

AUTHENTIC ARABS, AUTHENTIC CHRISTIANS: ANTIOCHIAN ORTHODOX
AND THE MOBILIZATION OF CULTURAL IDENTITY

by

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Dedicated

to my family
and my moo

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Al-Nour [the light], the weekly bulletin for St. Mary's Antiochian Orthodox Basilica in Livonia, MI, announced the upcoming annual Holy Land Christmas Concert. According to the Dec. 6, 2009 bulletin, the concert will celebrate, along with the Nativity of Jesus Christ, the Holy Land provenance of the Orthodox faith. The 2009 concert of Orthodox Church choirs, the bulletin says, will be held at St. Mary's Basilica and will feature an "Arabic Ensemble" sung by Fr. George Shalhoub, St. Mary's long-serving priest. The proceeds from the event will support the International Orthodox Christian Charities (IOCC), which performs extensive humanitarian work in the Middle East, as well as throughout the Orthodox world from Russia to Ethiopia.

A full-page insert in the same weekly bulletin advertised the 2010 New Year's Eve Party at the church, featuring local Detroit singer and *oud* player Ali Barada, who has performed at previous St. Mary's New Year's Eve parties. The flyer says that the rather steep admission price of \$100 includes dinner, drinks, dancing, and "American & Arabic music."

A few days later, the *Shoo fi-Mah fi* email (roughly "What's up?"), which contains weekly announcements from Fr. George and is emailed to each parishioner, included a "Public Announcement" about an event at Byblos Hall in Dearborn, MI, as part of the 77th anniversary of the Syrian Renaissance Movement. The event was to be

highlighted by a speech “to commemorate the Palestinian Right of Return,” which is a cause near and dear to the hearts of St. Mary’s parishioners, the majority of whom are Palestinian.

This one week’s worth of announcements demonstrates the main argument of this dissertation: that the space of the church for Antiochian Orthodox Christians is the main site for the construction and maintenance of a specific Arab cultural identity. I will show how this cultural identity, or Arabness, is produced within the intersecting social locations of religion, culture, and politicized action.¹ The three items above, a religious event that centers the Antiochian Orthodox claim to a Holy Land Christianity, an event that celebrates an Arab cultural identity through food and music, and a politicized event that supports the Palestinian cause, are all part of the space of the church.

I focus on the Antiochian Orthodox Church to show how transnational religious communities in the U.S. can create complex identities that both celebrate a U.S.-based religious and cultural identity and engage in transnational politicized action that, in the case of Antiochian Orthodox, can run against the grain of popular U.S. political discourses about Arabs and the Middle East. This complicates attempts to define Arab American Christians as either assimilationist (“loyal Americans”) or long-distance nationalists (“loyal Arabs”).² I situate constructions of cultural identity within the space of the church in relation to events in the homeland (mostly war and humanitarian crisis) and U.S. political and popular culture discourses of Arabs that are informed by Orientalist modes of knowledge production. The space of the church for Arab American

¹ My use of “social locations” follows the discussion put forth by Gupta and Ferguson (1997) in which they call for anthropological investigations that consider, in part, “shifting locations” and not “bounded fields,” “with attentiveness to social, cultural, and political location” (5).

² For work on the long-distance nationalism of Arab American communities, see Jones 2000 and Naber 2009.

Christians is an important site through which to work out these homeland attachments while also allowing them space for selective participation in U.S. liberal multiculturalism. Using Lowe's (1996) framework, I show how Antiochian Orthodox strategically separate their "importation" (their marketing of cultural identity) from their "immigration" (their politicized, transnational agendas), in order to navigate the "contradictions" of liberal multiculturalism.

In this introduction, I first present a brief history of the Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese in the U.S., as well as a history of my main ethnographic location within the archdiocese, St. Mary's Basilica in Livonia, MI. I then theorize the space of the church and its importance for Arab American Christians. This introduction concludes with an extended discussion of the positionality of Arab American Christian's cultural identity within multiculturalism, specifically the long history of self-Orientalist rhetoric and imagery within the Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese and claims to cultural authenticity through food and church-sponsored ethnic food festivals.

The Antiochian Orthodox Church, St. Mary's Basilica, and an Arab Cultural Identity

The Antiochian Orthodox Church is best described as the Arab branch of Orthodox Christianity. It shares the same doctrinal and liturgical aspects as the Greek Orthodox Church, but since it developed in the Middle East and historically had its religious See or Patriarch in the biblical city of Antioch (now in Damascus, Syria), it is linguistically and culturally distinct from the Greek, Russian, Serbian, Romanian, and other nationalist Orthodox Churches. Fr. George Shalhoub, an immigrant priest educated at the Balamand Orthodox seminary in Lebanon, describes the church thusly:

Really the original name of the Church should be the Greek Orthodox Church of Antioch, but I think for some reason the founding fathers of this Church...I think we chose to take the Antiochian name to refer that we are from the Middle East and Arab American. I feel very enriched with that because it is not only a institution that has sprung for almost 2000 years being alive as a descendant of Peter and Paul, the apostles of Christ, but also the Church prides itself by embodying the nationalism of the Arab world because Orthodox Christians have lived among [many religions]...when we became a minority we accepted the fact and we were extremely tolerant and accepting of other people's faiths.

The parishioners pride themselves on their role of inheritors of, as they see it, the one, true, Orthodox Christian Church. The title "Antiochian" refers to the fact that the Patriarch for the faith was established in the ancient city of Antioch where, the parishioners and clergy will tell you, is where followers of Christ were first called Christians. For example, on the front page of their weekly bulletin, *Al-Nour*, St. Mary's Antiochian Orthodox Church has the verse from Acts 11:26, printed in both English and Arabic script, that gives credence to their ancient religious identity: "And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch." This Bible verse is also on the official letterhead for the Archdiocese and is cited frequently by Church members as part of their claims to Christian authenticity, the subject of my final chapter.

How the parishioners in the U.S. came to be know as "Antiochian" is part of a long and complex history, spanning nearly 2000 years of Christian and Middle Eastern history. The title Antiochian, in this dissertation, refers to the adherents of Christianity loyal to the Greek Orthodox Church of Antioch. As the seat of one of the original patriarchates of the Greek Orthodox Church, the ancient city of Antioch has been a gateway between East and West, and is referred to by Antiochian Orthodox scholars as "the heart of vital Christianity in the Middle East" (Gillquist 1991, 11). The early Christian leaders at Antioch "were very active in the ecumenical councils and in the

debates that led to the numerous schisms in the church” (Bailey and Bailey 2003, 61). As the site of struggles between various Christian factions and denominations, and as a besieged city that incorporated the cultures of invading groups, the legacy of Antioch is one of crossroads. The Antiochian Orthodox in the U.S. envision themselves as part of this ancient Christian and world history, and see themselves as inheritors of the unique Christian perspective that emerged from Antioch’s turbulent past. In a speech to the Patriarch of Antioch during his visit the U.S. in 1985, the leader of the Archdiocese, Metropolitan Philip Saliba, recounted this imaginative pull of Antioch:

From Calvary to the Edict of Milan, Antioch has suffered the most barbarous and longest holocaust under the pagan Roman empire. This was followed by the Persian invasion and the internal heresies which have torn Antioch asunder, the Muslim conquest of the Near East, the Crusades, the Ottoman Turks, the western missionaries, the Melkite schism and last, but not least, international Zionism. It is a miracle, indeed, that Antioch is still alive. (Saliba 1987, 123–24)

Even though Antioch is no longer the seat of the Patriarch (now in Damascus), it is still very much “alive” in the minds and hearts of Antiochian Orthodox Christians. As one priest and prolific author has written, “To this day, the Church of Antioch marches at the front of the column of Orthodox progress in seeking to bring America face to face with the changeless treasure of New Testament Christianity” (Gillquist 1991, 13). For Antiochian Orthodox in the U.S., as this dissertation will show, Antioch not only represents a cultural heritage of Middle Eastern and Holy Land Christianity, as the title Antiochian Orthodox is entangled with an Arab Christian identity in the U.S. and an Arab nationalist viewpoint in the Middle East, but a unique spiritual heritage.

The Antiochian Orthodox began arriving in the U.S. with the first wave of immigrants from the Arab world in the late nineteenth century, along with other religious communities from what was then Greater Syria, such as the Maronite and Melkite

Catholics. Many Antiochian Orthodox communities were established in the early 1900s, mostly in industrial centers in or around Boston, New York City, Pittsburgh, Detroit, and Toledo, and later in numerous cities in Texas and California. The first Antiochian Orthodox Church in the U.S. began as the “Syro-Arab Mission of Brooklyn” as part of the larger Russian Orthodox Church in 1904, although this first official church grew from an earlier mission established by Syrian immigrants in the early 1890s (Gabriel 1995). The Church in the U.S. was referred to as the Syrian Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese until the late 1960s, when it dropped “Syrian” in favor of having simply “Antiochian” to recognize the Church’s roots in the city of Antioch. Some parishioners continue to refer to themselves as Syrian Orthodox, despite the archdiocese’s best efforts to avoid any “ethnicism” within the faith.³ There are now over 250 parishes in North America, broken up into seven dioceses, all under the jurisdiction of Metropolitan Philip Saliba, Lebanese-born cleric, who has served as “Primate” of the Archdiocese for over forty years.

As the most visible Antiochian Orthodox Christian in the U.S., Metropolitan Philip Saliba is one of the main figures of this dissertation. Along with being the spiritual leader of the faith, Saliba has also been the driving force in maintaining connections to the Middle Eastern homeland, with his frequent trips to the Patriarchate in Syria, his establishment of Arab refugee charities, and his politicized action on behalf of the Lebanese and Palestinians.⁴ Most of the rhetoric that I will analyze comes from his mouth or pen, or from the pages of official archdiocese publications, which he endorses. He is an important figure for Antiochian parishioners, not only because of his spiritual

³ Ethnicism in this sense does not refer as much to a constructed cultural identity in the U.S., but rather to the privileging of that identity above an Orthodox one.

⁴ His politicized role in Middle East affairs is frequently celebrated in biographies of Saliba that appear in *The Word*, in books written about him, and in the archdiocese convention programs. My chapter 2 will further detail the politicized actions of Saliba and the archdiocese.

title as Primate and Metropolitan of the archdiocese in all of North America, but because of his ancestral connections to the Holy Land, having been born and raised in Greater Syria, and also his role as an Orthodox bishop, which means that he is spiritually descendant from the Apostle Peter (a role I further examine in the final chapter).



Figure 1-1 Entrance to Antiochian Heritage Museum at the Antiochian Village. Photo by the author.

The Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese is a vast institution. Headquartered in Englewood, NJ, the Church runs a large summer camp and conference center, the Antiochian Village, in the mountains of Western Pennsylvania, in addition to the 250 parishes throughout the U.S. and Canada. The Antiochian Village also contains a library that caters to Orthodox seminary students, and has a professionally-maintained museum that documents both the history of the faith as well as the history of Arab immigration to the U.S. Possibly the most visible marker of the vitality of the archdiocese are the annual regional and bi-annual national “Parish Life Conventions,” where all the priests and

bishops gather with delegates from each parish to review the previous years' work and make decisions and resolutions that affect the faithful in the U.S.

The archdiocese also publishes a monthly magazine called *The Word*, which was one of the first widely distributed Arabic language publications in the U.S. Originally published in Arabic in 1907 as *al-Kalimat*, *The Word* has been published in English, with some Arabic, since the 1950s. *The Word* is automatically mailed each month to all registered communicants and has a high production value (glossy covers, color photos, etc.) for such a relatively small archdiocese. The magazine prints official announcements and directives from the hierarchs, articles about homeland religious and political events, theological and doctrinal debates, and editorials that typically touch on U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East.



Figure 1-2 A second view of museum entrance. Photo by the author.

The cultural identity of Antiochian Orthodox Christians is deeply connected with a mother church that is, according to Fr. George Shalhoub, “still alive in Antioch today,

in Damascus, headed by the Patriarch and the Holy Synod.” He continues, “We are a living member of that church. Everyone needs to have roots.” In the Antiochian Orthodox Church, those roots are firmly planted in Lebanon, Palestine, Syria, and Jordan. Although most parishioners at St. Mary’s agree that first and foremost they are committed to “seeking the Kingdom of God” through their faith, in the words of a non-Arab convert deacon, at the same time “being Arab is crucial.”

The Arab identity of the archdiocese is maintained through the liturgical use of Arabic alongside English (the amount of Arabic varies from congregation to congregation); the hierarchical connections to the Patriarch in Damascus; the continual immigration of parishioners from the Middle East; the travel and communication between families and friends in the U.S. and “back home”; the cultural celebrations of ethnic food and music that parishes from coast to coast have hosted for decades; and the consistent engagement with homeland political and humanitarian developments. St. Mary’s Basilica in suburban Detroit is no exception, and is in fact a microcosm of the archdiocese.

At St. Mary’s, there are third and fourth generation Arab Americans who do not speak Arabic and have never been to the Middle East. There are Middle Eastern-born members who speak fluent Arabic and travel frequently between the U.S. and their homeland. And there is an increasing number (though still relatively small) of non-Arab converts, mostly as the result of marriage to a church member. Like other parishes, St. Mary’s has to negotiate the issues of language (how much Arabic to use in services), politics (supporting social justice in the Middle East, particularly Lebanese or Palestinian causes), and culture (holding elaborate, and public, ethnic festivals). The members of St. Mary’s are particularly concerned with balancing the idea of being an ancient Christian

faith from the Holy Land while flourishing as an American Orthodox parish that is plugged in to the surrounding Detroit communities, both Arab and non-Arab.

St. Mary's is exceptional because of its proximity to Dearborn and Metro Detroit, which is home to one of the largest Arab and Middle Eastern populations in the U.S., and home to some of the largest and oldest Christian communities from the Arab world.⁵ The continual immigration from the Middle East to Detroit since the late 1800s has created a diverse population of more than a dozen nationalities and every major religious denomination found in the Middle East.⁶ The diversity of Christians from Arab nations is also reflected in the Metro Detroit population, as there are over twenty parishes, such as Antiochian Orthodox, Maronite Catholic, Chaldean, Coptic, and Syrian Orthodox.⁷ Partly because of this positioning, St. Mary's looks today like many parishes looked in the 1970s, as far as the ratio of Arab members to non-Arab members. Fr. George believes that in 50 years St. Mary's may look like older parishes that are becoming less and less Arab. But, he says, it will still have a "center" in culture. If we lose the culture, Fr. George argues, we "become a non-denominational Orthodox."

⁵ There is plenty of good scholarship on the history of Detroit's Arab communities. Most accounts talk about the large influx of Syrian immigrants that began in 1914 when Henry Ford started the five-dollar work day, although there were small numbers of Christians, mostly from Greater Syria, in the area before then. See Shryock and Abraham's (2000) introduction to their volume *Arab Detroit*, and Baker and Shryock's (2009) introduction to *Citizenship and Crisis*.

