they could consume at their convenience. This idea of the “multiple reality of place” (Anderson 1987) is also present in Kaplan and Recoquillon’s (2014) exploration of different senses of place within a single space, namely the multiethnic Goutte d’Or neighborhood in Paris. The authors note that the neighborhood actually has multiple coexisting identities that are negotiated both within and outside Goutte d’Or. Their study emphasizes the importance of forging meaning in place to the process of building community, which in turn affects the way immigrants become incorporated into a new context.

The examples above highlight localized processes of place-making that enable multiple (sometimes contentious) histories and meanings to exist simultaneously in any given place, largely shaped by the everyday lives of the people in that place. However, places can also be ideological; remembered based on one’s own experiences as well as those of others. Ideas of place, as the transnationalism literature demonstrates, also have bearing on the creation of lived places. In the United States, immigrants are encouraged to identify based on ethno-national groupings in keeping with America’s racialized social structure and pluralistic identity politics. Mobilizing “foreign” identities in this way also encourages immigrants to ground these narratives in the landscape. For instance, the Arab American National Museum in Dearborn, Michigan is the physical expression of a collective consciousness that evokes an idea of the

Arab World and enacts this in the U.S. context. Nagel and Ayoob (2014) write that the museum, “represents the successful construction of a public, pan-ethnic, Arab American category...[that] asserts a shared past, present, and future for those who trace their origins to the Arab world, despite significant differences among them...” (22-23).

From a research standpoint, thinking about immigrants in collective terms is often a practical necessity. At the same time, it invites a tendency to treat diverse individuals as a uniform, bounded entity. Therefore, it is important to ask how and why communities are constructed and maintained instead of taking their existence for granted. Faith-based communities are a poignant example because of the ability of religious identities to forge meaning and belonging that complicates the ethno-national paradigm often imposed on immigrants. Considering the religious identities and institutions immigrants create and contribute to tells a different story about community formation.

Considering Religion

Over the course of the current wave of globalization, international migration has produced increasingly heterogeneous religious geographies (Hopkins et al 2013). Portes and Rumbaut (2006, 304) write that, when it comes to the societal contexts and processes that shape immigrant integration, religion generally has the effect of “softening their edges.” Focusing on the social aspects of religion, religious identity can potentially ease the transition into a new place by establishing common ground with locals of the same faith. Furthermore,

many congregationally-minded religious institutions adopt an ethic of welcoming newcomers, providing them with community support and, in some cases, social services (Ehrkamp and Nagel 2012). Religious institutions can therefore be an important venue for people negotiating belonging in a new setting. To explore the relationship between religion and integration, the approach to immigrant religion I adopt in this thesis focuses on religious institutions as social fields that simultaneously mediate participation in broader communities and produce distinct collective identities.

Since the early 2000s the study of religion and religious institutions has become increasingly recognized by geographers as having significance on par with dynamics such as race, class, and gender (Kong 2001; 2011; Brace, Bailey and Harvey 2006). This work challenges the idea that the religious is clearly bounded and separated from the secular. Religion is positioned among more commonly explored dynamics of “secular” ideologies and systems as mediators of place, space, and society. Ivakhiv (2006), for instance, argues that religion and the sacred can be understood, “(1) as ways of distributing significance across geographic spaces, and (2) as involving the distinction of different *kinds* of significance from among those being distributed” (171).

Religion does not operate independently from the social contexts in which it is practiced, and separating the sacred from the secular ignores the dynamic lived processes that continually blend the two. The spatiality of religion, then, involves the convergence of physical and imagined places in daily lived experiences that are not constrained to designated “religious” spaces

(Sheringham, 2010). Tse (2013), in his overview of the religious studies literature on the concept of lived religion, notes that religious practices are negotiated within local contexts. Approaching religion as a living tradition that is constantly being created in the present, "...is to accord individuals within religious communities the agency to compose their own intersectional subjectivities" (Tse 2013, 11). The perspectives of these scholars widen the focus of religious geographies beyond explicitly religious spaces, and also draw attention to the role of religious institutions as social actors that interact with myriad secular institutions and phenomena. Thus, religious geographies are also cultural and political geographies.

Religion, Identity Politics, and the "Immigrant Church"

Since religious institutions are subject to—or established as the result of—the evolving needs and practices of the communities in which they are situated, religious institutions can act as anchors for the (re)creation of culture and heritage in place (Hervieu-Leger, 2002). This is especially salient for migration scholars studying "ethnic cohesion" and immigrant religiosity in immigrant receiving countries. Since the social impact of religion is at once profound and more accessible than its spiritual dimensions, a number of scholars across disciplines have conducted studies exploring these more "secular" functions. The focus of these studies (and mine) is on the socio-political and cultural significance of immigrant religion rather than on questions of spirituality and piety. For instance, in her study of a Maronite church in Senegal's Lebanese

diaspora, Leichtman (2013, 40) argues that the sectarian politics of Lebanon were not important in this context, allowing the church, "...to serve a broader role in reaffirming and reinforcing Lebanese identity while adapting to individual and community needs grounded in Senegal." This suggests that religiosity and cultural expression are far from apolitical. For example, Mourão et al (2010), argue that the increasing (and often problematized) visibility of religion in European public life is increasing the political agency of religious organizations, especially as mobilizers of minority immigrant communities. These groups, beyond engaging with religious/political identities of "home," position themselves in relation to prevailing discourses in their immediate context. Interviewing leaders of Orthodox churches in Austria, the authors found that, "although [church leaders] emphasise that they represent a community of well-integrated and Austria-loving citizens, at the same time they see in the heightened visibility of religion in the public sphere a chance to present themselves as good Christians, adding to those voices that construct the Muslims as the Others of Europe" (Mourão et al 2010, 1476).

The authors' observation that religious identity can be a mechanism for particular kinds of negotiations of membership rings true in the U.S. context as well. American society has a deeply embedded ideal of liberalism that places value on individual free will, which has in turn fostered religious pluralism. Religion in the United States, then, is less directly associated with national membership. Williams (2007) argues that religion instead functions, "...primarily as a vehicle for subcultural reproduction for groups within society—importantly,

ethnoracial minorities” (30). However, this is not to suggest that religion has nothing to do with becoming “American”. Ehrkamp and Nagel (2012) demonstrate that places of worship serve as sites for immigrants to develop and mobilize narratives of U.S. citizenship. Faith-based communities can therefore enable immigrants to establish national as well as local membership and form situated attachments. Kurien’s (2001) study of “Non-Resident Indians” (NRIs) is an interesting variation on the themes described by Williams (2007) and Ehrkamp and Nagel (2012). Her work concerns NRI’s engaged in Indian religio-political movements fueled by competing visions of Indian identity. She argues that subjects’ engagement with their immediate environment has been conditioned by “homeland” identities, in which religious identity, politics, and culture are very much intertwined. As opposed to enabling engagement with American socio-political ways of being, as in Ehrkamp and Nagel’s example, religious identity became a way to engage with Indian identity politics through American multicultural politics. Viewed together, these examples demonstrate that faith-based social networks have the potential to bridge the multiply situated contexts, identities, and belonging of immigrants.

Conclusions

Religion knits together ideas and places (Orsi 1999). Many religions—certainly Christianity—have an ethic of fellowship and universalism; one might even say that community building and place-making are inherent in religious practice and belief. The way a faith-based community takes shape is contingent

upon the people (and their places) within it, meaning that as social entities they become sites of negotiation. Such communities are thus implicated in the process of integration for many immigrants to the U.S., but not in any straightforward way. Given the variety of roles religion and faith-based communities can play in immigrant integration⁶, I focus in this thesis on the question of acculturation—of an integration trajectory that moves toward the “mainstream”—and how religious social fields can facilitate this process or run contrary to it. I argue that it is also possible for both to occur at once, as immigrants negotiate belonging by creating identities that are distinct yet nonthreatening to the mainstream. Religion can indeed, as Kurien (2001) writes, “sustain immigrant ethnicity” in America; but, depending on specific community dynamics, it can also afford access to whiteness, as the findings of this study will demonstrate.

What follows is a case study of a faith-based community, with an immigrant population within it, that seems to defy several major generalizations of the functions of immigrant identity and community building. To understand why, you have to look at the place itself, and how geographies of elsewhere are represented and engaged with in this context by virtue of the nature of this place and this community.

⁶ Not all of which are necessarily geared toward integration into a white (Christian) mainstream. See, for instance, Hondagneu-Sotelo (2006).

Chapter 3

Methodology

This thesis explores immigrant integration from a place-based perspective, focusing on the ways in which places of worship function as sites of community building and negotiation with mainstream social categories, norms, and discourses. The research is centered on a qualitative case study of Saint Rafka Maronite Church in Greer, South Carolina, but also includes perspectives of parishioners of Saint Mary's Church in Greenville. I relied primarily on semi-structured interviews with members of Saint Rafka and/or Saint Mary's. Supplementary information was collected through informal conversations and participant observation, as well as through local newspapers and church bulletins. This chapter explains my methods of data collection and analysis and the methodology behind them, beginning with the genealogy of this project.

Preliminary Research

While the bulk of the fieldwork was conducted in March of 2014, my research began in March of 2013 with preliminary work on the history of Saint Mary's Roman Catholic Church and its relationship to Greenville's Lebanese-origin population. This project involved primarily archival research as well as two informal interviews with lifelong parishioners, one of whom was employed by Saint Mary's.

I visited Greenville on two separate occasions. On the first trip I was given a tour of the church by one of my interviewees, who also spoke with me about the church's history and his experience growing up as a European-American attending what was at the time widely considered a Lebanese church. I was also able to look through Saint Mary's "archives" (several boxes of newspaper articles, church bulletins, and other documents spanning the 20th century), which gave me an idea of the involvement of Lebanese families in the church, particularly in the 1950s -1970s. I returned a second time to speak with a parishioner from one of the old Lebanese-origin families, who would become an important contact as well as a repeat interviewee for my 2014 project. Additional sources were gathered from the University of South Carolina's South Caroliniana Library, historiographies on Greenville, online newspaper archives, and Saint Mary's website.

It was during my second 2013 trip that I learned about the existence of Saint Rafka Maronite Catholic Church which, I was told, began as a mostly Lebanese church but had evolved into something quite different. Intrigued, I searched for newspaper articles and looked through the information on Saint Rafka's website, where I found bulletins for the past year, a history of the church written by one of its parishioners, and a commemoration booklet from 2010, when the mission moved into its own building and became a full-fledged church. A letter included in the commemoration booklet written by the church's priest, Father Bartholomew Leon (known as Father Bart), was the only source out of these that also hinted at the ethnic diversity within Saint Rafka that my Saint

Mary's contact had described. Based on what I had learned about both churches, I drafted a proposal for a more formal research project on the subject to be conducted in the spring of 2014.

Research Design

This case presented a real-world instance in which to investigate theoretical questions of place-making, immigrant identity, and the social and political functions of faith-based communities. Given my interest in this particular site, I decided to conduct an intrinsic case study, "...in which the focus is on the case itself...because the case presents an unusual or unique situation" (Creswell 2007, 74). The premise structuring my research design was that the interaction between Greenville's Lebanese-origin Catholics and the Saint Rafka community was a product of contextually specific historical, cultural, and political geographies that would not be generalizable to a wider population, but could inform theoretical discussions about integration, identity, and community. The research was also intended to draw attention to lesser explored avenues in migration studies and Arab American studies. Although my knowledge of Saint Rafka Church was limited at the time, it was clear that there were social relationships and practices shaping this community beyond what might be inferred from the broader Maronite and Lebanese identities in which it was situated.