⁶ It is also well known among scholars of Detroit's Arab American communities that war and crisis in the Middle East, specifically in Lebanon, Palestine, and Iraq, has always resulted in spurts of immigration to the Detroit area. Much of the immigration to the area is also "chain migration" of family (Aswad 1974).

⁷ The Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese is often confused with the Syrian Orthodox Archdiocese (which is a Jacobite church and is not in communion with the Antiochians). Part of the confusion is because the Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese in the U.S. was known as the Syrian Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese until 1969, when the national label was dropped in favor of emphasizing the Church's roots in the biblical city of Antioch. This confusion has become somewhat institutionalized in histories of Arab American communities.

St. Mary's is not the only Antiochian Orthodox church in Metro Detroit. The first church in Detroit was St. George, founded in 1916.⁸ St. George was originally located in the city of Detroit but, following the movement of the parishioners, relocated to the northern suburb of Troy in the 1980s. St. George of Troy is "a little more Americanized," according to one parishioner at St. Mary's, as most of its membership is currently made up of second, third, and fourth generation Arab Americans. St. Mary's, on the other hand, was founded as a mission in the early 1970s by immigrant families who had settled in the western suburbs and did not want to continue to drive to the city of Detroit to attend St. George. According to Fr. George Shalhoub, St. Mary's was started by eleven parishioners "and little by little, the war kept going in Lebanon and Palestine" so the congregation kept receiving new immigrants. At first, the parishioners did not have a dedicated building to worship in, and held services in houses and other Livonia churches until 1976.

Fr. George Shalhoub has served as pastor since 1972 when, recently arrived in the U.S. from seminary in Lebanon, he was sent to minister to the handful of Arab families in Livonia who wanted to start a parish. In the 30 years between the church's founding and the opening of the new basilica in 2002, St. Mary's has to a thousands-strong membership of Lebanese, Syrians, Jordanians, and Palestinians. In fact, the number of children enrolled in church school, well over 400, is larger than the entire congregation of many Antiochian parishes nationwide.

⁸ There is a third, smaller church in Metro Detroit, St. Mary's in Berkeley, MI, which tends to be very immigrant heavy. According to one parishioner at St. Mary's in Livonia, walking into the Berkley church is like being in Syria.



Figure 1-3 St. Mary's Antiochian Orthodox Basilica, Livonia, MI. Photo by author.

St. Mary's impressive basilica was consecrated in the summer of 2002, just in time to host a gathering for the national day of prayer on September 11, 2002. The brand new basilica has become a site of public gatherings, humanitarian efforts, and private prayers for peace in the wake of the tragedies of September 11 and the continued violence in the Middle East. The church building was designated as a basilica by Metropolitan Philip Saliba, because its architecture reflects an "old world" church construction. As Fr. George wrote in a historical account of his life and his church, "Our task was to build an authentic Antiochian Orthodox church in America that would serve as a representation of churches in the Holy Land, and also as a point of reference for those who will never visit the Middle East" (2007, 207). Modeled after an ancient church in Syria, Fr. George's homeland and the current site of the Antiochian Patriarchate, it is the only basilica in the archdiocese.

Antiochian Orthodox as Arab American Christians

Antiochian Orthodox make up the largest community of Christians in the U.S. who are most likely to self-identify with the label Arab or Arab American. The archdiocese is the largest in terms of total adherents and number of parishes, and is also the most widespread, with parishes or missions in 44 states and the District of Columbia. Gregory Orfalea (2006) counts the Antiochian Orthodox as the largest denomination of what he labels “Arab Eastern Rite Christians.” He estimates that, as of 2005, there were 250,000 Antiochian Orthodox and 240 parishes across the U.S. (442). Orfalea also lists that there are 250,000 Coptic Orthodox in the U.S., with only 70 churches; 115,000 Chaldeans; 70,000 Maronites spread out across 59 parishes; and smaller numbers of Melkite Catholics and Syrian Orthodox and Syrian Catholics.

Regardless of numbers, Antiochian Orthodox, both in Metro Detroit and the U.S., are more likely to self-identify with the label Arab or Arab American than the other large Eastern Rite Christian faiths. Even though they have large numbers across the U.S., Coptic Catholics and Coptic Orthodox do not self-identify as Arab or Arab American as readily as Antiochians (Jones 2000). Maronite Catholics and Chaldeans outnumber Antiochian Orthodox in the Detroit area, but like Copts, tend to shy away from the labels Arab or Arab American, instead choosing to celebrate a national identity (such as Iraqi or Lebanese) or the identity of the ancient civilization (such as Babylonian or Phoenician) (Shryock and Lin 2009).⁹ There are complex homeland cultural, religious, and political

⁹ According to the extensive Detroit Arab American Survey, which interviewed and surveyed over 1,500 people, 61% of Christians, which includes Chaldeans, Maronites, Antiochian Orthodox, Coptic, and other Eastern Rite Christians, accepted the label “Arab American” (Shryock and Lin 2009, 53). Isolating the responses of individual Christian communities gives a slightly different picture. Whereas only 45% of Iraqi Christians, who are overwhelmingly Chaldean, accepted the label Arab American, 94% of Jordanian and Palestinian Christians, who almost all belong to the Antiochian Orthodox churches in Metro Detroit, accept being labeled Arab American (Shryock and Lin 2009, 53).

reasons for these disparities, which remain beyond the scope of the dissertation, but it is important to keep in mind that Antiochian Orthodox in the homeland as well as in diaspora in the U.S., are more likely than other Arab Christian communities to align with an Arab nationalist agenda, especially in regards to issues that affect Palestinian rights.¹⁰

The Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese is also a good representation of the Arab American Christian experience in general. The Antiochians share a similar history in the U.S. with the Maronite and Melkite Churches who founded parishes at the end of the nineteenth century, and tended to settle in industrial centers on the Eastern seaboard and the Midwest. Antiochian parishes, like other Eastern Rite Christian communities, have continually celebrated their cultural identity through public ethnic festivals, and have become known for their production and sale of Middle Eastern food in their respective localities. Antiochian parishioners and clergy have served as board members and directors of some of the largest and most active Arab American organizations, like the National Association of Arab Americans (NAAA), and have led politicized action on behalf of their collective homelands since the time of the First World War.¹¹ Much like Maronite, Melkite, Chaldean, and Coptic Churches, the liturgical services at some parishes are fifty percent in Arabic, and at others they are almost completely in English. Most importantly, the church building is the hub of social and cultural activities for the Antiochian communities as it is for other Christian communities from the Middle East.

¹⁰ My argument holds up even as the Antiochian Archdiocese, since at least the 1970s, has been changing demographically because of a growing number of non-Arab converts and the continued out-marriage of the second, third and fourth generation Arab American adherents. This dissertation will show that even as the congregations were becoming less Arab and more Arab American, the Archdiocese maintained religiously and politically engaged in the Middle Eastern homeland, and the Antiochian Orthodox parishioners continually constructed and celebrated an Arab cultural identity through food festivals, *haflis* [parties], and the continued use of Arabic in liturgical services. Philip Kayal (2002) also argues that Antiochian Orthodox remain the most likely to identify with pan-Arab causes among all other Lebanese and Syrian Christians.

¹¹ See Hani Bawardi's (2009) well-researched dissertation about early political action among Antiochian Orthodox Christians in the U.S.

The Antiochian Church is also unique; it is the only established Arab American religious community that is not comprised of immigrants largely from one nation. Because the Antiochian Orthodox Church has adherents that trace their ancestry from Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, and Palestine, the Church has been involved religiously and politically in all of those countries.¹² It is a decidedly Levantine Arab identity, but it is more representative than the almost completely Lebanese Maronites or Melkites, the Egyptian Copts, or the Iraqi Chaldeans. For example, Jen'nan Ghazal Read (2008) explains that she chose an Antiochian parish over a Coptic church for her research, in order to obtain a wider range of responses to her survey on the identity formation of Arab Americans in the post-9/11 era (310).

Finally, as this dissertation will show, the cultural identity of the Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese is decidedly Arab, whereas a constructed Coptic cultural identity in the U.S. may be more “ancient Egyptian” than Arab (Jones 2000), the Chaldeans may celebrate an Iraqi or ancient Babylonian identity (Shryock and Lin 2009), and the Maronites tend to celebrate a Lebanese or Phoenician identity instead of an Arab one (Naber, Stiffler, Tayyen, and Said 2009).

The Space of the Church and Lived Religion

Fr. George Shalhoub, priest at St. Mary's in Livonia, explains the myriad functions of the space of the church¹³:

A lot of people might come to be seen, a lot of people come for coffee hours, a lot of people come out of a sense of obligation, or if somebody is having a

¹² Although there are a few Antiochians in the U.S. from Iraq, there is an Antiochian Patriarchate in Baghdad, which prompted the vehement outcry of the archdiocese in the U.S. against the first Gulf War.

¹³ I argue that the “space” exists, following DeCerteau, wherever and whenever it is “practiced” by the community (De Certeau 1984, 117).

memorial or sacrament, baptism, funeral. But you will always find the few who come to thank God for the day. [...] Even the coffee hour is holy. Because in it, you are filling not only people's days, but their heart and mind and soul. Many lonely people that have no family, they find a family. And being an immigrant church, we are by nature social creatures from the Middle East. Here [at church] you are known, you are invited, you are someone special, and part of the socialization and adaptation in America. The churches have become great centers to fill this gap.

For my study, the space of the church is defined by one biblical passage; one that resonates through the everyday lived experiences of Antiochian Orthodox Christians. The words of Jesus Christ as recorded by Matthew the Evangelist and printed in the Orthodox Study Bible read simply: "For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them" (18:20). This passage establishes the space of the church as wherever and whenever two or more Antiochian Orthodox Christians are gathered together *as* Antiochian Orthodox.¹⁴

Far from an obscure Bible passage that I selected to fit my theoretical framework, Matthew 18:20 plays an important role in the liturgical and social lives of Antiochian Orthodox within the context of their religious identity. "Christ is in our midst!" is a pronouncement used by priests and bishops during every Divine Liturgy.¹⁵ This short phrase invokes the space of the church as it draws the listener into the community of Christ. "Christ is in our midst" is drawn directly from Matthew 18:20, in which Jesus is recorded as saying that His presence will be anywhere that people are gathered in his name. "Christ is in our midst" is also on the lips of the parishioners at each liturgy. In most congregations, during the "kiss of peace," the time in the Sunday service where

¹⁴ I am indebted to Andrew Shryock for helping me to establish this framework. Amy Rowe (2008) makes similar claims about the Maronite Catholics in New England. She writes: "The community of people and the bricks and mortar taken together demarcate a Lebanese space" and "by gathering together in these spaces as Maronite...my informants are most explicitly linked to a Lebanese past and ancestry" (113).

¹⁵ In the weeks following the Nativity this phrase is replaced with "Christ is born," and after the Resurrection the pronouncement is "Christ is risen."

parishioners greet those around them, the congregants are supposed to turn to their neighbors, grasp hands or embrace, and announce, “Christ is in our midst.” The appropriate reply is “He is and always shall be.” As Frederica Mathewes-Green, prolific writer on matters of the Orthodox faith, explains, “Exchanging the kiss of peace is a liturgical act, a sign of mystical unity.”¹⁶ Through their embrace and exchange of the greeting, the parishioners and clergy announce to each other that Christ is present, that they are in the space of the church.

The pronouncement has relevance beyond the bounds of liturgical services as well. “Christ is in our midst” is also a typical way for a priest or bishop to begin a speech, a letter, or an email, as a way of invoking those readers or listeners to be part of the community, announcing that the space of the church is there. This is important to my work, because it is at many extra-liturgical events and gatherings that the discourses of Arabness are constructed and maintained. The pronouncement “Christ is in our midst,” drawn from Matthew 18:20, is crucial for my study, for it situates the community, and thus the space of the church, beyond the liturgical services (as Fr. George says, “even the coffee hour can be holy”), and beyond walls of the parish building.

If Matthew 18:20 defines the space of the church, then another verse prominent to the Antiochian Orthodox delineates the specific Orthodox community within that space. Acts 11:26 states “And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.” The Antiochian community is constructed around this verse. Antioch was a city in ancient Syria, and many of the bishops, priests, and parishioners, or their families, trace their ancestry to Greater Syria. The Patriarch for the faith is seated in Damascus, Syria, to this

¹⁶ From a brochure widely circulated among Antiochian Orthodox Churches and published by Conciliar Press, a branch of the Antiochian Orthodox Church

day. Because of this unique historical connection to the Bible, the Antiochian Orthodox see themselves as authentic Christians, perhaps *the* authentic Christians. Acts 11:26 separates the Antiochians from other Orthodox denominations and other Christian sects. No other Christian group can claim this type of authentic provenance to the label “Christian.”¹⁷ Whoever accepts the New Testament as the teachings of Jesus Christ is a Christian. But among those, the community of Antiochian Orthodox are those that maintain a connection to Acts 11:26.

Choosing a biblical passage to define both the space of the church and the community is important because it allows for a self-selecting community. I am not defining the membership. An Antiochian Orthodox is anyone who gathers in the midst of Christ with the understanding that the Church traces its heritage back to the ancient city of Antioch in Syria. By focusing on this Bible verse as the marker of the community, instead of defining the community by some shared cultural heritage, it allows me to also include the growing number of non-Arab converts to the faith, who have chosen the faith precisely because of the ancient and authentic connection to the Holy Land in the Middle East. They did not choose the faith because they wanted to become Arab or play Arab, although converts understand that the space of the church is concerned with a negotiation of Arabness.

But the Bible is not a cultural text for my interlocutors. Even though reading Acts gives me a good sense of how the Antiochians envision their continued relationship to the one, true, unchanging Church, I do not analyze it as a cultural text. The Bible is scriptural to Antiochians and is the structuring relationship to the divine and to their belief system.

¹⁷ Other Orthodox Churches, particularly the Armenian Orthodox and Coptic Orthodox, claim to be the first true Church as well, but do not claim the title of first Christians.

This became evident to me while I was performing my ethnographic work both for this project and as a member of the research team for the Ethnologies of Scriptural Readings of Arab Americans project, funded by the Institute for Signifying Scriptures.¹⁸ To perform ethnography among the Antiochian Orthodox means not shelving the belief of the informants, and not trying to explain it away as simply a result of their conditions of existence (culturally, politically, or socially).

I analyze the space of the church through a lived religion approach, which focuses on everyday lived experiences and how religious identity is manifested in cultural self-representation and politicized action. Many scholars see the space of the church for immigrant communities as not only “insulating,” but as “providing a secure social location from which [immigrant groups] can negotiate with greater success their identities and relations with others” (Williams 1996, 274). For instance, because Antiochian Orthodox cultural celebrations are often tied to their religious space and their identity as ancient Christians, their cultural “difference,” vis-à-vis liberal multiculturalism, can be “mediated” through the space of the church (Warner and Witner 1998, 16). Khyati Joshi’s (2006) lived religion approach “acknowledges the role and social impact of religion as the community’s organizing force and the vehicle through which many ‘do ethnicity’” (53). The space of the church in the U.S. context, then, is about celebrating faith and culture.

My lived religion approach also accounts for belief. Religion needs to be seen in terms of the divine; something that cannot be explained away through theory or as a function *of* cultural identity, which is why my space of the church is drawn from biblical verses that are featured prominently in the daily lives of Antiochian Orthodox. I draw

¹⁸ See Naber, Stiffler, Tayyen, and Said 2009 for a written report of that project.

from the ethnographic focus on Arab religious practices by feminist scholars Laura Deeb (2005 and 2006) and Saba Mahmood (2005). Both scholars show that discourses of piety or practiced belief cannot be explained away by “standard models of sociological causality (such as social protest, economic necessity, anomie, or utilitarian strategy)” and that terms such as “morality, divinity, and virtue” cannot be seen as “the phantom imaginings of the hegemonized” (Mahmood 2005, 16), but that the religious practices of Muslim women, in Mahmood’s case, and pious Muslims in general, in Deeb’s study, must be analyzed for what they are: lived expressions of spirituality and belief. Although my focus on the cultural aspects of religion differs from Deeb and Mahmood, I mainly refer to their centering of religious practice within academic scholarship.

Deeb has also written about the “secularist silencing” of religiosity in the U.S. feminist/activist movement (2005). I would broaden this out even more and say that much of the academy has “disdain or mistrust,” as Deeb writes, for religion and especially for religious people. Her conclusion is powerful, and one that I take to heart as a scholar working with Arab American communities. Deeb writes of “the need to treat religious background, religiosity, and political perspective as plurally constructed, experienced, and practiced, and as existing in complex and non-determinative but mutually constituting relationships to one another” (2005, 206). I take this directive to mean that religious belief cannot be shelved.¹⁹

Finally, Andrea Smith’s (2008) investigation of the coalitions among Native activists and Evangelical Christians is similarly suspect of writing off religious belief as

¹⁹ My role as a researcher in the Ethnologies of Scriptural Readings Project, similarly forced me and my research team lead by Nadine Naber, to account for the spirituality of our adherents. We took pains to insure that that the manner in which they spoke of their relationship to the divine was not “cleaned up” for an academic audience.

“the phantom imaginings of the hegemonized” (Mahmood 2005, 16). Smith argues that few scholars in her field have, for example, “take[n] seriously the theological content of Christian Right belief systems” (2008, xxiv). She uses the Promise Keepers as an example of how writers have failed to fully contextualize the theology behind the movement and she says that critics must account for the fact that “thousands of people actually *do* believe that praying is not just an empty gesture but a powerful act that can transform social structures” (xxiv–xxv). This statement has stuck with me, as I have found that many cultural studies, historical, and ethnographic works on religious communities fail to take account of belief as a generative act and not simply a byproduct of social, political, or cultural identity.

The Cultural and the Multicultural

My concept of cultural identity, or Arabness, is specific and contextualized. My analysis of the construction and maintenance of an Antiochian cultural identity in the U.S. context takes into account the transnational positioning of Antiochian Orthodox Christians vis-à-vis U.S. military and political interests in the Middle East, homeland events (such as political or humanitarian crises), and U.S. popular, political, and media discourses about Arabs that structure their position within the U.S. multicultural. Antiochians have continually constructed and re-constructed their cultural identity in response to this positionality. As Nadine Naber (forthcoming) argues about Arab-ness and American-ness, which is similar to the scope of my work, these constructs “shift and change when they are lived in light of changing circumstances and power relationships.”

Examined in this way, cultural identity is not a watered-down version of race, but a viable framework for analyzing the articulations by racialized groups.²⁰

I have chosen to use the term cultural identity instead of ethnicity, even though I see both terms as useful for the analysis of the contextual articulation of group identity. I have chosen cultural identity for three reasons. First, the term “ethnicity” has been used so uncritically for decades by popular historians, critics, media personalities, and political pundits, that the term has lost much of its power. In its popular usage, ethnicity is taken for granted and decontextualized, and has often been used as a way of avoiding discussion of race (Omi and Winant 1994).

Second, ethnicity tends to be used as the “naturalization of group identity,” in that the context for the creation of cultural identity is obscured, and ethnicity becomes a “possession of certain attributes” (Appadurai 1996, 13). Cultural, following Appadurai, signals “the conscious and imaginative construction and mobilization of difference” (1996, 14). This is the heart of my dissertation. Since Antiochian Orthodox, as a transnational and multi-national group of people, construct their identity in relation to specific historical moments, analyzing cultural identity as a conscious construction is more helpful than ethnicity as a naturalized possession.

Third, and most importantly, “ethnic” can have a negative connotation within the Antiochian Orthodox Church. Ethnic can refer to the “ethnicism” that develops among Orthodox Christian denominations in the U.S., such as Greek, Romanian, Albanian,

²⁰ Also, following Comaroff and Comaroff (2009) cultural identity, unlike race, can be examined “primarily in expressive culture, in collective practices and products” (37). But much like race, cultural identity is created through interactions with historical realities. As Eric Wolf (2002) argues, “culture making and remaking” is always contextual (190). Wolf further stresses that we must understand the relational and contextual processes that help construct ethnicity at a given moment: “precise ways in which they construct and relinquish claims to identity under the pressure of complex forces, processes that underwrite, maintain, exacerbate, or cool ethnic assertion” (2002, 186).

Russian, Arab, etc. Metropolitan Philip Saliba of the Antiochian Archdiocese has long maintained that the deep ethnic divisions between the Orthodox Churches were a hindrance to the expansion of the faith in the U.S. He says that “ethnicism is a very narrow fanatic concept of a particular nationality...and I have nothing to do with it” (Shadid 1984, 67). As Fr. George has told me, “We’ve never lived in isolation and Metropolitan Philip, all his life, he refused for us to live in our own ghettos but to be on the frontline.” This is part of the reason that the Antiochian Orthodox Church has been so accepting of non-Arab converts: the ethnicity, as a historic marker of Orthodox denomination, does not trump religion. To avoid confusion between this particular Orthodox Christian understanding of ethnicity, and the more general celebration of an Arab identity, of which Antiochian Orthodox freely participate in, I use cultural identity.²¹

Multiculturalism and the Commodification of Cultural Identity

Most scholars that engage in critiques of multiculturalism are quick to point out the difference between “multiculturalism,” which is the existence of peoples from diverse ethnic, racial, and religious backgrounds living within the same geographic region or even within the same nation-state, and multiculturalism as a political project (Shohat and Stam 1994). Tariq Modood states that multiculturalism is not simply about a society suddenly being or recognizing that they were multiethnic or multiracial, but “understanding that a new set of challenges were being posed for which a new political agenda was necessary” (2007, 5). This “new political agenda,” what Charles Taylor

²¹ I do, however, use the term “ethnic” in relation to established descriptive terms, such as ethnic food or ethnic festival. But anytime I refer to the construction of Arabness, I use cultural identity.

refers to as the “politics of recognition,” requires minority groups to prove their “worth” to the larger unmarked hegemonic society (1992).²² My analysis of multiculturalism situates Arab American Christian constructions of cultural identity within U.S. liberal multiculturalism and its emphasis on the commodification of a depoliticized identity, mainly through food and its celebration, as a prerequisite for cultural citizenship.²³ I argue that Arab American Christians, particularly Antiochian Orthodox, selectively participate in multiculturalism by exploiting the “contradictions” of multiculturalism (Lowe 1996)—readily marketing their cultural identity through the front door of the church, while simultaneously pushing their politicized agendas out of the side door.

Lisa Lowe (1996) opens up her critique of the “contradictions” of multiculturalism by analyzing a specific instance of the production of multiculturalism. Her investigation, which similarly to my work acknowledges the rich analytical terrain offered by festivals, details the production of multiculturalism and its competing narratives during the 1990 Los Angeles Festival of the Arts. The festival was “represented as a polyvocal symphony of cultures” (86), but for Lowe it is clear that the presentation of the city’s diverse ethnic and racial groups in the commodified atmosphere of the festival, heightened the contradiction between these groups’ visibility and participation in the pluralist celebration of America and their continued marginalized

²² Taylor (1992) argues that the recognition, or the fight for recognition, helps to construct the identity of minority groups. In other words, they become an identifiable group only as they engage in the politics of recognition, which forces them to prove their worth by showcasing their contributions to the larger culture.

²³ Ong (1996) views cultural citizenship as a process, where “cultural practices and beliefs produced out of negotiating the often ambivalent and contested relations with the state and its hegemonic forms that establish the criteria of belonging within a national population and territory.” It’s a dialectical process of “self-making and being made” (738). Christine So (2007) argues that Asian Americans, and other minorities, are made visible in the public sphere through their participation in economic exchange (19). Far from an uncritical celebration of economics as a level playing field, she is concerned with “the ongoing anxiety over the pathways of economic and social circulation” (9). This idea of “economic citizenship” builds on Aiwaha Ong’s view of cultural citizenship, part of which entails the figuring of the “economic worth” of racial minorities to the U.S. (1996, 739).

political and economic status. Simply stated, and extremely relevant to my discussion of Arab Americans, is that the festival and similar productions of multiculturalism show that multiculturalism “is concerned with ‘importation,’ not ‘immigration’” (87), in which the general U.S. public purchases cultural artifacts but outside of the social and political reality that the peoples who produce and sell those artifacts exist in. For my work the contradictions are evident as the U.S. public, hungry for diversity, consumed *hummus* and *kibbee* from the Arab American Christians, even as the undifferentiated “Arab” was marginalized and “othered” in the Orientalist-informed popular culture and political discourses.

Food, Festival, and Bicentennial Multiculturalism

My work figures the planning and production of the 1976 U.S. Bicentennial celebrations as a structuring force within multiculturalism, one that continues to have salience in the public performance and consumption of ethnicity and diversity. The planning for the Bicentennial celebration did not mark the beginning of multiculturalism in the U.S., but rather intensified the focus on its performative aspects, most visibly the ethnic food festival. I see both liberal multiculturalism and the Bicentennial celebration as processes of nation building, built on similar contradictions of cultural inclusion and political exclusion.²⁴ The Bicentennial celebration was for the most part orchestrated by

²⁴ What I mean by processes of “nation building” is that both the Bicentennial project and multiculturalist rhetoric and programs, such as the 1972 Ethnic Heritage Studies Program Act, envisioned the inclusion of diversity as only serving to shore up national narratives of assimilation. “Diversity” becomes something to commodify and consume (literally through ethnic food and festivals), consequently ignoring the imbalance in power relations. Lisa Lowe states it most clearly: “Multiculturalism levels the important differences and contradictions within and among racial and ethnic minority groups according to the discourse of pluralism, which asserts that American culture is a democratic terrain to which every variety of constituency has equal access and in which all are represented, while simultaneously masking the existence of exclusions by recuperating dissent, conflict, and otherness through the promise of inclusion” (1996, 86). Andrew

local and state governments and organizations, as the idea of a “national community” waned in significance in the wake of the tumultuous 1960s, White House scandals, the prolonged war in Vietnam, harsh economic realities, and the fracturing of the idea of an imagined monocultural America.²⁵ The Bicentennial was executed as a series of local expressions, over 66,000, that ultimately served to “foster order and national unity” by having local, religious, and ethnic groups elaborate their own histories in relation to their “contributions” to the nation (Bodnar 1992, 243). This discourse of “contributions” to the nation, and the power structures that encouraged and maintained it, continued to marginalize and even erase any difference that was seen as outside the scope of a traditional and linear national imaginary.²⁶

As the Bicentennial *Final Report* stated, “A quick look at the activities registered in the official Bicentennial Information Network proves that the contents of the ‘melting pot’ have not yet melted. The bubbling pot was serving up a lavish feast of ethnic celebrations for the Bicentennial” (ARBA 128). The language of food in the description of the activities that took place throughout 1976 and the run up to it is no doubt intentional. It is also no accident that many of the major ethnic food festivals across the U.S. began or expanded in the 1970s.²⁷ Although large-scale community festivals were

Shryock, in his ethnographic investigation of Arab American organizations, argues similarly that ethnic identity maintenance is seen by minority groups as “our own business,” yet this maintenance is also “everybody’s business” and part of a larger “nation-building process” (2004b, 287).

²⁵ See Schulman (2002), Bodnar (1992); and Capozzola (2004) for excellent discussions and context on the local productions of the national Bicentennial. Other than these three works, I have found no extensive study on the Bicentennial celebration, and hope that my work places it into a fuller context.

²⁶ An obvious example is that any sort of protest statement by Native groups was not to be included in the Bicentennial. Instead, Native participation was encouraged only to show the harmonious relationships between the nation’s ethnic and racial groups. See the account of the meeting between the bicentennial planning committee and Native tribal leaders in the *Final Report* by the ARBA (1976, 130–31).

²⁷ Scholars of ethnic festivals typically cite the 1970s as the period in which the ethnic resurgence was most evident. The search for and/or celebration of one’s heritage during this period, which Marilyn Halter (2000) says received an official boost from the 1970s Ethnic Heritage acts, “accounts for such developments as the

not new, “[b]efore the 1970s, larger-scale festivals rarely focused specifically on ethnic foods” (Gabaccia 1998, 189). The “new ethnicity and its festivals” would arrive in the 1970s, with the simultaneous development of liberal multiculturalism and the planning and execution of the Bicentennial celebration.²⁸ From New York City to the Smithsonian in Washington, D.C. to San Antonio and Tucson, the largest ethnic festivals of the 1970s were funded by state and federal governments to “encourage multiculturalism,” even though these events also became huge money makers (Gabaccia 1998, 193).²⁹ The food festival became the perfect site to commodify, and literally consume, difference within multiculturalism.

Penny Van Esterik (1982), whose work is based on fieldwork with urban ethnic festivals in the 1970s, sees a strong connection between government institutional support for ethnic expression and the festival as a “positive” ethnic space where people could “experience ethnicity ‘painlessly’ by eating foods” instead of being bogged down in politics. She writes that “[s]ince 1972 when the Ethnic Heritage Studies Program Act was passed, urban ethnic festivals have become more popular” (224).³⁰ Since this act did

growth of ethnic celebrations, a zeal for genealogy, increased travel to ancestral homelands, and greater interest in ethnic artifacts, cuisine, music, literature, and, of course, language” (5).

²⁸ Further, the Bicentennial, as part of the larger multiculturalism of the 1970s, was heavily commercialized and commodified and was sold in the form of t-shirts, toilet seats, and a “star-spangled banner whoopee cushion” (Capozzola 2004, 33). The Bicentennial was not exempt from the “consumer culture” of the period, and neither was the role of cultural identity within multiculturalism (Capozzola 2004, 33).