Particularized Research Questions

In this section, I will present my research questions as they were originally proposed, and then briefly discuss changes in terminology that developed over the course of my fieldwork. The purpose of this research was twofold—first, to flesh out the relationship between Saint Mary's, with its Lebanese-origin parishioners, and Saint Rafka, with its more diverse parish; and second, to unpack the multiple identities and attachments being negotiated through individuals' involvement with Saint Rafka Maronite Catholic church. The research questions for this project were as follows:

1. How do Greenville's Arab Christians engage with multiple identities through participation in faith-based communities?

Within this question, I was concerned with (a) how Saint Mary's and Saint Rafka are represented as institutions, and whether their public images reflected any engagement with particular identities situated beyond Greenville; (b) the present-day relationship between the two churches; and (c) to what extent a global Catholic identity was relevant to parishioners.

2. How, and to what extent, do members of Saint Rafka Church align their identities within the ethnic, cultural, and political orientation of the international Maronite leadership?

Within this question, I was concerned with (a) how Saint Rafka parishioners articulate their relationship to a Maronite Catholic identity; (b) whether events in the Arab world inform parishioners' notions of belonging; and (c) how

participation in Saint Rafka Church connects parishioners to Arab world, and/or specifically Lebanese, politics and culture.

3. How do narratives of involvement with an Arab Christian church reflect individuals' notions of their religious, ethno-national, and cultural identity?

Within this question, I was concerned with (a) to what extent Lebanese-origin parishioners of Saint Mary's are also affiliated or involved with Saint Rafka Church; (b) which aspects of Saint Rafka Church motivate parishioners to worship there; and (c) how the clergy and parishioners adapt the overarching Maronite identity of the church to suit the community's specific dynamics and needs.

As the project progressed, it became necessary to revise aspects of the research design. For instance, my initial geographical frame of reference was the city of Greenville. In retrospect, this was likely because my first exposure to this site was focused on Saint Mary's Church, which is indeed located in Greenville. However, this project involves people and places spanning upstate South Carolina. Additionally, and most importantly, I now use the term 'Middle Eastern' in reference to my participants as opposed to 'Arab,' which I used in my pre-fieldwork proposal. This is because, as I will discuss in chapter four, most of my participants referred to themselves as either Middle Eastern or their particular nationality.

Data Collection

Fieldwork for this project was conducted in March of 2014 over four site visits: three day trips, and one full week in which I stayed in Greenville, all with the intention of accommodating my participants' schedules. My primary research objective was to gain, to the extent that was possible, an understanding of my case based on the perspectives of people within it. Thus, my primary source of data was collected through semi-structured interviews and informal conversations with parishioners of Saint Rafka Church and Lebanese-origin parishioners of Saint Mary's who also had some affiliation with Saint Rafka. All of these exchanges were in English, and the majority of them were recorded (see table 3.1). Those that were not recorded were unanticipated conversations, in which I would attempt when appropriate to guide the conversation to stories about immigration histories and church involvement. In those situations, I either wrote down or recorded my recollections of these conversations immediately afterward. The advantage of using a semi-structured interview format as the primary source of data was that it allowed me to come prepared with several guiding questions specific to my research questions, yet also allowed the flexibility for conversations to develop organically. This approach also gave me the freedom to pursue additional themes that revealed themselves over the course of the interview. Interview data was augmented by participant observation in the form of three consecutive Sundays attending mass at Saint Rafka Church, as well as informal interactions at post-mass coffee hours and other outside settings. Most of my formal interviews were completed during the

first two day trips and the week days that I stayed in Greenville. This proved advantageous, as I had developed a degree of familiarity and rapport with the Saint Rafka community and was able to use the subsequent two Sundays attending mass to socialize, check in with previously interviewed participants, and meet new parishioners.

I initially proposed a process of snowball sampling, relying on my Saint Mary's contacts in addition to contacting Father Bart of Saint Rafka Church as key informants. I did engage in some snowball sampling; however I reached some of my semi-structured interview participants in a different way. Before attending my first Mass at Saint Rafka I met with Father Bart to introduce myself and my project. After that first service, during announcements, he called me up to do the same for the parish. At the coffee hour following mass, several people approached me and volunteered to be interviewed. I came to discover that many of them were people who have been highly involved with the church for a number of years, some since its beginning. In speaking with them I would learn more about the social network of Saint Rafka and continue the process of snowballing contacts.

Interviews were mostly conducted at a location of the participant's choosing: a mixture of home visits, coffee shop meetings, and interviews during Saint Rafka coffee hours. All interviews were individual save for one instance in which I had the unexpected opportunity to interview two members of the same family at once. In addition, my consistent, if short-lived, presence at Mass and

coffee hour presented several opportunities to speak with members of the church I was unable to interview formally.

This research was conducted under considerable time and financial restrictions that limited my ability to access via accumulated rapport individuals who were perhaps more reluctant to speak with me. Most of the people I spoke with were people I would characterize as key informants, involved in the initial establishment and/or normal operations of Saint Rafka church, as well as people who are prominent members of large families. There are benefits as well as drawbacks to this kind of sample. On the one hand, prominent church members are well versed in topics such as the church's history, daily operations, and are themselves significant contributors to the overall social dynamics of the community. Since many of my interviewees were members of prominent Middle Eastern-origin families who attend Saint Mary's and/or Saint Rafka, they also had extensive social networks and were knowledgeable about family immigration histories.

On the other hand, relying mostly on key informants may have produced a representative sample that is to some extent misleading in its homogeneity. For instance, most of the Middle Eastern immigrants I interviewed had lived in the United States for 20 years or more. There are more recent immigrants, particularly refugees from Iraq; however, I was unable to speak with most of them because I am not fluent in Arabic. Additionally, most of the people I spoke with were middle aged to older adults. While the 35 and under population at Saint Rafka is smaller, their perspectives would have been a valuable addition,

especially concerning the experiences of second generation immigrants.

Unfortunately I had to complete my research just as I had begun to meet parishioners from that age group.

As previously stated, a number of my interviewees were people who I first met at church and who volunteered to be interviewed at a later date. Although I did also engage in snowball sampling, many of my participants were self-selected, which affects my perception of the Saint Rafka community. To that end, though Saint Rafka is still a relatively small parish, my sample is not representative of the entire community, and can only be regarded as a subset of perspectives. Still, the high degree of consistency in details and opinions from these interviews, and the fact that I was able to speak with most of those identified to me as key informants, renders this sample a notable representation of how parishioners understand and articulate individual and collective identities in relation to their involvement with Saint Rafka Church.

The most challenging group to access were Lebanese-origin Greenville natives from Saint Mary's, for a number of reasons. First, it must be acknowledged that the majority of my efforts were directed toward the Saint Rafka parish, since a primary driver of this research was to uncover factors that bring together such a diverse group of people under a seemingly specific religious identity. Additionally, the old Greenville Lebanese community is considerably more diffuse than the Saint Rafka parish, and I was told that many people have left the area. People from this group were also more reluctant to speak with me for various personal reasons, and some declined to be

interviewed. I was, however, able to interview two people from two different families who were mentioned to me by a number of other participants.

It should be noted that my interviews did not include detailed perspectives from non-Middle Eastern community members despite the fact that this population is increasing in the parish.¹ The decision to focus on Middle Eastern immigrants and descendants was made out of a combination of theoretical and practical considerations. First and foremost, my aim was to address concepts relating mainly to immigrants. This case presented me with the opportunity to explore in depth the identities of people with connections (both material and imagined) to multiple places. However, studying the multifaceted nature of this community also presented the risk of my project becoming unruly very quickly. The research I present here could serve as a springboard into a much longer ethnographic study, but this was beyond the scope of the both my available resources and the objective of this research as a component of my master's course of study. If I were to continue this research in the future there would be several possible expansions and improvements, which I will discuss in the conclusion.

Analysis

At the conclusion of my fieldwork, I had accumulated three types of data: recorded semi-structured interviews lasting between 25 minutes and 2 hours and 15 minutes (on average 45-60 minutes), my written and recorded notes of

¹ By Father Bart's estimation, however, Middle Eastern people still constitute the majority of the parish.

observations, reflections, and of unrecorded conversations, and documents (mostly collected in 2013) for providing both context and additional validation of information related to me by community members. The data were organized and analyzed using the qualitative research software QSR Nvivo10. I began transcribing recorded interviews in their entirety concurrently with fieldwork, and subsequently uploaded the transcripts into Nvivo for coding. I did not, however, use the software's auto-coding option, instead opting to go through each transcript and develop my own codes. My coding strategy was to begin with a larger number of more specific codes. Upon coding all of the transcripts in this manner, I then went through the series of codes I had developed and grouped them into several overarching themes. The advantage of using software was that I was able centrally manage the data and easily juxtapose different sources to look for common themes. For example, I was able to view in aggregate the excerpts from all the interview transcripts that I had assigned a particular code.

Interviews were given with the understanding that I would take every precaution to keep participants' identities confidential. As I reviewed my primary sources and began to piece together the dynamics of the Saint Rafka parish, however, I became aware of the challenge of maintaining informant confidentiality in a small community. An example of this is my decision to refrain from disclosing the particular sect of non-Maronite participants. Though the church is attended by people from a range of religious backgrounds, some sects are represented in much smaller numbers than others. As a result, although this

information is significant it can also be distinctive, especially when paired with a participant's nationality.

Researcher Reflexivity

A significant advantage, and challenge, of qualitative research is that the researcher is the primary instrument of investigation (England 1994; Falconer Al-Hindi and Kawabata 2002). Qualitative methodologies have become increasingly recognized and utilized for their ability to elicit rich insights into complex social processes that cannot be gained through quantitative measures alone. Feminist and post-structural scholars, however, also caution that it is essential to challenge positivist claims of objectivity and acknowledge the power dynamics in which research takes place (Sultana 2007). In doing so, it follows that what we produce as researchers is colored by our own "biographies," and is only ever a partial representation of what we are studying (England 1994). Therefore, continually reflecting on my subjectivity and positionality in this project was important for both owning my interpretations and better understanding their origins.

Although I would not characterize my research as ethnography, this methodology resonates with my personal epistemology, so I incorporated elements of ethnographic research where I could. An important part of doing so was acknowledging that I was an agent in creating my primary data, and reflecting on my interactions with participants through journaling. Now, as I represent the data I collected for this thesis, it is additionally important to discuss

how my subjectivity has affected the way I interpreted my findings. It is therefore necessary at this point to address my stake in this project.

I am half “American” (European-origin) and half Lebanese (fourth generation, from a Christian background). Although my Lebanese heritage is not significant in my everyday life, it is something in which I have a deep interest. It is also something that I wish I was more connected to, which in turn has influenced my academic pursuits. I was drawn to my research site initially because I wanted to learn about the history of Lebanese immigrants who had settled in South around the time my ancestors would have settled in the Midwest. The research subsequently evolved into a project focused primarily on the present-day relationships and identities underpinning the Middle Eastern Christian community tied to Saint Rafka Church; however my pre-existing interest in my roots never dissipated.