²⁹ New York’s Ninth Avenue International Festival of Food started in 1971 (Gabaccia 1998, 191). In Washington, D.C.: “By 1976, and the huge bicentennial festival, the Festival of American Folklife more clearly celebrated multicultural ethnic diversity, and hoped to ‘stimulate cultural self-awareness and inter-cultural understanding’” (Gabaccia 1998, 193). Also, the expansive “Tucson Meet Yourself” festival began in early 1970s (Griffith 1988, 219). Griffith says that much of the sales at the Tucson fest are from ethnic foods. And this is by design because, as Griffith says: “We live in a consumer-oriented society, and one way to present ethnicity (or anything else) in such a society is to provide the public with an opportunity to purchase things [especially ethnicity]. Americans in the seventies seemed to enjoy sampling each others’ foods” (222–223).

³⁰ In July 1972 Congress passed the act as part of the Title V of the Higher Education Amendments Act of 1972. “The new law authorized grants for the creation of ethnic heritage studies programs in elementary and secondary schools, and for the establishment of a National Advisory Council on Ethnic Heritage Studies” (Skrenty 2002, 302).

“little” “[b]esides adding legitimacy to the politics of difference” (Skrenty 2002, 302), it is not surprising that Van Esterik saw the festival space in the 1970s much like Lowe saw it in the 1990s, as a space where “‘Saturday ethnics’ can celebrate their differences, while retaining intact the American dream” and “agree to act as if no problems or worries exist, and ethnicity can be safely expressed” (1982, 224, 225). This was also the goal of the celebration of the nation’s Bicentennial. After the socially, culturally, and politically tumultuous 1960s, the last thing the powers-that-be wanted was to create tensions around “difference,” so the festival functioned a depoliticized space through which to “play nice” (Van Esterik 1982).

I will demonstrate through the space of the ethnic food festival, that Antiochian parishes market a specific version of their cultural identity through the planning and production of their public *haflis* and festivals, operating within the logics of multiculturalism, specifically through the space that Bicentennial-era multiculturalism opened up for the food festival.³¹

Why the focus on food and its celebration? Food and the celebrations of food, whether through Middle Eastern themed restaurants or *haflis* carried out by churches, is an important but underdeveloped unit of analysis in Arab American studies. Beside William and Yvonne Lockwood’s (2000) detailed scholarly work and the small group of literary works about the relationship between Arab Americans and their ethnic foods, there is relatively little attention paid to food studies, unlike within the bodies of literature

³¹ Food and the celebration of food, or what Charles Camp labels the “food event,” is a potent cultural form through which to analyze a group’s identity construction. My focus on the food festival as a food event, allows me to focus on how food and its associated imagery function as markers of community identity and cultural commodities for sale to the general public, without worrying about recipes, food production processes, or nutritional information of the food items, all of which may be intriguing areas for studying the cultural production of Arabness, but are beyond the scope of my work.

of other ethnic groups, notably Jewish, Asian American, Latino/a, and Indian Americans.³² But food for Arab Christians, specifically Antiochian Orthodox, is often much more than symbolic culture and can carry a real historical and religious power with it. Fr. George Shalhoub, in his memoirs and historical account of his parish, proclaims while remembering the completion of construction on the banquet hall that:

I am reminded all over again of how important food is to the entire Arab-American culture. In our long and loving tradition, we always break bread after a funeral. Food is literally a part of the healing process for all of the bereaved. And who could imagine a wedding reception among Palestinian or Lebanese or Syrian families that did not include mountains of fragrant, richly satisfying foods (2007, 171).

Because the space of the church becomes a main site for the construction of cultural identity for Antiochian Orthodox, it is no surprise that food is seen both as a religious and a cultural expression, as evidenced by Fr. George's quote. Consider an advertisement in *The Word* in February 1991 for a videocassette called "You Can Make Arabic Bread." The video promises to teach the viewer how to make Arabic bread, both "pita-pocket" and "Holy" bread, which is served at communion in church and is, incidentally, referred to as "Syrian bread" by Antiochians in western Pennsylvania.

Within Arab immigrant communities, and I would argue especially Arab American Christian communities, eating ethnic food is the most common ethnic-related cultural practice.³³ Joanna Kadi, in her introduction to the anthology *Food For Our*

³² There are also two anthologies of Arab American literature and writing that show the centrality of food to Arab and Arab American life, *Grape Leaves* (1988), and *Food For Our Grandmothers* (1994), which uses a "common Arabic food," such as olives, bread, and mint, "to embody the themes" of each section of writing, and also includes a recipe utilizing that food submitted by one of the contributors (Kadi 1994, xx).

³³ Paul Eid, in his study of second-generation Arabs in Canada, found that the "most common ethnic-related cultural practice...is eating ethnic food" (2007, 84). Eid says that this correlates with other researchers, mainly Wsevolod Isajiw, who says that eating ethnic food is maintained more from generation to generation more than anything else. As William and Yvonne Lockwood argue in their extended study of Arab American foodways in Detroit, "perhaps no aspect of culture is so resistant to change, so tenaciously

Grandmothers, partially describes her cultural identity in relation to her family's homeland: "Lebanon. I grew up tasting Lebanon and hearing its music, but not speaking and only rarely hearing its language" (1994, xv). Many Arab Christians who may not speak Arabic or have not lived in the Middle East, still know its food well and identify eating it with their cultural identity. Author Randa Kayyali similarly places food as a main marker of cultural identity for Arab Americans. Kayyali writes that "[s]ome multigenerational Arab Americans describe their Arabic-language skills as 'kitchen Arabic,' meaning they only know the Arabic words for dishes cooked by their family in the home" (2006, 84). Compare this with a statement from two of my interlocutors, a Lebanese-born husband and wife, who describe the parishioners at an Antiochian parish in Pennsylvania, where the majority of the membership is third and fourth generation Arab American. The husband says that to these parishioners "Lebanese history is all about *tabouleh* and *kibbee*." The wife adds, "*Hummus*, too."

The consumption of cultural identity through food forms the basis of my argument about the importance of studying Antiochian food festivals as *the* site where the public comes in contact with a constructed Arabness. Deborah Lupton (1994) speaks literally about the consumption of the other. On the "simplest, biological level...we become what we eat." But identity, the "being" what you eat, is also "linked" to food's "symbolic meaning" and "[f]ood may be regarded as the ultimate consumable commodity" and "acts symbolically to define boundaries between Self and Other and constructs a cosmology" (666). The consumption of ethnic foods speaks volumes about the larger context of multiculturalism and its celebration of de-politicized identity. But

held. Generations after the loss of their mother tongue, ethnic Americans are still likely to be cooking and eating some version of the family's 'mother cuisine'" (2000, 516).

even within this space, there is some power of negotiation on the part of the ethnic groups. If ethnic food “invites [the consumer] not only to appreciate the beauty and pleasure of well-prepared food, but also to consume the subtle messages embedded within these representations,” then Arab American groups can use this exchange to exact some measure of interjection into the popular discourses that have marginalized and othered Arabs (LeBesco and Naccarato 2008, 1). Even if that message is simply that Arabs have a “real” or tangible cultural tradition outside of Hollywood representations and nightly newscasts.³⁴

On multiple occasions, Fr. George Shalhoub has equated the increased availability of Arab ethnic food in the U.S. with an increased awareness, and even acceptance of, the Arab peoples in the U.S. During a homily in the days before the inauguration of Barack Obama, Fr. George spoke of “change,” a popular theme in Obama’s campaign:

Things change. In a few days America will install a new President. [...] Barack Obama will take the oath of office on the same Bible that Abraham Lincoln did. Change is good. If it does good. We change food. I am stunned that wherever I go, people know what *hummus* and *baba ghanoush* and *kibbee* and *sfeeha* [is]...the food we brought to America now selling at Costco and Meijer. And there is a Arabic store on every corner.

The message is that food can represent a “real” culture, even though it is embedded within a de-politicized multiculturalist space that operates on stereotypes and a required “thinness” (Shryock 2004b). Antiochian parishes can exert power in the realm of representation, since the exchange of food as identity occurs in a face-to-face setting on the community’s terms, more or less.³⁵

³⁴ My chapter on self-Orientalism further elaborates on the representational practices of Arab Christians in the U.S.

³⁵ I understand that I am arguing both that multiculturalism structures the limits of representation and that the Antiochians can exact a measure of power through the negotiation of these limits in such a way that financially and even politically benefits them. Following LeBesco and Naccarato’s (2008) understanding of

Race/Whiteness in the Public Festival Context

Many Arab American scholars have written about idea of “white” as it pertains to Arabs in the United States (Samhan 1999, Majaj 2000, Naber 2000, and Gualtieri 2000, to name a few). The newest addition to the scholarship is an edited volume by Nadine Naber and Amaney Jamal *Race and Arab Americans Before and After 9/11* (2008). It is the first major work to tackle the issue of race and cultural racism as experienced in Arab America. Naber’s introduction states that “whiteness studies has opened up important possibilities for conceptualizing the multiple, contradictory ways that Arab Americans have tended to self-identify” racially (2008, 30). Most helpful to my work is how Sawsan Abdulrahim (2008) confronts these “contradictory, racial identity formations” of Arab American through her fieldwork in Metro Detroit (136).

In the case of Antiochian Orthodox in southeastern Michigan, it is a decidedly complex engagement with whiteness. While almost all of the parishioners that I talked with at St. Mary’s use the labels “white” or “American” (and usually interchangeably) when referring to a non-Arab person, they also see themselves as white, if not something more distinct, especially in the context of claims to culturally authenticity within multiculturalism. Lisa Suhair Majaj uses the term “liminality” to discuss how Arab Americans are classified as legally white but “popularly perceived as non-white.” This liminal position, Majaj (2000) argues, “has profound implications for Arab-Americans as

the powers of food in a discursive context, the food culture of the Arab American Christians can be a vehicle for exercising “both repressive and productive power,” in a Foucaultian manner (3). Also, Lucy Long, in her essay in her volume *Culinary Tourism* (2004) states, following Bourdieu and Appadurai, that “culinary tourism...[allows] producers and consumers to elevate food from being a mere sustenance to the realms of art and recreation, and therefore tools for the expression and manipulation of social power” (45).

they attempt to assert a public identity, claim a voice within the American multicultural, and take collective action on issues of common concern” (320–21).

Based on my ethnographic data, and that of Abdulrahim (2008) and the Detroit Arab American Study (2009), I can say that Antiochian engagements with race are nothing if not complex. But as my data shows, these complex engagements with whiteness are heightened in the planning and production of the public festival space, as parishioners tried to determine what foods and music would attract “white people” and what would appeal to “our community”. The public nature of the ethnic food festival forces Antiochian Orthodox parishioners to articulate their cultural identity within the often racialized constructions of identity in the U.S. Throughout my ethnographic work Antiochian parishioners articulated their community boundaries through a relation to U.S. constructions of whiteness.³⁶

There is also a complex positioning in relation to Antiochian Christianity which is rooted in an Arab cultural identity, but perceived by outsiders as racially unmarked “Catholic.” More than one of my interlocutors said that most people driving past the basilica see it as a plain old Catholic Church and “not an Arab Church.”

Self-Orientalism, Cultural Authenticity, and Arab American Representations

The instances of what I call self-Orientalism occur mostly in the context of the commodification of cultural identity in which Antiochian Orthodox attempt to claim their

³⁶ Because religion in a racialized society like the U.S. “accentuates group boundaries, divisions, categorizations, and the biases that follow” (Emerson and Smith 2000, 158), religion offers an especially important intersection with race and belonging, since religious thinking both “undergirded, and occasionally contested” the racial thinking that informed colonialism, slavery, and westward expansion (Fessenden 2004). Since much of religious history in the United States is rooted in racial division, to discuss immigrant experiences with religion is to map them out on the U.S. racial landscape as well.

share of the diversity market within multiculturalism. I look at how Antiochian Orthodox engage with the imagery and rhetoric of the *Arabian Nights* and adaptations of the *Arabian Nights*, specifically its magical, romantic, and exotic elements, and strategically re-present that imagery and rhetoric as something Antiochian and Christian. As part of their self-Orientalist self-representations, the images of camels, Bedouins, palm trees, and deserts, are deployed as Antiochians graft themselves onto the dominant representations of Arabs in U.S. popular culture. Sometimes this self-Orientalizing is calculated and ironic as a way to sell more *kibbee* and *hummus*. Other times the use of stereotypical images of Arabs and the Middle East is drawn from the constructed Arabness of the Antiochian Orthodox community: part nostalgia, part family history, and part ancient Christian history, but mostly adapted from the pool of images and representations available in U.S. popular culture.

I show how self-Orientalism (chapter 3) and the deployment of a similar essentialized cultural identity in the context of food festivals (chapter 4) are part of claims to cultural authenticity. I argue that cultural identity can become something to be authenticated in the context of the multicultural marketplace. Mannur (2007) and Shukla (2003) also address authenticity as something that exists when cultural identity enters the multicultural marketplace in the form of food and/or festival.³⁷ Cultural authenticity lies in a cultural group's ability to present itself as "outside" of the typified "social and geographical" experiences of an unmarked, hegemonic American public (Lowe 1996, 87). Similarly, Phil Deloria (1998) places claims to authenticity within the marketplace and bases those claims on enacted differences. He argues that in order for "Indians" to be

³⁷ Also see MacCannell (1976), L. Long (2004), and Halter (2000), for discussions of how cultural identity as a commodity, particularly in regards to food, becomes a claim to authenticity.

seen as authentic, by the Americans who would purchase their goods and an “Indianized” experience, the Indians had to be “located outside modern American societal boundaries” (115). As Antiochians graft their cultural identity onto the legacy of the *Arabian Nights*, especially when marketing their food festivals, it instantly enhances their claim to cultural authenticity by enacting the magical, mystical otherness of ancient Arabia.

But as the *Arabian Nights* is generally considered a record of Islamic storytelling with few main Christian characters and fewer positive portrayals of Christians (Makdisi and Nussbaum 2008), and as Orientalism generally takes Islam as its main site of religious difference and not Christianity (even Arab Christianity), Antiochian Orthodox have to first insert themselves into the legacy of Orientalist representations of Arabs by using the images of camels, Bedouins, scimitars, and in some cases minarets in the marketing and production of their food festivals. In other words, Antiochian Orthodox represent themselves through imagery and rhetoric that is generally considered, by Western audiences, to be Islamic. But in order not to create “an experience of fundamental alterity” for the U.S. festival-going public (Povinelli 2002, 12), Antiochians have to continually reinforce that their Arabness is a Christian one and that their festivals are taking place on the grounds of a church and not a mosque. It is easier for a Christian Arabness to remain within “the limits of tolerance” for liberal multiculturalism (Povinelli 2002, 12). For example, a flyer for the annual *hafli* of an Antiochian Orthodox church in Altoona, PA, (Figure 1-3) features Islamic-style minarets and other imagery that could be associated with Islam, such as the *oud* player wearing a turban-style headdress and an “Exotic Mid-East dancer.” But the *hafli* is scheduled to take place at the local Knights of

Columbus Hall, and the word “church” appears on the flyer twice. This *hafli* offers the public a night of exotic Arabness within the space of the church.