As a student and first-time researcher, the process of monitoring my positionality involved learning experientially about what I had been taught about conducting qualitative research. A good example of this is how I negotiated my insider/outsider status during fieldwork. While my age, gender, and socioeconomic status are undoubtedly also important to my positionality, the aspects of my identity that were the most immediately relevant in the field were my nationality and my ethnic background. I was born and have lived my entire life the United States. My first two interviews were with people who also were born and have lived their entire lives in the United States. I had learned about and anticipated the importance of being mindful of reflexivity at the research

proposal stage; but these interactions with people who are relatively like me left my perception of myself unchallenged. Once I began interacting with people from a range of national and ethnic backgrounds, however, it became clear that I was experiencing and engaging in some of the processes of shifting identity that I was there to study. Depending on with whom I was speaking, I would be characterized as an American, as Lebanese, or as Lebanese American, often all within the same interview.

It would be disingenuous, however, to say that these identities were imposed on me by others. I was consciously and unconsciously performing them in context-specific ways to relate to my participants. England (1994, 84) describes fieldwork as, "...a dialogical process in which the research situation is structured by both research and the person being researched." Indeed, my identity over the course of the research was being co-created by myself and my participants through our interactions. This process has inevitably influenced how I understand these people and their places, and how I will represent them in this thesis.

Related to this aforementioned process is my positionality as a white American with access to an "ethnic" identity. The phenomenon of symbolic ethnicity (Waters 1990) is something I have observed and experienced firsthand within my family. My father, who is third generation Lebanese, characterizes himself as a "middle-aged white guy" like any other. He does not conceal the fact that he is Lebanese, but this identity has little meaning in his everyday life. In contrast, though I am only half Lebanese, I seek out ways to learn about and

connect to this heritage. Even so, being Lebanese has little impact on how I go about my day or interact with those around me. I am afforded all the societal privileges of being a white middle-class American. For my family, who have been in the United States for over a century, this ethnic identity has largely become one we can take or leave as we like. I will discuss this further in chapter five as an example of relational processes of identity formation.

Conclusions

As I reviewed transcripts, field notes, and journal entries within the frame of my research questions, several things became clear: First, participants not only engaged with multiple identities by participating in faith-based communities, they engaged with these identities by actively creating and/or shaping faith-based communities. Second, in practice, Maronite identity is flexible in the context of this case, accommodating a number of confessional, national, and ethnic identities. Third, religious identities and institutions were considered by my participants to be important links to Middle Eastern heritage and culture. Furthermore, their understandings of this heritage and culture were shaped by the fact that they are Christians. This brings me to my final point; something I had not initially considered but which jumped off the pages of my transcripts. Whatever the boundaries of the Arabic-speaking Christian community in the upstate, to label them “Arab Christians” was incorrect.

Table 3.1: Parishioner Interviewees

Respondent*	Type of Interview	Attends Saint Mary's	Attends Saint Rafka	Identifies as Maronite	Country of Origin	Years lived in the U.S. (approx.)
1	Semi-structured	X		N	U.S. (Middle Eastern)	American born
2	Semi-structured		X	Y	U.S. (Middle Eastern)	American born
3	Semi-structured		X	N	Iraq	≥10
4	Semi-structured		X	N	Lebanon	15-20
5	Semi-structured		X	Y	Lebanon	15-20
6	Semi-structured	X	X	N	Iraq	≤30
7	Semi-structured		X	Y	Lebanon	≤30
8	Semi-structured		X	N	Iraq	≥10
9	Semi-structured	X		N	U.S. (Middle Eastern)	American born
10	Informal**		X	N	U.S. (Middle Eastern)	American born
11	Informal		X	N	Iraq	≤30
12	Informal	X	X	Y	Lebanon	≤30
13	Informal		X	Y	Lebanon	≤30
14	Informal		X	N	U.S. (European)	American born
15	Informal		X	N	U.S. (European)	American born
16	Informal		X	N	U.S. (European)	American born
17	Informal		X	Y	U.S. (Middle Eastern)	American born

*Identification numbers were assigned based on the order in which I interviewed participants

**Informal interviews were conducted during Saint Rafka's post-mass coffee hour

Chapter 4

“Arab” American

Post-interview recording, March 11, 2014:

I'm finding that people who identify as Lebanese Christians do not like the term Arab. I mean I can't really base this off of talking to two people, but they do not like that term *at all*. They do not identify as Arab American and I don't know if that's a generational thing...I'll be interested to talk to [other interviewees] and get their opinions cause they're actually from the Middle East.

Underlying the study of how immigrants become incorporated into a receiving society is the question of what happens when migration throws together different ways of being in and understanding the world. The short answer is that it depends. In the United States, pluralistic identity politics encourage immigrants to become legible by adopting an ethnic American persona (Williams 2007).

Some immigrants actively co-construct these identities, using them as entrance into dominant social and political fields (Yeh and Lama 2006). However, some would-be “co-ethnics,” who do not identify in this way may nevertheless become perceived and/or claimed as a member of that group. This is the case in the “Arab American community,” whose narratives—not unintentionally—encompass the entire past and present of Arabic-speaking people in the U.S. The diversity and divisions among Arabic-speaking immigrants and their descendants still operate beneath the surface of the secular, pan-ethnic Arab American identity. One of my interviewees gave this example: “In the United States you have racial issues. In the Middle East we have religious issues. And very frankly Muslims

and Christians- It's always gonna be; it's been there for 1500 years" (Respondent 5). His matter-of-fact comment was typical of a sentiment I heard over and over again in my research: there are fundamental differences between Middle Eastern Christians and their Muslim counterparts. While the Arab American identity is unifying for some, my interviewees' near unanimous rejection of the term indicates that it can be alienating for others. In short, Arab American is a contested identity.

For Middle Eastern immigrants, becoming American also means navigating Arabness as it is imagined in the American context, which is not always an easy path to "mainstream" acceptance. Middle Eastern Americans occupy a unique and tenuous position on the racial and ethnic spectrums in the U.S., being federally classified as white, ethnically classified as Arab, and for some, racialized as Muslim, regardless of whether individuals accept any of these identities themselves. In this chapter I juxtapose the history of Middle Eastern immigration to the United States and the development of the Arab American community with interview data to examine layers of meaning behind Arabness from the perspective of my Middle Eastern Christian participants.

Negotiating Ethnicity in America

Assimilation scholarship has tended to distinguish between "ethnic" (immigrant) groups and a broader, unmarked "receiving society" which presumably lacks a sense of identity and belonging. Rather than a dichotomy of ethnic and distinct vs. assimilated and nondescript, however, it is more useful to

envision complex fields of identity and difference in which people conceive of themselves and others as belonging to certain communities. Social norms and practices give substance and shape to these categories.

Immigrant identities and communities are neither monolithic nor static. Establishing and maintaining them involves choices of action and inaction, and negotiations of numerous categories, some generated “there” and others generated “here” in the United States. Such identities are created over time and draw from what came before, so it is important to consider migration histories and the relationships between different generations of immigrants (Jimenez 2010). Arab American identity is a poignant example of an ethnic identity whose formation and contestation are tied to the interactions between different, diverse immigrant cohorts. To understand the divergent identity narratives within the “Arab American community” thus necessitates delving into the history of Middle Eastern immigration to the United States.

Becoming White

The social and racial positioning of Arabic-speaking people in the United States has been in flux since the first of two major waves of emigration from the Middle East to the Americas that began in the late 1800s¹. Similar to that of their European contemporaries, the history of “Syrian” immigrants is held as a classic American success story of foreigners overcoming hardship to adapt and

¹ Middle Eastern immigrants also settled in South American countries during this period. More thorough accounts of the geographical extent of Syrian-Lebanese immigration can be found in Hourani and Shehadi (1992) as well as Gualtieri (2009).

ultimately thrive in their adopted country. The bigger picture, however, is more complicated.

Upon arriving in the United States, Syrian immigrants were faced with an unfamiliar societal order based on race. With relatively light skin and Caucasian features, Syrians had a high degree of social capital compared to other non-European immigrants and African Americans (Gualtieri 2009). That most of these immigrants were Christian further improved their chances of assimilating into white America. This is not to say, however, that Syrian immigrants were automatically accepted. In *Between Arab and White* (2009), historian Sarah Gualtieri considers the tenuous racial positioning of Syrian Americans and chronicles their efforts to become legally Caucasian and therefore eligible for naturalization. This was accomplished politically through lobbying and legal challenges, culminating with the 1914 appellate court case *Dow v. United States*. The presiding judge sided with the petitioner George Dow, giving the Syrian community legal precedent for claiming a white racial identity. While legal whiteness was crucial for accessing legal citizenship, it did not have as much immediate impact at the local level. Gualtieri (2009) notes that Syrian immigrants still struggled to become socially accepted, particularly in the Jim Crow South. Nevertheless, Americanization within one or two generations was common among this wave of immigrants. “Settled in the various regions of the country,” wrote eminent Arab American historian Alixa Naff, “the Lebanese adopted the respective social attitudes, manners and regional accents” (1992, 150). The Lebanese in Upstate South Carolina were no exception. I spoke with members

of two old Greenville Lebanese² families who told me that, for their parents and grandparents, acceptance by the wider community took both time and hard work, but ultimately paid off. As one woman said:

This is a thing I know about Lebanese people: even though they did experience that isolation- they were not accepted- as they became part of the community, and worked and were successful, [they] just became Americans...[Today] they're accepted, they're part of things. A person from an old Lebanese family in Greenville would be just like any other old Greenville family (Respondent 1).

As much as their parents worked to become part of the wider community, they worked harder to instill Americanness in their children. A common trend among first wave immigrants was that fluency in Arabic disappeared quickly, within one or two generations, reflecting the immersion of these subsequent generations within mainstream American culture. This was the case in the Lebanese side of my family, and it was the case for the Lebanese American people I interviewed:

Respondent 9: My mother and father never taught us Arabic; they spoke English to us. The only time they spoke Arabic was when they didn't want us to know what they were talkin' about! If they had spoken Arabic to us we would have learned it and that's a mistake. That is a big mistake. I wish I could speak the language. I really do; I know the cuss words though.

Amelia: [laughs] That's what my dad says.

R9: Yeah he knows the cuss words? [laughs] I know the cuss words. You tell your dad he and I know the same thing!

A: Why do you think that they only spoke English to you?

² Most first wave immigrants were from the region that would become Lebanon, which complicates terminology. Immigrants from this group are referred to as Syrian, Syrian-Lebanese, or Lebanese. My participants, who were the children and grandchildren of immigrants from this period, identified themselves and their cohorts as Lebanese, so this is how I will refer to them.

R9: I don't know. I don't know I guess maybe they wanted us to have the American culture too. Probably that would be my guess is they wanted—I think maybe my father wanted us to go out and, and learn their ways so we could kinda help him truthfully as I see it now.

This was how another Lebanese American interviewee described her upbringing:

[My mother's sister] had a son who was a professor of English at a university and he said, "Aunt ____, now don't you talk to those kids in Arabic cause when they go to school they're gonna have an accent!" So my mom never spoke Arabic to us. We'd hear her but they wouldn't answer me in Arabic, they'd say English. No I was raised very American. Mother she's very modern, she was wonderful (Respondent 2).

For the modern-day descendants of Syrian-Lebanese immigrants, ethnicity in the common sense of the word—that is, cultural distinctiveness—has become largely “symbolic” (Waters 1990). First wave Syrian Lebanese immigrants have over time become incorporated into the white American “mainstream.” At the same time, some descendants of these immigrants (myself included) resist being classified as simply American, which feels homogenizing, by also identifying with cultural aspects of their ethnic backgrounds. Although this is reminiscent of the European “white ethnics” studied by Waters (1990), the Lebanese-origin people I spoke with understood their ethnic identities as entangled with social practices that render them more retainable than those of European-origin Americans. For instance, the woman quoted above went on to say that, though she was raised “very American,”

I'm *proud* of my family. I can remember them doing the *dabke* and playin' the- my dad used to play the [oud] at picnics and they loved to have a good time! And that's what's nice. You don't see that in the American culture; you don't see families comin' together and—like if they're Irish, they forget! The Irish are gone, the French are gone, they don't—I think the Lebanese keep more of their culture than anybody else, you see, and yet they meshed (Respondent 2)

Among the three Lebanese-origin Americans I spoke with, contact with family in Lebanon had dissolved with the deaths of grandparents and parents. None of them spoke Arabic or had been to Lebanon, though all expressed pride in their heritage and identified as Lebanese, remembering their roots through practices such as cooking Arabic food, dancing dabke, and attending Maronite Catholic services.³ Some descendants of first wave immigrants still claim ethnic identity in this way; however many whose families have lived in the United States for several generations simply identify as white (David 2007; Gualtieri 2009).⁴ That they can take or leave ethnic identity implies a different relationship to race and ethnicity than that of many Middle Eastern immigrants who arrived later, though all remain legally white in the United States.

The Second Wave and the Racialization of Religion

Immigration to the U.S. diminished after World War I due to increasingly strict regulations imposed first by the Immigration Act of 1917 and then by the Johnson-Reid Immigration Act of 1924. These restrictions would be lifted with the Hart-Celler Act of 1965, just prior to the onset of the second major wave of Middle Eastern immigration (David 2007). This new cohort came from a wider array of countries, was generally better educated, and included as many Muslims

³ Involvement with Saint Rafka Maronite Catholic Church varied amongst these participants, from being highly involved to only occasionally involved.

⁴ The official classification for Middle Eastern people in the United States is white. Although there have been attempts by Arab American advocacy groups to add a separate census category, their efforts have so far been unsuccessful. Even so, it is questionable whether an “Arab” census category would be accepted and used by some Arabic-speaking groups such as Iraqi Chaldeans and Lebanese Christians.

as Christians. Before the 1960s, Middle Eastern Americans tended to distinguish themselves by country of origin, such as “Lebanese American.” This changed with the escalation of anti-Arab sentiment during the 1967 Arab-Israeli War (David 2007). Following the model of political movements in both the U.S. (“ethnic awakenings”) and the Arab World (pan-Arabism), the moniker “Arab American” allowed Arabic-speaking immigrants and their descendants to reconcile different national, cultural, and religious backgrounds. Naber (2005) describes this as a kind of “strategic essentialism,” by which Arab American activists could coalesce under one pan-ethnic label in concert with American multicultural identity politics. A number of Arab American political and social organizations were established in the second half of the 20th century that helped solidify this ethnic community presence. A principal undertaking of organizations such as the Association of Arab American University Graduates (1967-2007), the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (est. 1980), and the Arab American Institute (est. 1985) was and continues to be countering negative media stereotypes of Arabs. Other activities include providing social services for immigrants, publishing educational material about Arab American history and culture, and lobbying for Arab interests domestically and in the Arab World (Nagel and Ayoob 2014).⁵

⁵ Another interesting function of such community organizing is the Arab American Institute's efforts to gather and report demographic data concerning the Arab American population. These data are derived from the American Community Survey conducted by the U.S. Census and adjusted by AAI and the polling firm Zogby International. For an example of this work, see AAI's “National Arab American Demographics” report on their website at <http://b.3cdn.net/aai/44b17815d8b386bf16_v0m6iv4b5.pdf>.

The idea of an Arab American community was intended in part to bridge confessional divides among Middle Eastern Americans; however, rather than supplanting sectarian identities, “Arab American” coexists with them. Religious identity has additionally shaped Arab American identity in the sense that Arab American activism often responds to the othering of Muslims in American society. There is a prevalent conflation of “Muslim” and “Arab” in the United States, accompanied by the notion that Muslims/Arabs are a threat to national security (Nagel and Staeheli 2004; Cainkar 2009). Especially since the September 11th terrorist attacks, Arab American identity has become a rallying point for civil rights activists due to the discrimination experienced by Muslim Arabs in particular⁶. Claiming rights and space through Arab American activism involves portraying the “community” as deeply rooted and thoroughly American, drawing from the history of first wave Syrians and melding it with the more recent history of second wave immigrants. Doing so has offered a way to gain broader legibility and acceptance for Muslim Arabs by asserting both intragroup unity and a pro-American orientation (Ajrouch and Jamal 2007). However, Arabic-speaking Christians often have different relationships to Arab/American identities, and different experiences of belonging and/or marginalization in the Arab World as well as in the United States (Robson 2011; Awad 2010). As a result, many Christians from the Middle East do not identify as Arabs or as Arab Americans.

⁶ It should be noted that ethnicity as a relatively voluntary mode of identity was the primary focus of my study. I did not ask respondents to comment explicitly about their sense of their position in racialized hierarchies. However I did ask whether they felt accepted in South Carolina and the U.S. more broadly. Although this is not unequivocal proof that such dynamics do not exist for them, no interviewees expressed feeling unaccepted. Based on a number of factors- that they are all Christian, light skinned, middle class or above- I have little reason to believe that the people I interviewed are unable to access the social privileges of being white in America.

While this is well documented in academic literature, it was also told to me by nearly every person I interviewed.

“I am not an Arab.”

Those I interviewed mostly took issue with the term “Arab American” and being categorized as Arab, which they did not see as a pan-ethnic label, but rather one referring to a specific ethno-religious group. They cited different lineages (“we were here before the Arabs invaded”); different value systems; and different cultural norms (Christians being more in line with Western sensibilities). It has been demonstrated elsewhere that Middle Eastern Christians often do not identify as Arabs or Arab Americans (Adjrouch and Jamal 2007; David 2007; Gualtieri 2009; Awad 2010; Naber and Stifler 2013), so these findings are not novel in themselves. The significance lies instead in participants’ consistency on this point, which demonstrates that this phenomenon, documented among much larger samples than mine, is also relevant to my case study. While it is true that calling all Middle Eastern immigrants Arab Americans is an overgeneralization, challenging this perception by simply saying that Middle Eastern Christians reject this label is similarly vague. This case presents an opportunity to dig deeper into the question of what informs this rejection of Arab identity and, additionally, to understand the alternative ways Middle Eastern Christians construct community.

In general, the American-born people I spoke with did not identify as Arabs because their foreign-born parents and grandparents did not do so. Growing up, they were taught that, as Christians, they had a different lineage

from Arabs; that their families' linguistic and cultural similarities with Arabs were the product of centuries of Muslim Arab dominance in the Middle East. My discussion with this Lebanese American woman on the subject is worth quoting at length, as it demonstrates the kind of explanation I received by both Lebanese-origin Americans and immigrants alike:

Amelia: Do you identify as Arab American?

Respondent 1: No.

A: No; why not?

R1: Because I've always been told that we're not Arabs; we're Arabic-speaking people, but we're not Arabs. When I think of Arabs, I think of the other Middle Eastern countries. And I just feel that Lebanon is not- perhaps Syria as well- they're not Arabs.

A: Growing up is that what your Lebanese family—

R1: Right.

A: Did they ever explain to you the reason for that difference?

R1: Yeah- well sort of- because we're Christian...because of our history; how far we go back and, I mean my granddaddy would talk a lot about the history of the Lebanese people...

A: Could you tell me some about that- the things that he told you?

R1: Well, the one thing he always talked about is that we're descended from the Phoenicians. So much so that my aunt, when she was little and went to school and they said what's your nationality, she wrote Phoenician! Um...just that we're, we're just different from the Arab people. And I don't mean that in any kind of a negative way; I know people who are Arabs, who are Muslim, and they're fine good people, you know; it's just a different history and heritage.

The idea that the Lebanese are not Arab but rather are descended from Phoenicians- known in academic literature as “Phoenicianism”- is associated with Lebanese Maronites in particular and the Lebanese national narrative constructed in the early 20th century.⁷ This woman’s framing of Lebanese identity was passed down from her grandparents, who, like many early Lebanese immigrants in Greenville, were Maronite Catholics from the village of Zgharta in northern Lebanon. As mentioned in chapter one, the Maronite Catholic Church was an important in the formation of the Lebanese nation state, which French colonizers intended to be a Christian country in the Muslim dominated region. Thus, for the people I spoke with, being Lebanese was implicitly and explicitly associated with being Christian, and with a narrative that claims Middle Eastern roots, but in a way that is distinct from Muslim Arab identity. I heard similar narratives from first generation Lebanese immigrants as well:

Amelia: So does the term Arab American mean anything to you?

Respondent 7: As Lebanese some of us—some Christian Lebanese don’t like to be referred to as Arabs. And I don’t either because I think there’s quite a distinction between our culture—not to say the religion itself but—the way we look at the world, our culture, the arts the way that people...look at each other, you know. The way to be empathetic is different than other Arabs. I mean the Muslims in Lebanon tend to be more like the Lebanese—a lot like more Lebanese than Arab but they don’t wanna admit it they wanna, hang on the Arabic language, the Koran, you know to their religious roots. Well our religious roots are not with the Arab invasion you know that happened. So, we look at it as an Arab invasion I mean, in Lebanon until the late 1880s, most of the Mountain spoke Syriac, did not speak Arabic. Yeah, so I prefer not to identify myself as an Arab if I can help it. And the other thing is like, there is an organization called the Southern Federation, familiar with it?

⁷ For a more comprehensive discussion of Phoenicianism and its origins, see Asher Kaufman’s article “Phoenicianism: The Formation of an Identity in Lebanon in 1920” (complete citation in bibliography).

A: No...

R7: You should look it up; their website is SFSLAC.

A: Oh wait is that the Southern Federation of Syrian Lebanese American Clubs? I am familiar with it.

R7: I'm a member because I am a member of the ____ Phoenician Club, which is under that umbrella. So, a lot of churches and clubs within that resent the term "Syrian" and the name because they don't want to be identified as *Syrian* Lebanese. But at the turn of last century, that's how Lebanon was under the Ottoman Empire; you go back to Ellis Island records and see "Beirut, Turkey," or "Beirut, Syria," or Beirut—you hardly see Beirut, Lebanon. And the Lebanese were just Syrian Lebanese. So yeah, there's another point of identity crisis that we have!

A century ago, "Syrian" was the term immigrants from the region that would become Lebanon identified themselves in the United States. However in the present day Syria and Lebanon have distinct national borders, and Lebanon has its own national narrative that informs contemporary Lebanese immigrants' distaste for being labeled as Syrians. This "identity crisis" is therefore indicative of a convergence of multiple historic and geographic contexts.

Rejection of an Arab identity was not exclusive to people with Lebanese ancestry. A difference in heritage—really a difference in ethnicity—was also claimed by Iraqi immigrants from non-Maronite backgrounds. For instance, this man notes a difference in religion, related to a separate lineage: "If you look at the history? We're not Arabs. We're Aramaic. [Christians were in the Middle East] before everybody there [Muslims], and if you look at it, Abraham goes out from Iraq. That's the religion!" (Respondent 8). Another Iraqi immigrant, similar to the Lebanese American interviewees, placed more emphasis on language as indicative of the difference between Arabs and various Eastern Christian

denominations, which he characterized as ethnic groups, stemming from the Aramaic language tradition. When asked if he identified as Arab American, he explained,

Well, we are Arab speaking because of education, but actually most of us who lived in the villages of the Chaldean denominations we did not speak Arabic until we were in school...So no, I think most of the people who come from that region will term themselves as not an Arabic ethnic group but an Arabic speaking group (Respondent 11).