The Christian church not only has a long history of being the site of culturally-based fundraising in the U.S.,³⁸ but given the prevalence of Islam as the target of U.S. anti-Arab discourses, and the frequency with which mosques are vandalized in the wake of any conflict in the Middle East involving the U.S., a church setting may be more inviting to a wary U.S. public.³⁹ Even if the tales of the *Arabian Nights* presented an Islamic Arabness, the imagery and rhetoric from the tales were so ubiquitous in U.S. popular culture representations of Arabs that it was the best vehicle for Antiochians to hitch their identity construction to.

Scholars point to the *Arabian Nights* tales and their myriad adaptations, particularly in Hollywood films, as a major influence in U.S.-based Orientalism. Most important to my work are how U.S. popular culture representations of Arabs and the Middle East, especially through film, become almost standardized and metonymic. If the viewer sees a flying carpet on screen or in a book, they know the setting is the Middle

³⁸ See Gabaccia 1998.

³⁹ See Abraham 1994 for a rundown of anti-Arab racism and violence that focused on mosques in the 1980s. Slade 1981 also reported that the majority of Americans at the end of the 1970s, a time when Antiochian food festivals were in full swing, saw Arabs as anti-Christian. More recently in the post-9/11 context, the mosque in the U.S. is often perceived as the training grounds for “homegrown” fundamentalist Islamic terrorists. In a *New York Times* article titled “Heated Opposition to a Proposed Mosque” (Paul Vitello, June 10, 2010), the author details a public meeting about a proposed mosque on Staten Island, in which the vitriolic response by the area’s residents represents the conflation of the mosque/Islam with terror in U.S. popular and political discourses. As far as anti-Arab violence against Arab Christians, there are only two documented cases of an Antiochian Orthodox church building being vandalized in the post-9/11 moment. The first was an intentionally set fire at the Antiochian Orthodox Church of the Redeemer in Los Altos Hills, CA, in April of 2002. The church, housing mostly Palestinian adherents, was completely destroyed and the community blamed anti-Arab sentiment though there was no direct evidence (Suzanne Herel, “Fire at Arab Americans’ Church Ruled Arson,” *SFGate.com*, April 12, 2002. http://articles.sfgate.com/2002-04-12/bay-area/17538543_1_santa-clara-county-fire-departments-interfaith-group). A more recent incident, and equally disturbing, occurred in the wake of the Israeli siege on Gaza in the winter of 2009. The Sts. Peter and Paul Antiochian Orthodox Church in Bethesda, MD, was spray painted with a Star of David and the words “Israel forever—Arabs never.” The priest, Fr. George Rados, has been in charge of archdiocesan humanitarian efforts in the Middle East for decades.

East, regardless of the era that the story takes place in. Jack Shaheen calls the total collection of the images of the magic lamp, the scimitars, and the flying carpets the “Instant Ali Baba Kits” that set designers, property managers, and directors have relied on to quickly “conjure up” Arabland in the mind of the viewer (Shaheen 2001, 8). Over the centuries the images from not only the *Arabian Nights* but from travel books and works of literature, all covered quite extensively by Edward Said and other critics of Orientalism, show up in all types of places, from political cartoons in newspapers (Stockton 1994) to advertisements for cigarettes, coffee, and travel agencies. The imagery from the *Arabian Nights* was, and remains, quite ubiquitous in American culture.⁴⁰

The stereotypes and images of the Arab world and its peoples did not only originate with Hollywood cinema, but have always developed and changed alongside U.S. involvement and interest in the Middle East. Much of what Nabeel Abraham (1994) labels “anti-Arab racism” congealed in the 1970s. Moving past the mere Hollywood Arab, which he connects with an exoticized “other,” we find the themes of the Arab as dangerous, anti-American, terrorist, and fanatical. Fueled by a volatile mix of jingoism and nativist, racist ideology, the underlying anti-Arab sentiments are unleashed during periods when the U.S. homeland is perceived as being threatened by some Arab other (Abraham 1994). Abraham cites the 1973 oil embargo, the mid-1980s, with the fear of international terrorism heightened by plane hijackings, and the first Gulf War as

⁴⁰ Probably the best example of the proliferation of the images of the Middle East in American culture is Jonathan Friedlander’s “Orientalist Americana” collection at UCLA’s Young Research Library. The largest collection of its type in the U.S., Friedlander labels it “Middle Eastern Americana: print, electronic, audio, visual, ephemera — artifacts, fetishes, souvenirs, objects d’art and consumer items spanning more than 150 years of American history” (qtd. in Feuer 2008). Robert Irwin (2004) clearly states the overarching influence and circulation of these *Arabian Nights*-style images: “The iconography will register with people who have never opened the book...the Roc’s egg, harem girls, scimitars, genies, minarets, the Cyclops, the prince disguised as a beggar, the basket full of serpents, the rope which turns into a ladder, the all-seeing eye” (225).

examples of heightened tension and as times when anti-Arab rhetoric and imagery, particularly through film, political cartoons, and media coverage of the Middle East, were most intense. The aftermath of September 11, 2001 did not initiate the tropes and stereotypes used about Arabs and other peoples from the Middle East,⁴¹ but they were only recycled and modified to fit the context, much like each incarnation, translation, and publishing of the *Arabian Nights* was always a product of its time.⁴²

Although Shaheen (2001), Abraham (1994), and other pioneering scholars of the media's impact on Arab Americans always placed their analysis of the images into larger historical structures and political contexts, Ella Shohat and Robert Stam (1994) have laid out the clearest connection between Orientalist and imperialist modes of knowledge production and Hollywood, placing both into a critical discussion of multiculturalism. In *Unthinking Eurocentrism*, Shohat and Stam trace Hollywood's use of or continuation of what they label "tropes of empire," which collectively positioned the Middle East as a peripheral land (in relation to Europe and the West), and its inhabitants as hypersexualized, exotic, dangerous, and ripe for the conquest. Much like literary scholars view the early editors and translations of the *Arabian Nights*, Shohat and Stam argue that

⁴¹ Recently numerous scholars have made this point concerning September 11, 2001. See Nadine Naber's introduction to her co-edited volume *Race and Arab Americans Before and After 9/11* (2008). Further complicating the issue of representations of Arab in popular culture and media, specifically following September 11, 2001, is Evelyn Alsultany's essay (2008) about the portrayal of Arab and Arab American characters in prime time television dramas. She demonstrates that there was an increase in "sympathetic" characters, as well the usual terrorist enemy others, but that even the presence of sympathetic characters still allows audiences "the right to be racist and suspicious of Arab and Muslim Americans" and that "government practices to profile racially, detain, deport, and terrorize Arabs and Muslims are accepted" (225).

⁴² Jarmakani (2008) convincingly makes this argument about the shifting function of the images used in cigarette ads. In one poignant example, she contrasts the "jovial" image of a sultan on the *Omar* cigarette brand in the early twentieth century, a product of a romanticized view of the Middle East, with the more sinister depictions of "oil sheiks" in the 1970s and 80s. This shift following the 1973 oil embargo exemplified "the reemergence of symbolic barriers" that "reflect[ed] the complex network of power relations between the neocolonialist U.S. power, the Middle East, and the former colonial powers of France and Britain" (168).



Figure 1-4 Flyer for 1972 *hafli* in Altoona, PA. Image courtesy of Michael Farrow.

“cinema enacted a historiographical and anthropological role” “premised on cinema’s capacity to initiate the Western spectator into an unknown culture” (1994, 145; 148).

Amira Jarmakani (2008) similarly argues that popular culture representations of “Arabs” were “emptied” of real socio-historical context and “appropriated and refilled with the dominant ideologies” of the period in which they were deployed (5).⁴³ Jarmakani discusses the difficulty of arguing against these well-engrained tropes, stereotypes, or in her terms, cultural mythologies, especially because of the salience these images’ “persistent ability to refract concerns about power and progress” in the U.S context, locking the Middle Easter “other” in (trans)history (2008, 21).

⁴³ She looks at cigarette ads throughout the twentieth century that depicted images of what she terms Arab womanhood. She then placed these advertisements within the context of U.S. imperial or neocolonialist ventures in the Middle East, whether through the marker of “oil” in the 1970s or the thrust of war in the 1990s and post-9/11.

My intervention into the literature on representations of Arab Americans is to firmly place the human element into the discussion. I situate Antiochian Orthodox Christians within the context of U.S. engagements with the Middle East and the cultural productions about Arabs that are reflective and generative of that history, specifically the tales of the *Arabian Nights* and their adaptations. Too often the people get displaced in favor of textual analysis. Admittedly textual analyses in the vein of Said's *Orientalism* have carried the conversation a long way. But *Orientalism* and subsequent approaches that place Orientalism into a strictly U.S. context, I am thinking here of Melani McAlister (2005) and Douglas Little (2002), fail to account for the impact on and of the Arab American communities.⁴⁴ Even though Jarmakani's book is dedicated to the investigation of the images of Arab womanhood, she does not engage in any sustained discussion of Arab American responses to the "cultural mythologies" of the veil, the harem, and belly dancers. This is less a critique and more a statement of the limitation of her textual approach, which she fully recognizes. In fact, Jarmakani ends her book with concerns that are central to my study. She asks the question of "how cultural mythologies related to the Arab and Muslim worlds have impacted Arab Americans and Muslim Americans" (2008, 188–189). Her call to action certainly resonated with what I am trying to accomplish not only with my ethnographic approach, but with the centering of the cultural productions by Arab Christians in my historical analyses. My focus on articulations, much like Naber (forthcoming), allows me to foreground Arab Americans as producers of their own cultural identity.

⁴⁴ Admittedly, Little (2002) does briefly discuss the uphill battle that Arab American lobby groups have faced amidst the barrage of anti-Arab rhetoric and discourse. Also, Maira (2008) investigates how the popularity of belly dancing was enacted and resisted by Arab American women.

Methods

Anthropologically, I approach the Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese as a transnational religious space, and I investigate different locations within that space.⁴⁵ My main ethnographic location is St. Mary's Antiochian Orthodox Basilica in Livonia, MI. Other locations are the archdiocese conventions that I have attended, the Antiochian Village and its Heritage and Learning Center and museum, food festivals at various parishes, and liturgical services at a number of Antiochian Orthodox churches.

Historically, I rely on archival research to contextualize the locations that I have investigated, both temporally and spatially. For instance, my attendance at the 2005 national Parish Life Convention in Dearborn, MI, is placed into a larger context by reading the convention program books from every archdiocese convention since 1945. I am able to contextualize my ethnographic experiences at Antiochian food festivals in Michigan, Ohio, and Pennsylvania, by reading the accounts of food festivals in, for example, New York, Texas, and Oregon. Together my ethnographic and archival research shows a tremendous continuity of the construction and maintenance of an Arab cultural identity, across time and space, within the transnational religious space of the Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese in the U.S.

My main archive is the Heritage and Learning Center and museum at the Antiochian Village. While there, I mainly focused on the dozens of souvenir program books that have been distributed at each Archdiocese convention, both regional and national, since the 1940s. Each souvenir program book begins with letters from hierarchs

⁴⁵ Locations, here, follows the discussion put forth by Gupta and Ferguson (1997) in which they call for anthropological investigations that consider "shifting locations" and not "bounded fields." My work also answers Appadurai's call for ethnographers to consider the "slippery, non-localized quality" of "the *ethno* in ethnography" (1996, 48). I envision this project as an ethnography where, instead of a "field site," I am investigating multiple locations within a space.

and bishops to the assembled Antiochians, followed by letters from state officials (governors, mayors, and sometimes U.S. Presidents), and from the hosting parish's priest and parish council president. There is always some kind of historical account of the faith or of Arab immigration to the U.S. But the bulk of each program book is comprised of advertisements and sponsorships from parishioners and local businesses, most of which were parishioner owned or Arab owned. These program books have given me clear insight into how Antiochians envisioned themselves and the host parish's relation to its locality (i.e. local businesses and government officials). Parish commemorative books were also helpful, as they had a similar structure to convention program books, and were created for myriad events in the life of a parish: anniversaries of a parish's founding, consecration of a new church building or cultural center, milestones in the service of a priest or bishop, and "mortgage burning" celebrations.

I also performed content and discourse analysis of *The Word* magazine. *The Word* is the central repository for all archdiocesan news, particularly the full reports from national archdiocesan conventions. Probably the most important point about *The Word* is that it is always in conversation with its historical moment and always reflective on the archdiocese's position as both an American Orthodox community and a transnational religio-cultural group. I focused on the years surrounding homeland crises and moments of intensified patriotism in the U.S. (1976–77, the first Gulf War in 1991–92, and the years following 9/11), as these were moments when the archdiocese most clearly articulated their positionality with regards to U.S. multiculturalism and events in the Middle East.

The bulk of my ethnographic work was performed at the archdiocese's Parish Life Convention in 2005 in Dearborn, MI, and during a year-long project with St. Mary's Basilica in Livonia, MI. I also corresponded by phone and email with a number of priests and office staff across the country, specifically regarding ethnic festivals.

My ethnographic work began at the 2005 archdiocese convention at the Dearborn Hyatt. Throughout my five days at the convention, I attended a handful of relevant departmental meetings, such as the department of Inter-Orthodox and Inter-Faith Relations. I ate lunch with groups of priests, had coffee and drinks with convention attendees, documented the *hafli* on Friday night, and went to the hierarchical Divine Liturgy that concluded the convention. I conducted six formal interviews with Antiochian parishioners and clergy, both those with Arab ancestry and non-Arab converts.

The Friday night *hafli* "*Niss-Har Sawa*" [stay up late together] was the most revealing aspect of the convention, because it was there that I learned just how important the space of the church was for the celebration of an Arab cultural identity. Every archdiocese convention has at least one *hafli*. The *hafli*s are always well-attended and serve as a culmination of the weeks meetings. The *hafli* at the 2005 Dearborn convention was no exception and was jam packed with convention-goers dressed to the nines and dancing the *dabkeh* to a live Arabic band. As the *hafli* progressed, there was an "American Dance" complete with a DJ and large dance floor set up in the adjacent ballroom. The "American Dance" was all but empty. In fact, a small group of older parishioners were using the dance as a "quiet" place to talk outside of the *hafli*. Nobody wanted to dance to "American" music when there was *mezza* to eat and traditional Arabic dancing in the next room.

The Dearborn convention was also where I first encountered my positionality as both an ethnographer and a member of the Antiochian Orthodox Church. Although my last name is Stiffler, a decidedly un-Arab name, my mother's family, the Jabers, carried the Antiochian faith and the Arab cultural traditions. Whenever I struck up a conversation with a parishioner at the convention, it would only take a few moments before they saw my last name on my name badge and asked me if I was "cradle" or "convert." Cradle is a term used to describe those adherents that were born into the faith, who tend to be of Arab descent and have an Arab sounding last name. I must have explained to a dozen people that I was "cradle" Orthodox, and that my mother's father was Lebanese. I would have these kinds of conversations again and again as I completed my ethnographic work at St. Mary's in Livonia, MI.