Though people clearly did not feel that they are ethnically Arab, there would be slippage in the way “Arab” was used. The admitted importance of Arabic language and culture to interviewees’ constructions of ethnic identity resulted in an uncomfortable relationship with Arabness. In interviews and casual conversation, the word Arab had multiple meanings, reflecting that convergence of a confessional identity-based social system with a race-based one that Middle Eastern immigrants first encountered generations ago. In the United States, “Arab” is commonly used to describe anyone from the Arab states of the Middle East. That Arab American activists, attempting to assert unity and strength in numbers, pay little attention to the contentiousness of Arab identity further encourages the generalization of Arabness. Thus, in explaining their identities to an American, interviewees would sometimes use the term Arab to distinguish between themselves and non-Middle Eastern people, particularly within their church community. For example, this man explained that, “something that’s very unique about Saint Rafka in particular is that we have such a diverse mix of Arab people” (Respondent 7). Another woman, when describing social life at Saint Rafka, said that, “we have barbeques once a month at the pavilion, you

know, and we do have bingo nights and whatever. And the turnout is mainly Arabs I would say” (Respondent 4).

Nevertheless, the majority of the time it was clear that Arab, for them, was another word for someone from the Middle East who is Muslim, which furthermore implied differing values, ways of being, and genealogies. Immigrant interviewees were more direct in voicing these perceived differences than their American-born counterparts, who distanced themselves from Muslim Arabs in more tentative ways out of concern for sounding prejudiced. This did not seem to concern first generation interviewees, which is something I attribute to the explicit confessionalism in Middle Eastern social and political systems. For instance, when I asked a Lebanese woman whether she identified as Arab, she explained:

Well technically we are because we you know we speak the same language and we grew up over there but, sometimes you feel connected more to like Americans as a Christian; to Americans instead of connected to somebody from the gulf. You don’t feel the connection because they have a totally different way of thinking than us regarding women, regarding kids, regarding multiple wives- this comes into place (Respondent 4).

This man also understood there to be a clear separation between himself and Arabs, stating that,

When you say I’m an Arab American—no, not really. Okay call me Middle Eastern American that’s fine; but I have culture different than yours. Nothing wrong with that, just call me Middle Eastern or Lebanese American. And yeah there is, you know, animosity between what you call Arab American and Lebanese American. See for us when you say “I’m an Arab” to an American [that] means Muslim; it’s almost equivalent (Respondent 5).

In contrast, for this woman, who had no first-hand experience in the Middle East, Middle Eastern confessional politics were less of a reference point than ideas

about Islam prevalent in the United States: “I’m a Lebanese; I don’t identify myself as an Arab. I know I am but uh, I’ve kinda left that behind [because] there’s been so many terrorists with these Arabs and everything else...” (Respondent 9).

Another Lebanese American I spoke with posed a question that I saw my interviewees working through on a daily basis by simply claiming Middle Eastern heritage in America. Her frustration with the way Arab American identity obscured differences between Middle Eastern people was present throughout the interview, as it was for other American and foreign born interviewees. Disliking the idea of an Arab American identity, she asked, “What’s Arab? It’s not a nationality, what is it? It’s a race- what does Arab mean?” (Respondent 2). Her question caught me off guard, as I realized that I had no straightforward answer for her. I settled for, “it’s a term that I feel like people use to mean different things, like each person almost has their own definition.”

Conclusions

As the currency of American multicultural identity politics, ethnicity is not simply imposed but is also reworked, subverted, and contested by immigrants seeking an American identity niche. The idea of the Arab American community was established in such a way. However, it is not simply the product of an American context; nor is it the only ethnic option for Middle Easterners, as this case study demonstrates. “Arab American” and its alternatives have been formed in multiple historic and geographic contexts. As a result, interviewees’

rejection of the term and their reconfigurations of Middle Eastern American identity reflect both the contentedness of Arab identity in Middle Eastern countries as well as the racialization of Arabness in the United States.

Based on the history of Middle Eastern immigrants in the United States and what I learned from my interviewees, the amorphous nature of Arab American identity is the product of a multiply situated, dynamic process of creating belonging. There is a tendency in migration scholarship to naturalize ethnic categories and assume they are meaningful to everyone placed within that category. That a large majority of the people I interviewed reject the Arab American moniker, however, indicates that they create belonging and remember their heritage on different terms. Their narratives suggest that Middle Eastern Christians, because of their religious identity, have the option to claim an ethnic identity that is distinct, yet not so unfamiliar as to create discord with “mainstream” America.

While Christianity asserts difference in the Arab world, it asserts sameness in the United States. For Middle Eastern Christians, ethnic identity does not necessarily deviate from whiteness in the way a more politically mobilized Arab American identity might be given the racialization of Islam in America. I do not mean to suggest, however, that interviewee’s rejection of Arabness was a simple calculation of accessing racial privilege. As many of the quotes in this chapter demonstrated, the religion-based social divisions in the Middle East—broadly the tension between Muslims and Christians—has deep roots which affect how Middle Eastern Christians understand and articulate their

identities even in non-Middle Eastern contexts. This supports the call for more scholarship exploring the diversity among “Arabs” (Robson 2010), and furthermore with an attention to the way the convergence of multiple contexts recreates this category for immigrants.

While it is true that ethnic identities reside in the realm of ideology, they are also utilized in very “real,” everyday interactions. In practice, as lived identities, people imbue these categories with their own meanings. In this case, religious identity was used in a rather rigidly to qualify ethnic identity. At the same time, religious identity would prove flexible in other ways for the sake of community building. The next chapter focuses on how Middle Eastern Christian immigrants and descendants in the Upstate construct meaningful place and community by negotiating large-scale national, ethnic, and religious identities at interpersonal and community levels.

Chapter 5

Complicating Community

Journal entry, Sunday, March 9, 2014:

Just got back from dinner with a group of Saint Rafka parishioners. They are certainly a jovial bunch, and very welcoming. We have all established that I am very much an outsider, however. Language is the biggest indicator of this, although it is also surely apparent in my American mannerisms and my unfamiliarity with Lebanese culture. I have the last name but little else. I felt at the time, and continue to feel currently, more aware of my Americanness than ever before, and self-consciously so. Maybe, in conjunction with American, to say I feel very white would also be appropriate. I can pass for 'ethnic' among European Americans, but here I may as well be fully Irish. This, actually, is an important lesson, and one that may curb my ethnic maintenance tendencies. I don't have a whole lot of ethnic capital here. Just enough to get my foot in the door; but not so much as to make a meaningful connection based on a shared cultural background/understanding.

These were my impressions on first day I was introduced to the Saint Rafka parish during Sunday mass. It was with this experience under my belt that I went, humbled, to conduct my first interview of that week. As it turned out, the feeling that my Lebanese heritage was not a sufficient basis to connect as a fellow "ethnic" depended on the interviewee. I sat down with a Lebanese American woman over coffee and cookies (home visits inevitably involved some sort of dessert). After the formal interview portion, the conversation turned to family history, hers as well as mine. I had felt compelled to downplay my Lebanese heritage around Middle Eastern immigrants ("my dad's family is Lebanese, but we're very American"); but when speaking to people who I

unconsciously perceived to have a similar level of familiarity with Lebanese culture to mine, I did not hesitate to express my interest.

As the project progressed, and I noticed both myself and my participants engaging in this behavior, I came to understand these negotiations of ethnic and national identities as authenticity claims. Identities are formed through a continual exchange between individual self-identification and externally imposed perceptions. We were asserting where and how we belonged in certain groups by emphasizing particular identities relative to those around us.

As chapter four demonstrated, the people I interviewed for this case study did not define themselves as Arab Americans. They constructed alternative narratives of Middle Eastern-ness, anchoring ethnic identity in religious identity. This has in turn become spatialized in the form of Saint Rafka Maronite Catholic Church. However, situated context interjects in participants' re-articulation of ethnicity through this community. In this chapter I consider how places facilitate the formation of different, and sometimes unexpected, groups of people. I will represent the multiple (and multiply situated) identities of the Saint Rafka community through the narratives of people who have and/or continue to help build it.¹ A focus on the daily emplaced interactions that build community reveals the compromises people make in the pursuit of sameness and belonging. Thus,

¹ Saint Mary's Roman Catholic Church had been the center of the small Lebanese immigrant community in the late 19th to mid-20th centuries. Today, Saint Rafka Maronite Catholic Church serves a similar function for Middle Eastern immigrants from several countries. Not everyone I interviewed was a regular attendee of Saint Rafka Maronite Catholic Church, but all of them had or continued to be involved with the church in some capacity. There is also considerable overlap between the two churches and their Middle Eastern parishioners.

collective identities are more flexible than they may seem, as they become reproduced in ways that suit the needs of particular groups of people.

The Idea of Community

If community is anything, it is ambiguous (Mason 2000). The word “community” can be applied to a variety of collective identities at multiple scales and envelop intragroup differences in an idea of sameness. These insights can make the concept seem so fluid as to be ultimately meaningless. However Staeheli (2008) argues that, though they are perpetually “unsettled”, the conflict and divisions within a community do not render it somehow illegitimate.

“Community only needs to be totalizing, essentializing, or to mask difference if we allow it. We can recognize and respect the differentiated nature of community, or at least its possibility” (18). Recognizing the differentiation within communities is particularly salient to the question of how community factors into immigrants’ incorporation into a receiving context. Therefore, although the idea of community is not meaningless, it can be problematic in the way that it is often understood as pre-existing—that is to say, it is important to consider how communities are actively constructed.

The process of negotiating social belonging is constant—even mundane. As my anecdote at the beginning of this chapter demonstrates, the identities from which people draw to engage in this process are situational and context dependent. It follows that communities are collections of individual and group actions geared toward a particular kind of identity work in which individuals

create and position themselves in narratives of “we-ness.” Given this premise, I argue that immigrant integration takes place through community formation; negotiating and recreating “we-ness.”

Immigrant communities are typically imagined as coalescing around nationality. However, this is problematic because it implies that immigrants are predictably set apart from their situated context and disengaged from the construction of their communities. However, the creation and maintenance of collective identities actually facilitates immigrant integration; it just may not look the way assimilation scholars had imagined it. Integration is not a process of acculturation, but one of re-working community boundaries.

For the purpose of discussing immigrant community building it is useful to revisit the concept of transnationalism which, in this case study, I see embedded in the process of constructing belonging in one place based on shared identities that have ties to other places. Considering the ways transnationalism and integration can be simultaneously reactive and agentic reveals more nuanced, ambiguous ties to “home” that are tempered by immediate lived contexts. Immigrant transnationalism is often imagined in collective terms; studying the implications of building social support networks among “coethnics,” as well as the diffusion of these ties in subsequent generations and the tension this can create (Yeh and Lama 2006). While this may seem to set up a dichotomy between “unassimilated” immigrants and their more assimilated children, Lee (2011), in her study of second generation Tongans in Australia, found that the complex personal geographies shaping collective identities can be grounded in second-

hand knowledge and emotional ties when experiential knowledge of “home” does not exist. These examples highlight the pluralistic and fluid nature of community membership and they shed light on the ways in which Saint Rafka parishioners conceive of and use their church as a community site.

The community that has formed around Saint Rafka Maronite Catholic Church is not solely Lebanese, nor is it even solely comprised of immigrants. An ethic of welcoming outsiders under universal Christian fellowship has ultimately privileged an “ethopolitics” (Staeheli 2008) of acceptance of diversity over an institutional history that has been tied to one ethno-national background for generations. This is not to say, however, that this community has no ingrained ideas of belonging. A faith-based community may enthusiastically welcome new members, as Saint Rafka certainly does, but it will still draw particular people for particular reasons. Establishing the church involved the claiming of physical and social space, which necessitated some degree of boundary setting.

Bounding Community

The first attempt to establish a Maronite Church in the Upstate occurred in the 1940s, led by members of old Greenville Lebanese families who had become prominent in the wider community; however this failed because the Roman Catholic Diocese of Charleston declined to support such an endeavor. The diocese did not want to draw parishioners away from Saint Mary’s Church (interview with Fr. Bartholomew Leon, March 7 2014). This happened before the Maronite Catholic Church had national leadership in the United States, which

would have made the support of the Latin diocese essential. Several parishioners also mentioned another attempt in the 1970s to establish a church in which a priest was sent to the Upstate. It was not made clear to me exactly why this too was unsuccessful other than vague mentions of scandal that doomed that attempt. By the late 1990s, the stars finally aligned for a Maronite mission in the Upstate, which was made possible with the support of a strong Maronite Eparchy, the dedication of lay members of both Saint Mary's and the would-be Saint Rafka Church, and a priest who has been crucial in bringing both Middle Eastern and non-Middle Eastern Christians into the community.

Saint Rafka Church was conceived as an effort to draw an existing yet scattered group of Lebanese-origin families and individuals into an official religious (and cultural) community. The motivations for doing so ranged from want of a Maronite service in particular, to a more general wish for a service in Arabic, to an interest in having a place to celebrate religious and cultural roots. The mission was established by rallying support from Lebanese people all over South Carolina, and the initial core group was comprised mostly of Lebanese people of multiple generations. However, some of the founding families have left the area, and new people, from many Middle Eastern countries but particularly Iraq, have since joined the parish.

Today the church has grown to approximately 110 families. The Saint Rafka parishioners I spoke with were all regulars at the Sunday 11:00am mass, which is considered the "ethnic" service. Sunday at 11:00 is the only mass in which Arabic and Syriac are used in addition to English, and it is also the only

service after which there is a coffee hour. Like Saint Mary's was for early Lebanese immigrants, Saint Rafka Church is a gathering place for its Middle Eastern parishioners, who are scattered throughout the Upstate². Therefore, a pivotal moment for Saint Rafka mission was when they were able to move into a building of their own. One parishioner explained:

Usually in the Lebanese community, ethnic community, their church is their center...They don't just come together for nothing...They needed a church to bring 'em. The church brought us together, not the hafliis [parties]. You can't always have the hafliis, you know? (Respondent 2)

Acquiring a building after years of operating out of other Latin churches represented an arrival, and the basis for establishing and growing their community. Most obviously, moving into their own building demonstrated that the mission was viable enough to be considered an official church by the Brooklyn Eparchial leadership, which has jurisdiction over churches in the eastern United States. Claiming a more permanent material presence also projected an established collective identity to outsiders and community members alike. This parishioner, who had attended Saint Rafka services before the church had its own building, felt that having their own space has been important for strengthening parishioners' attachment to the church community:

We have our place; we said I'm going to church because it is our place *yaani* [which means], if we want to have a small picnic or whatever we can

² There is, in the city of Mauldin, also a large Coptic Christian Church. The Coptic Church is associated more exclusively with Egypt than the Maronite Church is with Lebanon, and this particular church has a more nationally and culturally cohesive identity than that of Saint Rafka. When I asked people about this church, they described it as a more insular community with an explicitly Coptic and Egyptian identity. While they do not discourage anyone from attending their church, they do not actively seek them out either. Amusingly, some parishioners also explained that they do not attend mass there because the services were much too long. In addition to the Coptic church, there is an Arabic Baptist church in Mauldin that was started by a former member of the Coptic church. The differences between Catholic and Protestant denominations keep this church and Saint Rafka Church fairly distant.

do that. We can ask Father Bart can we, you know do that here or whatever so, you feel a sense of more belonging you know? (Respondent 4)

Helping to fundraise and renovate the building as well as contributing to church business and services also give parishioners a sense of investment and permanence both in their place and in the community that gathers there. As this man explained:

I put my talent in there to help Father and everybody to buy a building, and [to] become a church we had to go through a lot with the bishop and everything like that; and we did. So that's something you feel, not the pride but the satisfaction in a sense. You contributed something...I'm always active, any kind of fundraisers I'm there—I'm not the only one, trust me there's many of us. So the church is a core for us, it's always there (Respondent 5).

Because I understood the institutional identity of the Maronite Church to be intertwined with the Mount Lebanon region and the Lebanese national narrative, I was especially curious as to how a Lebanese-Maronite identity functioned in a Maronite church with both non-Lebanese and non-Middle Eastern parishioners. From the chapel to Ashy Pavilion for picnics and Wicket Hall for coffee hours, the Saint Rafka campus is important to parishioners as a worship space, but also because it is a Middle Eastern oriented social space in a region where such a thing is difficult to come by. Even so, according to Father Bart:

[Saint Rafka] has never been seen as 'this is an Arab church' because first of all...the clergy are non-Arabic speaking. And the people have been nothing but gracious to us, because they're happy that we learn their ritual, and we want to give them worship in their own particular form that they're used to and to give them a place where they can be themselves...

Parishioners attributed much of the diversity in their church to Father Bart and his ability to build bridges in the wider community. He is also an assisting priest at Saint Mary's and also a chaplain at Greenville Memorial Hospital. For his part, Father Bart framed the diversity in his parish more as the result of a joint effort between Saint Rafka's clergy and its parish to accommodate new people in the parish and help the church to grow. He gave this example from the early days of Saint Rafka mission:

There's no flag-waving, [no one saying] "Lebanon is the only country!" We don't do that. When we first started, we were at Saint Mary's in Galvan Hall, and at the end of the liturgy sometimes they would sing the Lebanese national anthem. But when the Iraqis and that started coming I said "Oh no—no more." And they were very respectful of that. They realized "yeah you're right." You know, we can't- cause if we start waving one flag, then we have to start doing the other and we don't wanna be political...but they all have concerns [regarding the persecution of Christians in the Middle East].

In every Saint Rafka Church bulletin, however, there is an advertisement for Project Roots, an effort to encourage Lebanese Christians in the diaspora to apply for Lebanese citizenship to maintain a Christian majority. This, Father Bart explained, was done at the request of the bishop. Indeed, from an outsider's perspective Lebanese national politics did not seem to be an important part of the daily operations of Saint Rafka. While a number of people mentioned sectarian politics more generally (see chapter four) in conversation, church services and social gatherings were more reflective of the specific dynamics of the parish, in which the Lebanese are a minority. Over the course of the 11:00 service you will hear a mixture of Arabic, Syriac, and English, but the Wednesday, Saturday, and "last chance" Sunday services are entirely in English.

The church throws *hafli*, parties with Middle Eastern music, dancing, and food, but it also holds a regular pasta dinner spearheaded by a Sicilian parishioner. They have partnered with a Protestant church in Pennsylvania to help Syrian refugees, but they have also partnered with the Latin diocese in Charleston to establish a home that provides services to young pregnant women as an alternative to abortion and provide financial support a local non-Lebanese family in their parish (interview with Fr. Bartholomew Leon, March 7 2014). While the community has ties to the Middle East, it has also been shaped the local context in which it is situated. These examples suggest that the institutional identity of the Maronite Catholic church is filtered through the specific dynamics of the Saint Rafka community to create an institutional identity that suits their needs.

“It’s a different kind of parish, but whatever it is I’ll take it!”

The form a faith-based community takes will inevitably be shaped by the people it draws and retains. The Saint Rafka parish, multinational and multi-confessional by virtue of smaller-scale Middle Eastern immigration to the Upstate, has developed over the years through its broader approach to membership. Parishioners were well aware of this fact. This man perhaps explained it best when he said,

It’s circumstance, I mean you have the Lebanese here who came for several reasons. And then you have the Iraqis some of them have been here for thirty years but a lot of ‘em came because of the war...I think also [people from different backgrounds go to Saint Rafka] because they are accepted. Like I said, these people, if they were in [a city with a large Lebanese population], there is *no* way they would go to the Maronite church. They’d be like, almost shunned. But there it’s not; it’s different (Respondent 7).

There was consensus among the people I spoke with that the most important function of the church is that it connects people of different nationalities through faith: “It’s international really, more [than Lebanese]. Now, we are not Lebanese, we are Iraqi; but we feel all brother and sisters. We don’t think about that, we think about Jesus” (Respondent 6). Another parishioner, who is Lebanese, was of a similar opinion. She was adamant that Saint Rafka, “... is for everyone, because there are Iraqis, people from Syria, American people, and they all love the church. It’s the same thing as [Roman] Catholic or any other...Everyone is here. And we pray for everybody” (Respondent 12).

The statements above are representative of the answer most people gave me when I asked whether Saint Rafka was a Lebanese church. Even so, the question of the church’s Lebanese versus a broader Middle Eastern versus an even broader Christian identity was not uniformly understood. It is important to note, however, that even those who clearly articulated the identity of the community as Lebanese did not proceed to exclude those who technically would not fit within the boundaries they had just established. The following excerpt from an interview with two Iraqi parishioners is an example of this ethic:

Amelia: The Maronite church is often associated with Lebanon. Would you say that Saint Rafka is a Lebanese church?

Respondent 10: Yes.

Respondent 11: That is the connotation.

R10: Especially because she’s one of their patron saints, so yeah definitely.

They told me in no uncertain terms that the institutional identity of Saint Rafka is Lebanese. Yet immediately after stating this opinion, they go on to paint membership at Saint Rafka with a broader brush:

R11: Yeah, it's a Middle Eastern community- that's I think the best way to describe this place. It would be a good home for Jordanian Christians, for Iraqis, for Lebanese, for—

R10: I guess when you become a minority you look for others similar to your background. So that's what I know my parents did, and everyone else I'm sure; cause it reminds them of home especially.

Although interviewees constructed a multicultural, broad-based idea of membership, their frame of reference was clearly more geared toward the Middle Eastern members of the church, which makes sense given that they were all attendees of the “ethnic” mass. No one spoke against the membership of non-Middle Eastern people—on the contrary, they seemed eager to share cultural and faith traditions with the wider community—however it was also apparent that a major, perhaps primary draw of Saint Rafka is that is a Middle Eastern cultural space.