St. Mary's was much different than my home parish in Johnstown, PA, which was one of the first in the U.S., founded in 1906. The parishioners in Johnstown are likely to be non-Arab born and non-Arab speaking, but still of Arab ancestry. The services are almost wholly in English, with the exception of some hymns and prayers which are sung in Arabic. Similar to St. Mary's in Livonia, St. Mary's in Johnstown held regular, annual food festivals and *haflis* while I was growing up, but unlike most of the parishioners in Livonia, my family did not celebrate an Arab cultural identity outside of the space of the church. Nobody in my family spoke Arabic or had been to the Middle East, which is certainly not the norm at the Livonia parish. I chose St. Mary's in Livonia both for its size, one of the largest in the archdiocese, and for its position as having one of the more immigrant-heavy parishes, in order to compare my experiences at other, older parishes.

Most people that I interacted with at St. Mary's knew I was Antiochian Orthodox, but most people did not know I was of Arab descent, unless they asked. It is not something that I broadcast. But when people did find out that I was part Lebanese, it was always something that they celebrated. For example, after one of the festival committee meetings that I attended, the treasurer approached me and asked me what my last name was, which was a dead giveaway for "are you Arab?" I said my name was Stiffler, and she looked at me strangely. Based on my appearance and the fact that I was so knowledgeable about the Church, she assumed I was Arab. "You're not...uh..." she hesitated. I told her that my grandfather on my mother's side is a Jaber and that he was from Lebanon. She got very excited, especially when I was able to tell her the name of the village that his family was from. From that point on she always introduced me to other parishioners as being part-Lebanese.

Fr. George and the rest of the clergy, office staff, and parishioners at St. Mary's welcomed me with open arms. I was immediately put on the weekly *Shoo fi-Ma fi* email list and began receiving the weekly bulletin and other church mailings through the post. Throughout my year-long ethnographic project, I conducted 12 in-depth interviews with clergy and parishioners. I interviewed a representative number of Arab-born, Arab American, and non-Arab members, as well as an equal number of women and men. The questions I asked focused on their relationship to the cultural identity of the Antiochian faith, and did not directly engage in question of doctrine or theology. Other than Fr. George, who is a public figure in Metro Detroit, I do not use the names of any of my interlocutors, in order to protect their identity. My choice to use brief biographical markers (i.e. "a young Arab-born parishioner") instead of pseudonyms is a stylistic one.

In addition to the interviews, I attended numerous church services and social events, including an adult education class on the Divine Liturgy. But the bulk of my time at the church was spent as a member of the festival planning committee. I attended a planning meeting for the 2009 Sahara Fest with the intention of listening to the conversations and seeing first hand how a parish put together a large-scale food festival. At that first meeting, I was given a task to perform and told, lovingly, that I could not just watch; I had to work. I attended almost every festival meeting, ran errands for the committee chair, and worked three days of the festival, doing everything from hanging signs and collecting trash to sitting in the ticket booth at the carnival to ensure that the carnival company gave the church their fair share of the take.

I was grateful to the church community for allowing me full access to all of their meetings, services, and functions as an ethnographer and historian. As a graduate student I did not have the means to make a financial gift to the parish, but I wanted to give back in some way. My inadvertent appointment to the Sahara Fest committee turned out to be the perfect opportunity. Sure, I selfishly conducted fieldwork while diligently working to support the Sahara Fest and its fundraising goals, but I figured it was a pretty fair trade. I never exploited my position by guiding meeting agendas or discussions, and I never conducted any interviews, informal or formal, while performing my duties as a committee member, though I did interview a few of the committee members after the festival was over.

Interventions and Chapter Outlines

Even before there was such a thing as Arab American studies, and even before the term Arab Americans was widely used, historians, artists, and activists formed

organizations, held conferences, and published ground-breaking scholarship as part of an effort to bridge the religious and national divides among the growing Arab community. In the face of growing anti-Arab sentiment and the marginalization of Arab causes in the U.S., particularly in the wake of the 1967 and 1973 Arab-Israeli wars, scholars and activists attempted to solidify a singular Arab American voice by writing about the issues that most affected their community: racism, cultural representations, politics, and the construction of an Arab American identity. One of the most active organizations that came out of this moment was the Association of Arab-American University Graduates (AAUG). Established in the late 1960s, the AAUG helped to provide a launching pad for what would become Arab American studies, with its focus on both the history of Arab immigration to the U.S. and the relationship between events in the Middle East and the diaspora. For example, the proceedings of the seventh annual AAUG convention were published in a 1975 volume that contained essays by seminal scholars and activists such as Michael Suleiman, Janice Terry, Ismael Ahmed, and Edward Said. The presentations and resulting essays, according to the editors, “pointed to the entrenchment of Orientalism in American educational and political institutions,” which remains at the heart of much of Arab American studies, including this dissertation (Abu-Laban and Zeady 1975, xi).

This dissertation makes several interventions into the field of Arab American studies. First, my project will show, as some researchers have begun to posit (see Naber 2008), that 9/11 is not the first moment that repositioned Arab Americans within the American multicultural and prompted Arab America to respond culturally and politically. The AAUG volume cited above is a good example of how the Arab American

community has been continually fashioning and re-fashioning its identity in response to crises in the homeland and the hostland. The same applies for the Antiochian Orthodox who have engaged in politicized action and the marketing of cultural identity for nearly a century.

Second, most scholars of Arab American studies recognize that religion is an important component of Arab American identity, as almost all books on Arab Americans include at least one essay or one chapter on religious identity. However, in many cases, religious identity is simply treated as a demographic marker or used to show the diversity of Arab America. There are few scholars who fully engage with the meanings and uses of religious identity, particular Christianity. As an exception, Philip Kayal, veteran scholar of Arab American Christian communities, focuses on how the different Christian denominations within Arab America play an important role in the identity negotiation of their members. Given the differences in religion, political affiliations, and self-identification among Arab American Christian communities, Kayal asks what, if anything, holds these religious communities (mainly Maronite, Melkite, and Orthodox) together as a cohesive cultural group? He asks, is it the *mahrajans* [festivals], the *kibbee*, the “cute Arabic-language phrases,” such as *yallah* and *inshallah* (Kayal 2002, 99)? He ultimately concludes that although there is consistency among the Arab Christian denominations as far as the “attenuated culture” of food and music, the real cohesion between the divergent religious groups is that they all “have several different identities coexisting with one another that [are] display[ed] to outsiders differently as circumstances permit or require” (Kayal 2002, 106). In other words, each Arab Christian group dynamically engages with their position at the confluence of Christianity and

Arabness. My dissertation navigates the deployment of these “several different identities” within the Antiochian Orthodox Church in the context of U.S. multiculturalism. Very few other works in Arab American studies center religion as a structuring and generative force. Recently Amy Rowe’s (2008) dissertation on Maronites in New England and Yasmeeen Hanoosh’s (2008) account of the articulations of Chaldeanness have proven to be very strong exceptions.

Finally, my dissertation is the first book-length analysis of the Antiochian Orthodox Church. There have been a handful of master’s theses and the Church itself has published a few books, but there have been no extended engagements with the construction of cultural identity in the U.S.

In the chapters that follow, I analyze the construction, mobilization, and deployment of cultural identity, or Arabness, in the space of the Antiochian Orthodox Church. Though the chapters are broken up into analyses of cultural identity and its use in politicized action (chapter 2), claims to cultural authenticity through food and festival (chapters 3, 4, and 5), and claims to an authentic Holy Land Christianity (chapter 6), I hope that the fact that all of these mobilizations are occurring simultaneously, and across multiple historical moments, is not lost.

My first chapter on the mobilization of cultural identity for politicized action and humanitarian aid shows how Church leaders and parishioners have balanced the idea of being an “American” Christian Church with their continued commitment to social justice in their homeland, by constructing a strategic Christian politicized identity. I look first at the Antiochian Church’s politicized actions at the start of the Lebanese Civil War in the mid-1970s in the context of U.S. liberal multiculturalism, the national Bicentennial

celebration, and the rising anti-Arab discourses of the decade. I argue that these Arab American Christians understood their contradictory position in multiculturalism as part of the celebrated U.S. “ethnic mosaic,” but also as potential “enemy Others” (Jamal 2007). Showing how religio-cultural identities shift with historical contexts, I then examine the Church’s response to the 2006 war between Lebanon and Israel and the 2008–09 Israeli siege of Gaza within the context of post-9/11 U.S. foreign policy in the Arab world and the subsequent positionality of Arab Americans. Throughout both historical moments, Antiochians collected and sent donations to Lebanon and Palestine through Church-sponsored charities, clergy met with presidents and senators, and formed interfaith organizations with Arab Muslims to address issues in their collective homelands. My contention is that the continued political engagement with the Middle East figures prominently in the maintenance of an Arab American Christian Arabness.

My chapter on self-Orientalism is the theoretical crux of the dissertation, where I theorize and historicize the self-Orientalist rhetoric and imagery deployed within the space of the church as both a representational practice (Hall 1997) and a claim to an Arabness that is culturally authenticated within U.S. multiculturalism. I examine how the self-representations of the Antiochian Orthodox are mostly adapted from Orientalist-informed U.S. popular culture representations of Arabs and the Middle East, mostly through the frame of the *Arabian Nights* and its myriad adaptations. I investigate both the public deployment of self-Orientalist representations and their functions in the in-group context of archdiocese conventions, to show how complex and strategic self-Orientalism can be.

I continue the discussion of self-Orientalism and claims to cultural authenticity, by focusing on ethnic food and its celebration through church-sponsored food festivals in chapter 4. By analyzing several examples of Antiochian food festivals from the 1970s through the years following 9/11, I make the case that the food festival is a playful, public space for the commodification of cultural identity. My analysis draws heavily on studies of ethnic food, as well as the playful nostalgia that is created when food and cultural identity are sold together in a public festival. My analysis of the role of ethnic food festivals foregrounds the planning and production of the U.S. Bicentennial celebration as a powerful nation building project that helped structure, and continues to influence, multiculturalism's focus on the depoliticized celebration and consumption of cultural identity. The American Bicentennial committee's encouragement of ethnic and religious festivals as a way to celebrate America's past, present, and future, makes Antiochian church-sponsored festivals during and after the 1970s a poignant site of analysis. Finally, I argue that the gendered space of multiculturalism created a complex positionality for Antiochian women and their labor within a patriarchal religion.

I continue the discussion on food and cultural identity with my ethnographic exploration of the negotiations involved in the public deployment of Arabness. I detail the planning and production of the 2009 Sahara Fest at St. Mary's Antiochian Orthodox Basilica. Set in Livonia, MI, historically one of the whitest suburbs of Detroit and only a fifteen minute drive from the heart of "Little Arabia" in Dearborn, the 2009 Sahara Fest at St. Mary's offers a clear example of the complex negotiations of gender and racialization that Antiochians engage in when marketing their cultural identity to the public through the space of the church. Building on the previous chapters' focus on the

self-Orientalizing imagery and rhetoric within the archdiocese, my ethnography of the Sahara Fest shows that Antiochian Orthodox in suburban Detroit, MI, had a tacit knowledge of their positionality in the U.S. vis-à-vis whiteness and liberal multiculturalism.

In the final chapter, I explore Antiochian claims to an authentic Christianity, which helps to distinguish them from other Christian faiths in the U.S. Antiochian Orthodox Christians maintain that the ordination of their bishops and priests can be traced back to the laying on of hands by St. Peter, who ordained Christianity's first hierarchs in the city of Antioch. The members of the Antiochian Orthodox Church are also culturally linked to the Holy Land in the Middle East. In most parishes, including St. Mary's in Livonia, many hymns and prayers are sung or recited in both English and Arabic, maintaining a connection to an ancient, authentic Christianity of the Middle East. I contextualize Antiochian claims to an authentic Christianity within the long history of U.S. Christianity's fascination with the biblical Holy Land. Ending my study on the negotiations of a religious Arabness is a deliberate way to highlight the scriptural and spiritual foundations of transnational religious communities in the U.S. Regardless of how much cultural marketing or politicized action may take place within the space of the church, the adherents' relationship to the divine remains a structuring force in the community.

I conclude the dissertation with a brief analysis of the role of the camel as an unofficial mascot for the Antiochian Archdiocese, and how the image of the camel functions as both a marker of in-group identity and as part of a construction of a playful cultural identity within liberal multiculturalism.

CHAPTER 2

Mobilizing Cultural Identity: Christianity, Politicized Action, and Humanitarian Aid

In the summer of 1977 Dr. Frank Maria, tireless advocate for Arab and Arab American social justice, addressed the Antiochian Orthodox national convention in Washington, D.C. His report of the archdiocese's Department of Near East and Arab Refugee Affairs, of which he was chair, was by far the longest at the convention. Maria chronicles the previous year's developments in the Middle East, particularly the Arab-Israeli conflict, and their impact on Arab Americans in general and Antiochians specifically. In a year when the archdiocese and the Arab American community was dealing with the continued Palestinian refugee problem, the brewing Civil War in Lebanon, and what the archdiocese labeled as the gross "misrepresentation and defamation" of Arabs by U.S. media, Maria's lengthy report was poignant with a sense of urgency, in part to provoke a "relevant response by the American Christian community to the humanitarian and moral issues in the Middle East controversy" (Maria 1977, 17).

Maria's solution to the conflicts in the Middle East begins with their reception by the U.S. public. He believes that politicized action and cultural education within the space of the church can have a tremendous impact on how Americans view Arabs and thus U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East. He offers an example of a parish in Indianapolis that held a conference titled "Peace in the Middle East," and he urged other parishes to be as

active. He says that “local pastors and lay leaders” should “promote open discussions of the justice and peace in the Holy Land as Christian witness and as patriotic service to the United States” (21). It’s “patriotic” because, as he says in his report, President Carter “will need an informed American public to bolster his efforts toward a just and lasting peace in the Middle East” (22).⁴⁶ The Antiochian archdiocese and its people offer the best route for this education—cultural education, to be specific.

Maria told the assembled Antiochians that the “Peace in the Middle East” conference is only part of the solution. The other part is exemplified by the annual “Syrian Dinner” that the St. George Indianapolis parish held in conjunction with the conference. The Syrian Dinner, which St. George had held for years, attracted over 2000 guests from the community in 1977, and, according to Maria, was “a superlative opportunity” for the citizens of Indianapolis to “meet their Orthodox Arabic neighbors and to enjoy Arabic hospitality and food specialties” (21).⁴⁷ Maria then argues that in order to culturally educate the public, Antiochian parishioners need to be aware of their own heritage. He proposes that archdiocese conventions (both national and regional) “feature Cultural Education about our background and our heritage” (21). “Americans need to know and appreciate the Arabic cultural heritage,” he says, “if we are to work together for a better world” (22).⁴⁸

⁴⁶ The conclusion of Maria’s report boasts that “the Antiochian clerical and lay leaders, more than any other religious organization in the United States and Canada, are involved within their communities in activities related to the Near East” (Maria 1977, 23).