After my first Mass at Saint Rafka, during which I had introduced myself and my project, I stood in the back as the parishioners filed out, unsure of what to do next. My awkward hovering did not last for long, however, as several people came to introduce themselves and usher me into the hall used for coffee hour. Though Mass had only been over for maybe ten minutes the room was already bustling with activity, with as many conversations taking place in Arabic as in English. The atmosphere to me seemed very warm, like a large gathering of old friends. One parishioner offered me food while another showed me to the coffee

station and yet another waved me over to a table. The majority of my contacts were made that afternoon, as more people stopped by to meet me and offer their help. After my first visit, knowing that I had experienced coffee hour firsthand, Saint Rafka regulars would often point to these as an example of the uniquely Middle Eastern social life that the church facilitates. During another coffee hour, for instance, I was told that,

This particular gathering here is really very much part of that feeling and outlook [of a Middle Eastern church]. After they come out of the church, they spend the next 20 minutes half an hour [or more] you know kind of mingling around and it is almost every week families will join together to bring cookies or sometimes sandwiches or whatever but there's always coffee and things like that. So it's a community (Respondent 11).

In a nutshell, interviewees would often express the idea that being Middle Eastern implied a higher degree of communalism than is typically found in America, a point made by people spanning nationalities, immigrant generations, and sects. Interviewees enjoyed having a place to listen to and/or speak Arabic and be with other Middle Eastern people; participating in the church seemed to provide a “sense of identity and culture” (interview with Respondent 7, March 13 2014). For instance, I spoke with one woman who is not a Maronite Catholic, but who attends Saint Rafka because she says that is where her community is: “[There is a] family tightness and, you know, the way we think and we dance and we joke about things that Americans don’t understand or stuff like that” (Respondent 4). Another woman, an Iraqi American said that what she loves most about her culture is that,

we’re family-oriented. I know no matter what happens to me I have a hundred people behind me; literally, you know? And that’s extremely,

extremely helpful. And it's fun! ...We make an effort to stay close. And I think in the American culture that's lacking. I know my American, European friends here, they envy that part of my family because they see how fun it is when they come to our weddings and our parties and they wish they had the same in their own families (Respondent 10).

For comparison, this is what a Lebanese American member of Saint Mary's had to say about being Middle Eastern:

What is Lebanese culture? I think we're pretty normal people. We like our food, we *love* our family; family is so important to the Lebanese. And somehow or another, if you go to another country and you meet another Lebanese, it's somehow there's somehow kind of an attachment with it. Just like, you're just like family and, I don't even know you, you know? (Respondent 9)

Based on the quote above, it might seem as though this woman would feel at home at Saint Rafka. However community attachments are multifaceted and community belonging has multiple trajectories. For old Lebanese families, belonging within Saint Mary's has been cultivated over multiple generations and, for the people I interviewed, membership in that parish was more meaningful than establishing membership in a community that is more explicitly "ethnic."

Recall that in the first half of the 20th century Saint Mary's Roman Catholic Church served as a community space for Lebanese Christian immigrants, which in turn established a visible Lebanese community identity. At the same time, the church was a place to interact and build relationships with non-Lebanese people over time. Today, the first generation and many of the second generation are deceased, and many of their children and grandchildren have since left the area. Though descendants of Lebanese immigrants still attend Saint Mary's, there is no longer a distinct Lebanese community presence there. As one lifelong Saint

Mary's parishioner explained, "I think the Lebanese people still just love each other and are glad to see each other when they're in church but...we're not a member of the Lebanese community now, we're just friends in the church" (Respondent 9). She went on to say that Saint Rafka Church: "...will be where the [Lebanese] community is, and you know it's up to us to go join them. I think they've got their community. I think we're more the outsiders now; they're the insiders." Another American-born Saint Mary's parishioner agreed that Saint Rafka houses an ethnic, immigrant community in a way that Saint Mary's no longer does. She recalled that, at Saint Rafka's *hafli*, "...most of the people were young immigrants. And they're attitude about dancing and having fun is modern. For my husband and myself or anybody from my time of Lebanese heritage, everything stopped for us in 1920" (Respondent 1). While these two sources do not amount to a generalizable sample, their narratives, coupled with historians' accounts of first wave assimilation (see, for instance, Naff 1992 and Gualtieri 2009) suggest that descendants of first wave Lebanese immigrants often construct ethnic fellowship in a less consistent, more context-dependent manner, if they do so at all. Based on my own experience being raised in an overwhelmingly European-origin community (I'm not even sure I knew I was Lebanese until I was in middle school), I would speculate further that this is especially true for those who did not grow up in places with large Middle Eastern populations, making Middle Eastern heritage that much more remote.

The Americans

Similar to the way early Lebanese immigrants joined Saint Mary's, Middle Eastern immigrants in the area today have joined a faith-based community where they experience both acceptance and a degree of familiarity. However, Saint Rafka is not a direct evocation of home for anyone. As the parish has grown in size, it has also become increasingly diverse. Interviewees expressed a desire to foster a welcoming environment in their church, such that the sectarian, national, and ethnic diversity of the parish was often reconciled by framing the fundamental components of the church's identity in more universal terms: Christian and Middle Eastern as opposed to Maronite and Lebanese. However, membership was not contingent upon one's ability to claim both of these identities. The most obvious example of this is the continual growth of Saint Rafka's population of non-Middle Eastern parishioners.

"The Americans" are, by all accounts, accepted, though their levels of engagement with the Middle Eastern parishioners varied. I had limited interaction with this subset of the parish, and so their reasons for attending Saint Rafka—particularly for attending the English-only services—are something about which I can only speculate. An American couple I spoke with informally at coffee hour told me that the draw for them was a mass that is more authentic to the roots of Christianity. I also heard this sentiment from several Middle Eastern parishioners when I would ask about the Americans, as well as the recurrent

theme of Father Bart's essential role in community outreach, which included "gathering the Americans." A founding member of the church told me that

They *loved* him [at Greenville Memorial Hospital], he'd say mass there every afternoon, and all those doctors they all got to know him... and [when the mission] moved to Saint Mary's—Saint Mary's is a big parish, and lot of those people came to us. They liked Father Bart so he'd say mass, Latin mass. He won them over, and you know they'd say, "oh we wanna come to the Maronite [church]." The thing that we like about Maronite church, Amelia, is that it is the true church it's never changed. We can trace our roots to Jesus. Aramaic! Our mass—the mass is in Syriac-Aramaic! That's the true church, and a lot of those Americans were looking for that; they're looking for truth (Respondent 2).

As outlined in the previous section, interviewees often referenced the importance of Middle Eastern culture in social life within Saint Rafka. There are Americans at the 11:00 Sunday mass who are "like family; like anybody else" (interview with Respondent 7, March 2014), but my interviewees were mostly unfamiliar with the Americans who attended the other services. For the Saint Rafka parishioners I spoke with, belonging in the community was derived from forming connections with the people attending the Sunday morning service, and cultivated further through other church-sponsored social events. The people I spoke with, perhaps unsurprisingly, framed the Saint Rafka community as built upon Middle Eastern religious, social, and cultural practices. However, inclusion is not contingent upon one's pedigree but rather on one's engagement with the community; and to this end interviewees seemed to see Middle Eastern parishioners as generally having more stake in Saint Rafka, with some exceptions:

Amelia: Are there a lot of Americans that go to Saint Rafka too?

Respondent 8: Yeah, we haven't seen them, you know a lot but they go on Wednesday, they go on Saturday. A little bit on Sundays, you know the people who [want to connect]...And some of them they start liking the Syriac that they are saying. We don't say it on other days. So it's just only on 11:00.

A: What is it do you think that brings such a diverse group of people to this one church?

R8: It's the community, the difference in cultures that they are seeing here. That's what I am saying—and you saw it and I told you about it on Sunday that a lot the Americans they bypass the whole [coffee hour], and go out, that's it. They come and drink a coffee and go out. They don't sit and communicate; [but some Americans] are sitting there and communicating. They want to see something; they want to understand what's going on.

The community being created in this church is in flux in a way that reflects the array of memories, histories, and places being negotiated on a daily basis in the pursuit of belonging in and *through* collective identity. Massey (1991; 2005) defines place as an inherently social entity; each place is dense with connections to other places past and present by virtue of the human interactions that imbue spaces with meaning(s). The parishioner accounts here are only a glimpse of the intersecting social processes taking place within the Saint Rafka community. Attempting to represent even a fraction of these becomes messy very quickly; but, crucially, acknowledging this messiness necessitates accepting it, and all of the possibilities therein for grasping the complexity of immigrant integration and community formation.

Conclusions

This chapter has looked at the history and the present of Saint Rafka Church, as explained by people affiliated with it, in order to better understand how and why this community was constructed and what it means to its members. Juxtaposing members' narratives of establishing and maintaining the church depicts the concept of community more as a multilayered process shaped by a constellation of people and places as opposed to a fixed entity. Although institutions such as the Maronite Church and individual parishes such as Saint Rafka promote unity through shared belief systems and cultural ties, within these collective identities are different, intersecting ideas and practices of community.

Saint Rafka Church was established with the express purpose of bounding a community. At the same time it is integrated into multiple communities and places that render these boundaries negotiable. That this is a Christian church (Catholicism in the Upstate is now commonplace) with a charismatic non-Middle Eastern leadership makes it accessible to a wider community as well as unobtrusive in the broader social and religious landscape; just a bit of local color. The church facilitates multiple belongings, demonstrating the role community spaces can play in solidifying, if not the daily lived community itself, an identity that is cohesive enough to be identifiable to those who exist outside of it. Doing so has implications for immigrants forging situated attachments through faith communities, but as this case clearly demonstrates, immigrants are not the only ones at the negotiating table. The formation and continued success of an Eastern Rite Catholic church in a region with a relatively small and diffuse Middle

Eastern Christian population speaks not only to the support of immigrant parishioners in this community, but also to that of a number of “Americans.” The meanings and attachments individuals of different backgrounds may derive in such a community undoubtedly vary. For some Saint Rafka is a place to rediscover their heritage, or to connect with people from similar cultural and geographic contexts; for others the draw may be the uniqueness of the mass, or personal connections with the clergy, or some combination of these reasons and others. I do not intend to romanticize this community, as it is full of contradictions like any other (Staeheli 2008). Moreover the sense of identity and belonging fostered by Saint Rafka, in whatever form, is only one aspect of parishioners’ lives and identities. The bottom line, though, is that all of these people and the multiple trajectories they carry with them come together every week and make their mark on the social, cultural, and physical landscape of the Upstate.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

Data analysis memo, Tuesday, April 22, 2014:

The idea of ‘visceral belonging’¹ in (or rather to) place is something I heard from many respondents. I also heard first and second hand that, for some non-Middle Eastern parishioners the church’s appeal still lies in heritage- in authenticity. The Eastern churches, they feel, are closer to the heart of Christianity because they are rooted in its birthplace. So what are tradition and heritage, then, if not representations of particular configurations of place, space, and time? People place a high value on rootedness, as if grounding identity in a physical location makes it real and permanent. However, as Saint Rafka’s demonstrates, these identities, places, and spaces are never fixed. If they were, that church wouldn’t exist. But we still pin sense of self to place, and we still accomplish this through social interaction, and this is how we attempt to make sense of who we are and where we are situated in the world.

At the outset of this project I had envisioned two separate communities: the established Greenville Lebanese at Saint Mary’s and the Middle Eastern immigrants at Saint Rafka; but these neat categories were soon thwarted. As this study progressed from research to analysis and on to writing, I became increasingly unsatisfied with that assessment because it implied the sort of insular nature that is so often cast upon immigrants and “ethnic” communities. What I found instead were interconnected stories of immigrants past and present negotiating belonging in the Upstate by drawing from multifaceted identities—for

¹ This is a term borrowed from Massey (2005): “Place, in other words does- as many argue- change us, not through some visceral belonging (some barely changing rootedness, as so many would have it) but through the *practicing* of place, the negotiation of intersecting trajectories; place as an arena where negotiation is forced upon us” (154).

ethnicity in whatever conception is only a fraction of identity- to begin forming attachments in their daily lives with the identity capital at their disposal. This process then forges different situated expressions of identity. Regardless of whether immigrants “assimilate” or not, the circles they move in and the way they view themselves and are viewed by others is the product of a complex network of people, places, and ideas that is never frozen in time or space.