⁴⁷ The parishioners at St. George in Indianapolis continue this tradition. The website for their 2010 Middle Eastern Festival says that the festival is “offered” to the local community “to help promote peace and understanding for ALL.” <http://www.stgindy.org/Festival/index.htm>.

⁴⁸ This report would influence Antiochian parishes to add cultural education to the list of reasons for having ethnic food festivals, which will be the subject of the next three chapters.

In this report, which I see as articulating the archdiocese's broader role in politicized action, the space of the church is centered as a site for the construction of a cultural identity in service of a politicized agenda. Maria's passion for melding his Orthodox faith, his ancestry, and his pride in an Arab cultural identity is clear throughout. Much of the legacy of the Church's actions in regard to cultural identity and politicized identity can be traced back to Dr. Frank Maria and his decades of work with the archdiocese, particularly the Department of Near East and Arab Refugee Affairs.

This chapter serves as the historical background for the dissertation and will show how the space of the church is the main site for the construction and maintenance of a religious, cultural, and politicized identity. In the context of the continued transnational politicized action and humanitarian aid of the archdiocese, a constructed cultural identity is not deployed for claims to authenticity (which is the subject of the following chapters), but is mobilized for social justice causes in the homeland, for which parishioners and clergy draw on their familial and ancestral connections to the Middle East. I examine two periods of the politicized action of the archdiocese, both of which have significant homeland/hostland contexts to show that although constant, the politicized action adapts to different historical contexts. To illustrate this point, I focus on two moments of crisis in the homeland and intensified patriotism in the U.S.

Using archival evidence I show how in 1976-77, Antiochian Orthodox not only celebrated their first "Antiochian Holy Year," which showcased their transnationality and their ancient Christianity, but also fully participated in the U.S. Bicentennial celebrations. At the same time, the continued humanitarian and political crises of the Palestinian people and the start of the protracted Lebanese Civil War weighed deeply on the minds of

the parishioners. The second moment looks at the years following September 11, 2001, in which the archdiocese and its parishioners not only reaffirmed their commitment to their faith as practiced in the U.S., but worked through major crises in their collective homeland. Through ethnographic work in southeastern Michigan, I show how the war on Lebanon in the summer of 2006 and the ongoing conflict between Israelis and Palestinians, culminating in the Israeli siege on Gaza in the winter of 2008-09, mobilized the cultural identity of the archdiocese.

After an extended analysis of politicized action in these two historical moments, 1976-77 and post-9/11, I end the chapter with the Antiochian Archdiocese's "biblical case" against the state of Israel, in which Church leaders and parishioners use Orthodox theology to argue an anti-Zionist position. It is a clear example of the mobilizing of a religio-cultural identity for politicized action, and one that carries across both historical moments.

Background of Politicized Action and Humanitarian Aid

It is well documented that the early Arab immigrants at the turn of the twentieth century organized into many types of associations, the most prominent and stable being religious.⁴⁹ Antiochian Orthodox parishes, through their "Ladies Aid Societies" and affiliations with other Arab immigrant groups (e.g. the Syrian American Federation), were quick to mobilize in response to crises in the homeland as early as the famine in Lebanon during the First World War. As the archdiocese became more organized, its charitable actions and societies became more formalized. Although parishes like St.

⁴⁹ See any of the seminal works on early Arab immigrant communities in the U.S., such as Naff 1985, Kayal and Kayal 1975, or Hourani and Shehadi 1992.

Mary's in Livonia, MI, (my main ethnographic location) maintain pet projects, such as supporting orphanages, hospitals, or convents both in the U.S. and abroad, the archdiocese as a whole has officially sponsored a small number of international charities, the majority of which focus on aid to the peoples of the Middle East, particularly Lebanon, Palestine, Jordan, and Syria, and more recently Iraq.

In 1968 the Antiochian archdiocese established its Department of Near East and Arab Refugee Affairs, which was instrumental in coordinating donations from U.S. parishioners to causes in the Middle East. This archdiocesan department, and the resulting charities within it, was begun in response to the 1967 Arab-Israeli War which resulted in a heightened Palestinian refugee crisis. In the 1980s, in the midst of the violence of the Lebanese Civil War, the Church started the Children's Relief Fund, where parishes or individuals could sponsor a needy Lebanese child. As of 2010, this charity was still coordinating sponsorships between parishioners in the U.S. and children in the Middle East. Parishioners also send money overseas throughout the year by way of the archdiocese, but in times of crisis the amount of aid skyrockets. For example, in 2002 the archdiocese collected \$70,000 for "Victims of Palestine" and collected \$60,000 for "Iraqi War Victims" in 2003. In the wake of 2006 war in Lebanon, which was a jolting moment for the diaspora and an event I discuss further below, the archdiocese contributed over \$570,000 to war relief.⁵⁰

As Fr. George Shalhoub, priest at St. Mary's in Livonia, says, "Charity begins at home." And in the transnational Antiochian Archdiocese, home is both the Middle East

⁵⁰ As of 2009, the Department of Antiochian Charities maintained three named charities, the Children's Relief Fund, the Worldwide Relief (formerly known as Middle Eastern Relief Fund), and Food For Hungry People, all of which support people in the Middle East. All of the figures were taken from "Minutes of the General Assembly" of the archdiocese's bi-annual conventions, which are printed in the November issues of *The Word*.

and the U.S. Although there has always been a commitment to charity for Palestinian and Lebanese causes, money flows for domestic issues as well. Following the attacks of 9/11, the archdiocese and its parishioners collected \$200,000 for the 9/11 victims relief fund. And in the same fiscal year that saw the massive 2006 donations to Lebanon, the parishioners stepped up and donated \$453,000 to victims of Hurricane Katrina, demonstrating the relatively small archdiocese's commitment to causes in the U.S. as well as their ancestral homelands.

In addition to charitable work, Metropolitan Philip Saliba, as leader of the archdiocese for the last 40 years, has been an outspoken critic of the Israeli occupation of Palestine and has always stood in solidarity with the Lebanese people throughout their years of internal violence and conflict with Israel. Saliba has met with numerous U.S. presidents, Yasser Arafat, and presidents of Lebanon and Syria among other Middle Eastern leaders.⁵¹ The archdiocese regularly passes "resolutions," voted on by priests, bishops, and delegates from every parish, which support the right of return for Palestinians or call for cease fires whenever violence breaks out in the Middle East. For example, at the beginning of the Lebanese Civil War, the archdiocese passed two resolutions on Lebanon at the yearly convention in 1976, calling on the preservation of the unity of Lebanon. A summer 2001 resolution is vehement in its condemnation of Israel and calls on "all peace loving nations to support the Palestinian struggle against occupation."

The church space in the Arab American experience has always been a space for political, social, and cultural causes, in addition to religious celebration. Fr. George

⁵¹ Saliba's has endured his share of criticism. In 1977, because of his efforts to get the National Council of Churches to adopt a more balanced Middle Eastern policy, a rabbi from the American Jewish Committee accused Saliba of being a "paid Arab propagandist."

believes the role of the Church is to educate its people, similarly to Dr. Frank Maria's report. His stance is best exemplified by something he has repeated on numerous occasions. He contends that the Church does not legislate, but it lives in a political world and "is in the business of the human being," so there is certainly a place for the Church's input. Parishioners in the Antiochian Archdiocese have come to expect a certain level of engagement with political issues, especially pertaining to the Middle East. Besides the resolutions that are debated and passed at conventions, *The Word* magazine, the archdiocese's official century-old monthly publication, routinely publishes editorials about conflicts in the Middle East, historical articles about Palestine and Lebanon, and advertisements for charitable organizations operating in the Middle East.

Within the space of the church, the mobilization of cultural identity for transnational politicized action occurs simultaneously with the claims to cultural authenticity that I investigate in the following chapters. Further, all of the actions of the archdiocese and its parishioners take place in a religious context and from a particular Christian perspective. A subtext of this chapter will be how Antiochians walk the thin line between speaking from a Christian position in order to attract U.S. public support for the Arabs in the Middle East and taking a hard line of Christian exceptionalism, which can serve to only further demonize Arab Muslims within U.S. discourses.

Finally, it is worth mentioning here that much of the humanitarian aid and the cultural education that Frank Maria calls for is enabled by women's labor and knowledge, through the dinners and festivals that churches have as part of regular fundraising. In the realm of politicized action, though, because much of the public work is performed by clerics who are inherently male, women's work in the politicized action and humanitarian

aid is often hidden, even as it is the life blood of many parishes.⁵² This complex gendered positionality within a patriarchal religion and the patriarchal nation building project of multiculturalism is discussed further in chapters 4 and 5.

1976–77

I focus on the years 1976–77 to illustrate how different historical contexts, even only one year apart, impact the ways that transnational religious groups in the U.S. navigate their intersecting religious, cultural, and politicized identities. But both years are part of the same larger historical moment, as the mid-1970s saw the rising tide of multiculturalism, where cultural and ethno-religious groups were expected to celebrate their “contributions” to America’s “past, present, and future” (Bodnar 1992). The 1970s was also a particularly turbulent time for Arab Americans, with homeland crises and the rising anti-Arab discourses in the U.S. making the divide between homeland and hostland somewhat difficult to navigate. But 1976 and 1977 saw different manifestations of what that meant for the mobilization of cultural identity in the Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese.⁵³

⁵² I take my idea of women’s hidden work from Moallem (1993) who argues that in ethnic communities, women’s labor does “enter into the market and are exchanged for money, but because they are manufactured at home they are often not considered to represent ‘work’” (49).

⁵³ The 1970s was also an important decade for internal affairs within the Antiochian Archdiocese. At the end of the 1960s, the Archdiocese dropped the label “Syrian” from their title to represent their focus on their faith more than any single nationality. Further, the 1970s saw the first sustained push for an American Orthodox Church, one that would transcend ethnic divisions (Greek, Ukrainian, Romanian, Armenian, etc.) and take up the task of making Orthodoxy more relevant in the U.S. Even as the different national or ethnic Orthodox Churches in the U.S. have always maintained ties to their homelands, Saliba argues that “the Church is not going back to Russia, Greece, or the Middle East” and that Orthodox have to “put [their] house in order” in the U.S. (Shadid 1984, 70). The Antiochian Archdiocese was already leading this push by being accepting of non-Arab converts, and instituting English as the official language of religious services and archdiocesan publications. The idea of forming an American Orthodox Church was just another aspect of the negotiation of cultural identity within the archdiocese, and the talks of Orthodox unity continue to force the parishioners and clergy to consider just how much their Arabness overlaps with their Christianity. The answer to this question has not been consistently addressed by the archdiocese, but gets worked out on local levels as individual parishes determine the amount of Arabic to use in religious

In 1976, the year of the Bicentennial celebration in the U.S., Antiochian Orthodox fully participated in the multicultural nation-building project of the Bicentennial, presenting themselves as culturally “authentic” Arabs who have built a home in the United States and have thrived because of, what the Church has labeled, the nation’s religious and cultural freedoms. 1977 brought a slightly different focus within the archdiocese, as the year was declared Antiochian Holy Year, because the Patriarch from Syria would be making a trip to the North American continent for the first time in history. The rhetoric of 1977 figured the U.S. as the “New Antioch,” and was more about celebrating the ancient Christian Antiochian roots, and less about celebrating an American ethnic identity. But throughout both years, Antiochian Orthodox navigated what it meant to be Arab in the U.S. and, more importantly, what it meant to be politically active in support of Palestinian and Lebanese causes, especially during the start of the Lebanese Civil War.

“We are a product of Orthodox spirituality and Yankee ingenuity,” opens a letter from the editors of the May 1976 issue of *The Word* magazine (G. Corey 1976). The opening letter continues: “We are proud of our heritage, our ethnic cultures, our Mother Church abroad. But we are equally proud of the great accomplishments of our Church in America... We truly wish to maintain the deep spirituality we have inherited from our Mother Churches but our Church in American must take on the blessed character of this land...” The editors then proclaim, “With this issue of THE WORD, we wish to inaugurate throughout this Archdiocese the Bicentennial anniversary of America’s

services. The internal struggles with the cultural identity of the Church add another dimension to the participation in the Bicentennial, on the one hand, and the politicized action on behalf of a Middle Eastern homeland on the other.

independence” (G. Corey 1976). This opening letter, along with the cover juxtaposing the Liberty Bell with a passage from Leviticus on “liberty,” forms the base of the Antiochian Archdiocese’s year-long engagement with the American Bicentennial celebration.

Later in this same May 1976 issue of *The Word*, is a reprinted letter that Metropolitan Philip Saliba sent to the head of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, chastising the group for giving in to “political Zionism” and disregarding the plight of “the hundreds of thousands of Christian and [Muslim] Palestinians illegally imprisoned in Israel.” Since the U.S. government was staunchly pro-Israel, one could guess that letters like this, and there were more than a few, were not exactly what liberal multiculturalism expected from ethnic groups. Multiculturalism is concerned with, according to Lisa Lowe (1996), “importation” as in food, music, and cultural commodities, and not “immigration,” as in the political realities of being transnational in the U.S. But Antiochians, like most transnational communities, were concerned with both their cultural identity and the commitments to social justice in the Middle East, so as much as Antiochians framed 1976 as a year to celebrate America and their contributions to it, their religious and cultural roots, along with the everyday realities in their homeland, continually pulled them back to the Middle East.

Throughout 1976 parishioners and clergy reflected on their cultural identity and their role in celebrating the Bicentennial, but almost always through the space of the church, in that their contributions as Arab immigrants or descendants of Arab immigrants was framed through the role of the Antiochian Orthodox Church. The archdiocese’s national convention in July 1976 was the epitome of this type of rhetoric. The convention was themed “Freedom to Believe,” and celebrated how “America’s freedoms” (religious

and otherwise) have helped the Archdiocese prosper. The elaborate 300-page souvenir program book, which was bound more like a novel than a program book, is dedicated to the immigrants from the Middle East who “brought the spiritual, cultural, and family bonds which have allowed us to assimilate while maintaining a unique identity” (*A Tribute...* 1976, 3).

In a full page advertisement, the Farha family announces “Happy Birthday, America!” and thanks God for being American and for their family leaving Lebanon 81 years before. “Who knows?” the announcement asks, “If we hadn’t come to America we could have been killed or injured within the past 9 months of senseless fighting,” a reference to the beginnings of the Lebanese Civil War. This announcement, which was also printed in a local Wichita, KS, newspaper, is a strong example of the celebration of the U.S.’s perceived role as a nation of immigrants. Besides this curious advertisement, the Bicentennial creeps into the letters written by priests and bishops at the front of the book, colors the histories of the archdiocese that appear in the program, and is blatant in the letter from the Mayor of San Francisco as he references the “200th anniversary of the United States.”