This thesis has explored questions of ethnic and religious identity within processes of forging belonging and community for immigrants in the United States. I relied primarily on interview and participant observation data, which I collected and analyzed with an attention to my reflexivity since I was the primary instrument of research. Conducting a case study of this scale does not yield generalizable findings; however it did enable me to implement theories on assimilation/integration and immigrant identity and religiosity in such a way as to interrogate their utility (or lack thereof) in explaining the dynamics of my particular case. The contribution a case study can offer, then, is to examine theoretical constructs through a more grounded lens. Therefore, based on an epistemology cultivated by previous academic works (particularly Massey 1991; Duntley 1999; Nagel 2009; Jimenez 2010) as well as this research, I have attempted to make a case for factoring ideas of multiply situated identities and the active construction of belonging and community into understandings of immigrant incorporation. Communities are not *a priori* regardless of how “natural” they may seem; rather, they are complex, contingent, and dynamic. This study speaks to the need for

more nuanced accounts of immigrant belonging and the role of faith-based communities in the incorporation of immigrants.

Creating Belonging through Community

Nagel (2009) writes that assimilation is a process of “making sameness”:

“Certain forms of difference can become generally acceptable and normalized, whereas other forms of difference become marked as deviant. Assimilation, in this sense, signifies not just a diminishment of difference vis-à-vis the mainstream, but also the discursive construction of the mainstream and a reinterpretation of which differences matter and which do not within it” (403).

The same can be said, I believe, for community building. Ideas of assimilation and community are related; indeed, assimilation scholarship has always been imagined in collective terms. Acknowledging the importance of community building in immigrant integration ultimately complicates both and interrogates the idea of assimilation in a way that does not also uncritically declare it obsolete.

Saint Rafka Maronite Catholic Church is an interesting case for many reasons, not the least of which being how members of the church negotiate sameness and difference both as individuals and as a church community. For instance, that this is the only Maronite Catholic church in the state of South Carolina, established despite a number of extant Latin Rite churches, indicates a clear assertion of difference; something distinctive from the existing religious landscape. At the same time, the church maintains ties to broader communities, including Saint Mary’s Roman Catholic Church, but also through its non-Maronite and non-Middle Eastern parishioners. In this way, the church maintains an ethic of pan-Christian fellowship, creating a narrative of sameness and wider

belonging. These dynamics paint a more complex picture of integration; not as a zero-sum achievement of mainstream acceptance or rejection, but rather, as Nagel suggests, a negotiation of identity between this faith-based community and the context in which it is situated. Both are in a continual state of becoming, and both are changed through their interactions with one another. This dialectical relationship takes place at multiple scales, in multiple spaces, informed by multiple ideas of place and identity.

The conclusion I have come to, as an outsider contextualizing this parish within broader religious and secular communities, is that Saint Rafka Church is unique in its composition, but not in the social processes that contributed to its creation. One needs only to look at the history of Lebanese parishioners at Saint Mary's Greenville to see a parallel example of immigrants negotiating ethnic identity and belonging through participation in a faith-based community in a way that is informed by multiple contexts. This similarity between cohorts supports the argument that assimilation still has conceptual value (Alba and Nee 2003; Nagel 2009; Jimenez 2010). It remains a useful if overgeneralizing theoretical tool that, when combined with other theoretical lenses as I have attempted to do here, can create a more flexible and expansive understanding of what immigrant integration looks like in the United States. The challenge for migration scholarship going forward is to better represent the connectivity and contingency of place and community that shapes immigrant belonging and integration.

Avenues for Future Research

As stated in chapter three, there is much that could be done to expand this specific project as well as the study of Middle Eastern Christians more generally, who are understudied (Robson 2010). The research presented in this thesis is only a glimpse of the increasingly diverse Middle Eastern Christian population in Upstate South Carolina (which is furthermore only a subset of the international immigration economic growth has brought to the area). Given more time and resources, I would have liked to have lived in the area for a number of months and reached out not only to less visible members of Saint Mary's and Saint Rafka but also to the Coptic and Arabic Baptist churches in Mauldin. Additionally, the increased diversity of Maronite parishes in the United States is not a phenomenon exclusive to the Upstate (Elkhoury 2008). Another way to expand on this project would be to look at multiple Maronite churches across the U.S. to understand how these parishes construct membership, and how they reconcile the Maronite Church's relationship to Lebanese nationalism and politics.

Research on Middle Eastern immigration in the Southern U.S. is an especially scant body of work that is to my knowledge entirely historiographical.² Understanding how Middle Easterners have negotiated belonging in this region speaks to a broader question about what integration looks like outside of large

² I was able to find only a handful of scholars writing about Middle Eastern immigrants in the South. In addition to the work of historian Sara Gualtieri, I found one master's theses by Elizabeth Whitaker (2006), and two doctoral dissertation Paula Stahakis (1996) and James Thomas (2007). Thomas, who is affiliated with the University of Mississippi Center for the Study of Southern Culture, has since published chapters and articles based on his research. The University of North Carolina's Khayrallah Institute of Lebanese American Studies is the only collaborative research initiative on this subject of which I am aware. All of this work concerns the history of first wave Syrian-Lebanese immigrants in the South.

cities and immigrant communities. Therefore, it is my hope that this thesis contributes to the growing scholarly interest in the history of Syrian-Lebanese immigrants and might also serve as a springboard for studies on Middle Eastern immigration in the “New South” from the mid-20th century to the present.

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APPENDIX A – FR. LEON INTERVIEW TEMPLATE

The following list of questions was used as an outline for my interview with Fr.

Bartholomew Leon of Saint Rafka Maronite Catholic Church:

1. How did you come to work for Saint Rafka Church?
 - a. Do you work with any other churches in the area?
2. What makes a Maronite Catholic Church different from a Roman Catholic Church?
 - a. Walk me through a typical mass
3. The Maronite Church is often associated with Lebanon. Would you say that Saint Rafka is a Lebanese church?
 - a. Why/Why not?
 - b. Would you say that it is an Arab Christian church?
4. Tell me about the history of the church beginning with how the Saint Rafka mission came into being.
 - a. Have there been any significant changes between now and then?
 - b. Who is new?
5. In your letter in Saint Rafka's commemoration booklet you describe your parish as "ethnically mixed." Could you explain the demographics of your parish in more detail?
 - a. Why do you think your church draws people from such different backgrounds?

- b. Have you noticed this much diversity in other Maronite churches?
- 6. What do you know about the history of Lebanese immigrants here?
 - a. Are any people from the old Lebanese families in Greenville involved in Saint Rafka's?
- 7. Could you describe to me the relationship between Saint Rafka church and Saint Mary's?
- 8. Do you feel that the Saint Rafka parish is accepted by the wider Greenville community?
- 9. Does Saint Rafka Church do any sort of outreach activities or fundraising for the wider Greenville community?
 - a. What about outreach for people in Lebanon or the Middle East more broadly?
- 10. Tell me about Project Roots.
- 11. Do you know of anyone else who might be willing to speak with me?
- 12. Do you have any questions for me?

APPENDIX B – SAINT MARY’S INTERVIEW TEMPLATE

The following list of questions was used as an outline for interviews with Lebanese-origin parishioners of Saint Mary’s Roman Catholic Church:

1. I want to begin by asking you to walk me through what you know about your family’s immigration history. Who were the first members of your family to come to the United States?
 - a. Both sides- Where did they come from?
 - b. What were the circumstances that motivated them to come to the U.S.?
 - c. Where did they settle?
2. Do you still have relatives in Lebanon?
 - a. Have you ever visited Lebanon?
3. Was preserving an ethnic identity important to either of your grandparents/parents?
 - a. What did they teach your parents/you about your cultural heritage?
 - b. What did they tell you about their experiences growing up in Lebanon or here in the U.S.?
4. Would you say that being Lebanese is important to you?
 - a. Do you stay connected to Lebanese culture?
 - b. Do you keep up with events happening in Lebanon?
 - c. Do you belong to any Lebanese or Arab organizations?

5. Does the term Arab American mean anything to you?
6. Would you say that being Lebanese and being Arab are the same thing?
 - a. How is a Lebanese identity different from an Arab identity?
7. How long have you (/has your family) lived in Greenville?
 - a. Why did you move here?
8. How has Greenville changed over time?
9. What do you know about the history of Lebanese immigrants here?
10. Do you think the Lebanese community is well integrated here? Why/Why not?
 - a. Have the Lebanese been accepted as a community?
11. Are there other Middle Eastern origin people in Greenville?
 - a. Do you ever socialize with them?
12. Do you have many Lebanese or Arab friends?
 - a. How would you characterize the people you socialize with?
13. How has Saint Mary's changed since you first started going there?
 - a. Who is new?
14. What about Saint Mary's is important to you?
15. Do you feel there is anything left of the Lebanese community within the parish?
 - a. Have people made an effort to preserve it? Why/not?
 - b. Does this matter to you?
16. Do you ever go to other churches?
17. Are there Arab immigrants in Greenville who have come more recently?

- a. What do you know about Saint Rafka Maronite Church?
- 18. Do you know of anyone else who might be willing to talk to me?
- 19. Do you have any questions for me?

APPENDIX C – SAINT RAFKA INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The following list of questions was used as an outline for interviews with members of Saint Rafka Maronite Catholic Church:

1. I want to begin by asking you to walk me through what you know about your family's immigration history. Who were the first members of your family to come to the United States?
 - a. Where did they come from?
 - b. What motivated them to come to the U.S.?
 - c. Where did they settle?
- 1.1. Alternatively: Where are you from originally?
 - 1.1.1. What motivated you to come to the U.S.?
2. Do you still have relatives in ____?
 - a. Who?
 - b. Do you stay in touch with them? How?
3. Do you keep up with events in ____?
 - a. How?
4. Is ____ culture important to you?
 - a. What do you do to preserve your culture?
5. Does the term Arab American mean anything to you?
 - a. Do you identify as Arab?
 - b. Do you belong to any ____ or Arab organizations?

6. How long have you lived in Greenville?
 - a. Why did you move here?
 - b. Do you have family here?
7. What was it like moving to Greenville?
 - a. Have you felt accepted?
8. Have you noticed any changes in Greenville since you have lived here?
9. How did you become a member of Saint Rafka?
 - a. Were you raised Maronite Catholic?
 - b. What about Saint Rafka is important to you?
10. Saint Rafka is one community to which you belong. Do you consider yourself a member of any other communities?
 - a. Which community membership is the most important to you? Why?
11. On the subject of communities, how would you characterize the people you socialize with?
 - a. Do you have many _____ or Arab friends?
12. How has Saint Rafka church changed since you first started going there?
 - a. Who is new to this church?
13. The Maronite Church is often associated with Lebanon. Would you say that Saint Rafka is a Lebanese church?
 - a. Why/Why not?
14. Do you ever go to other churches?
15. Do you know anything about Saint Mary's Roman Catholic Church?
16. Do you know of anyone else who might be willing to talk to me?

17. Do you have any questions for me?