A narrative at the front of this 1976 convention program book titled, “Odyssey to America: A Bicentennial Tribute,” recounts the experience of the early Arab immigrants. The unnamed author writes that the early immigrants were drawn to the U.S. by the words of the Declaration of Independence and that once established, “a chain of communication linking the old country to [the] new homeland was kept alive” (*A Tribute...* 1976, 43, 44). The piece also elaborates on how the Arab immigrants and their descendants have shared their cultural heritage through food and music: “the churches

served not only as places of worship but also as community centers, bridging two worlds of understanding. [...] Through mahrajans and other cultural festivals, these succeeding generations would experience their cultural heritage of their fathers as a viable part of their own lives.” This rhetoric legitimizes the role of *hafllis* and *mahrajans* as extensions of the church, and a cultural identity constructed in the U.S. context.⁵⁴

The Antiochian Orthodox participation in the Bicentennial celebration was part of the larger multicultural push of the 1970s.⁵⁵ The American Revolution Bicentennial Administration (ARBA) urged ethnic groups and other communities to write histories or hold festivals to showcase their “contributions” to the idea of America. But the idea of showcasing one’s contributions ultimately reinforced the discourse that America’s “present” emerged neatly from a linear and uncomplicated racial past (Bodnar 1992, 243).⁵⁶ As Shukla states, “To be part of the place (and myth) of America has increasingly entailed belonging to a minority group that hails from *another* nation, and possessing discrete and ethnic origins” (2003, 7).

Like other racialized groups, Antiochians had to reconcile their celebratory commitment to the national building process that was the Bicentennial, while simultaneously dealing with anti-Arab racism that was taking hold during the 1970s (Abraham 1994). The 1970s was a particularly difficult time to reconcile an Arab identity

⁵⁴ My chapters four and five will demonstrate how Antiochian parishes took full advantage of the ethnic food festival as a way to showcase their cultural identity and make claims to a cultural authenticity while raising funds for their churches.

⁵⁵ The inclusion of the Bicentennial in the historical narrative is part of the “variety of ways” that religious organizations participated in the celebrations. According to the ARBA report on the Bicentennial, “Individual churches and synagogues observed the national anniversary in a variety of ways—from worship services to lectures and discussion groups, potluck suppers and ice cream socials. Some of these events for specially designed for the Bicentennial; more often, perhaps, the Bicentennial had a way of creeping into the ordinary activities of the congregation” (ARBA 1976, 135).

⁵⁶ This was especially problematic in the case of Native and African American participation in the Bicentennial festivities.

in the U.S. Besides the continued onslaught of Orientalist imagery and rhetoric in popular American culture, particularly fierce in the wake of the 1973 oil embargo, the Antiochian Orthodox had to navigate through two major homeland crises. As the Lebanese Civil War raged and the Palestinian refugee crisis continued to mount, church leaders took firm and vocal stances on U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East.

As much as liberal multiculturalism encouraged the celebration of cultural identity during 1976, the 1970s was not the best time to be Arab in the U.S. The Antiochian Orthodox had to balance their participation and acceptance within multiculturalism and the Bicentennial celebration in the face of anti-Arab discourses. Being Christian while culturally Arab allowed for a more palatable presentation to an American public fearful of the perceived growing Muslim threat from the Middle East, as evidenced in biased depictions of Muslim and Arab aggression against Israel. From political cartoons to Hollywood movies to television news programming, in the wake of the Arab oil embargo, the violent Arab-Israeli wars, and the spate of airline hijackings, U.S. popular depictions of Arabs were less than celebratory.⁵⁷ In the face of the growing anti-Arab anxieties of the 1970s, Antiochians not only crafted a claim to cultural authenticity that drew on earlier Orientalist discourses of Arabs as exotic rather than potential “enemy Others” in order to participate in multiculturalism, they also found outlets to politically mobilize their cultural identity as Arabs, Arab Americans, and as Christians from the Holy Land.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ For Hollywood movies and T.V. see Jack Shaheen (1984 and 2001), for political cartoons see Ronald Stockton (1994), for news media coverage see Janice Terry (1975), and for a strong analysis of U.S. public opinion about Arabs and Middle Easterners at the end of the decade, see Slade (1981).

⁵⁸ Nadine Naber (2008) outlines the development of the discourses of an Arab/Muslim enemy. Amaney Jamal (2008) argues that Arabs and Muslim are characterized as “enemy Others,” which helps the state justify infringements on civil liberties (116–117).

For example, in this same issue of *The Word* that inaugurated the Bicentennial throughout the archdiocese, there was an article about Metropolitan Philip Saliba meeting with President Ford and other Arab Muslim and Christian leaders in the White House in April of 1976 to discuss the escalating war in Lebanon.⁵⁹ Prior to the meeting, the group named themselves the Standing Conference of American Middle Eastern Christian and Moslem [sic] Leaders and drafted “An Appeal to the Lebanese People” which they enclosed with the letter they sent to President Gerald Ford. Their appeal stated that they were “deeply concerned, shocked, embarrassed and alarmed by the senseless fighting and bloodshed among the members of the Lebanese family.”⁶⁰ It was not uncommon for Saliba and other Orthodox clergy to be engaged in both homeland/hostland events simultaneously.⁶¹ But because of the dire nature of the conflict in Lebanon and the celebratory rhetoric throughout the U.S., vis-à-vis the Bicentennial, the relationship between hostland and homeland was stark. Again, the archdiocese convention in 1976 was the culmination of this relationship.

⁵⁹ I have written extensively about this meeting in unpublished papers given at the 2008 American Studies Association annual meeting in Albuquerque, NM, and at the Second World Congress for Middle East Studies in Amman, Jordan, in 2006. Those present at the meeting with Ford were: Bishop Francis M. Zayek from the Maronite Church in the U.S.; Imam Muhammad Jawad Chirri from the Islamic Center of Detroit; Imam Muhammad Abdul-Rauf of the Islamic Center in Washington, D.C.; Archbishop Joseph Tawil of the Melkite Church; Rev. Anthony Gabriel of the Antiochian Church, and Metropolitan Philip Saliba.

⁶⁰ Letter, Philip Saliba to Gerald Ford, 2 January 1976, folder: ND 18/ CO 82 2/23/76 Executive, box 35, White House Central Files, Gerald R. Ford Library. The group organized at a meeting at Saliba’s house in October 1975.

⁶¹ The Standing Conference of American Middle Eastern Christian and Muslim Religious Leaders would meet again on August 3, 2006, in an “emergency meeting” after nearly three decades of limited activity. The new version of the Standing Conference included several Islamic, Druze, and Orthodox leaders, as well as Lebanese diplomats including the acting Lebanese ambassador to the UN and Tarek Mitri, Minister of Culture and Acting Foreign Minister of Lebanon.

According to an August 4, 2006 press release from the Antiochian Archdiocese, the Standing Conference drafted nine resolutions, including a “call for an immediate and unconditional cease fire,” a prisoner exchange between Lebanon and Israel, a directive for Israel to vacate the southern portion of Lebanon that has been occupied since 1967, and a call for the international community to rebuild Lebanon. Their resolutions were sent to the State Department, President Bush, and Congress. The resolutions were similar to the “Appeal to the Lebanese People” that Saliba and the Standing Conference sent to President Ford in 1976, showing the remarkable consistency with which Saliba and the Antiochian archdiocese have dealt with the confluence of U.S. foreign policy and crises in the Middle East.

According to the reflections of the convention host priest, Father Gregory Ofiesh, the first memorable moment of the convention was Metropolitan Philip presenting Danny Thomas with an award for his work with St. Jude Children's Hospital as part of the opening night theme of "immigrant contributions which our ancestors have made in North America" (Ofiesh and Nicola 1976, 13).⁶² Through the rest of the week's festivities, more than 4,000 Antiochians and invited guests and dignitaries celebrated religion, cultural identity, and the nation's birthday with liturgical services and "evening socials," where "traditional Arabic music was supplemented by singers honoring America's Bicentennial" (Ofiesh and Nicola 1976, 14). Metropolitan Philip was surprised by a videotaped message from President Gerald Ford, whom Philip had met with three months prior, congratulating Saliba on his tenth anniversary of service to the archdiocese.

The convention was taking place during, and was themed after, the Bicentennial of the United States, so it is only fitting that the convention attendees drafted a resolution proclaiming as much. The resolution, which was "passed by acclamation" and sent as a telegram to President Ford, reads in part:

WHEREAS,

The Founding Fathers of our great nation were essentially religiously motivated individuals who cherished the freedom to worship; and [...]

WHEREAS,

Our continuing role in this Bicentennial Year as Orthodox Christians is to manifest our Freedom by Christian Actions; and

WHEREAS,

We, the Antiochian Orthodox Christians, whose forebearers migrated from the Holy Land to enjoy the Blessings of this Nation under God, express our heartfelt thanks to Almighty God.

⁶² Danny Thomas, though not an Antiochian Orthodox, was well-loved by Antiochian parishioners, as he attended and performed at many Antiochian functions and conventions.

The wording of this resolution is representative of how the parishioners and clergy envisioned their role in the celebration of the Bicentennial; as a way to reflect on their Holy Land-inspired religion, the immigrants who brought it with them, and their place in the U.S.⁶³

1977, “Antiochian Holy Year”

Even though the Bicentennial year was focused on both events in the homeland and the “contributions” of Antiochians to the idea of the American nation, 1977 was supposed to be the year where Antiochians shifted their focus back East, to their ancient Christian roots. 1977 was declared “Antiochian Holy Year.” The Church in North America would welcome the Patriarch from Damascus, Syria, marking the first time that an Antiochian Patriarch visited the continent. During 1977, the Antiochian faithful would not only celebrate the arrival of their beloved Patriarch from Syria, but would donate a significant amount of money to the Balamand Theological Seminary in Lebanon, at that time the only Orthodox seminary in the Middle East, in hopes of maintaining the Orthodox Christian presence in their homeland and the Holy Land. If 1976 as the year to celebrate their identities as an American ethno-religious group, 1977 would be the year that their identity transcended nation-state as inheritors of an ancient Holy Land faith. But as with 1976, the complexities of maintaining a cultural identity, especially within liberal multiculturalism, forced the faithful to articulate their experiences as members of an American ethnic group as well.

⁶³ The pall of the Lebanese Civil War was heavy at the convention. A large portion of the official business was dedicated to discussing the situation in the Middle East and passing three resolutions concerning Lebanon and the Palestinians. The report from the archdiocese’s Department of Near East and Arab Refugee Affairs was the longest of the convention, demonstrating just how much energy the Antiochian Archdiocese dedicated to homeland issues.

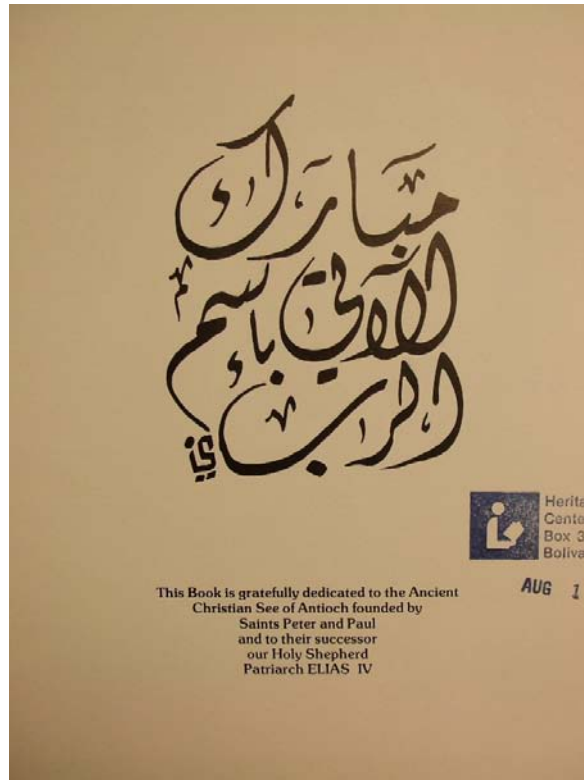


Figure 2-1 Opening page of the 1977 archdiocese convention program book. The Arabic script reads, “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord,” a Bible verse that Metropolitan Saliba used to describe the arrival of the Patriarch. Heritage and Learning Center Archives, Antiochian Village, Bolivar, PA.

In his letter addressing the archdiocese at the 1977 convention in Washington, D.C., in which the Patriarch was in attendance, host priest Fr. George Rados places the Antiochians celebration of their “holy year” in the context of both their ancient Christian faith and U.S. multiculturalism. He writes: “The visit of our beloved Patriarch this year coincides with a revival of ancestral consciousness in America and helps us to identify with our ancient Christian heritage.” He then goes on to welcome the Patriarch to, what he calls, “New Antioch.” Ancient Antioch has a strong imaginative pull on the

Antiochians in the U.S. Acts 11:26 states, “And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.”

Metropolitan Philip’s address to the Patriarch and the thousands of Antiochians gathered at the 1977 convention in the nation’s capital, continued this connection between the Patriarch’s arrival and an ancient Antioch-ian identity: Citing the biblical verse, “Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord,” Saliba says, “Before the arrival of His Beatitude, this theme was somehow an abstraction but now, ‘He that cometh in the name of the Lord,’ is here. He is real. We have seen him, kissed his hand, embraced him, touched him.” But the Patriarch did more than bear the word of God or come in the name of God. He was a physical link to the historical Jesus, not only because was coming from the Holy Land, but because his ordination is traced to St. Peter who ordained Christianity’s first bishops in Antioch.⁶⁴

Saliba’s address then connects the Archdiocese’s own ancient roots to those of the growing ancestral movement in the U.S. in the 1970s, saying, “I have read lately that after the famous TV series, ‘Roots,’ many Americans have been trying to rediscover their ancestral and cultural origins. In our case, we do not have to try hard. Our spiritual roots are deeply planted in Bethlehem, Nazareth, Galilee, Jerusalem, Beirut, Damascus and Antioch.” Saliba frames the cultural identity of Antiochians in terms of religion by naming these biblical cities. It is this positioning of an ancient Christian identity along side a cultural identity equally constructed as ancient, and both in service of a politicized agenda, that makes the rhetoric at these conventions so fascinating.

⁶⁴ Antiochian Orthodox Christians maintain that the ordination of their bishops and priests can be traced back to the laying on of hands by St. Peter, who ordained Christianity’s first hierarchs in the city of Antioch. So the Patriarch’s visit helped to solidify their position as true inheritors of this ancient and authentic Christianity, which is the subject of my chapter 6.

Even though the focus of the Antiochian Holy Year was supposed to be on their ancient Antiochian roots, having just come off the Bicentennial year, and with the archdiocese's active role in trying to influence U.S. policy in the Middle East, the nation's capital was a logical choice for the convention. At the convention, Dr. Frank Maria, as chair of the Department of Near East and Arab Refugee Affairs, addressed the location of the convention: "We trust that the presence of His Beatitude Elias IV in the United States and his presiding at this historic convention in Washington, D.C. with its tremendous attendance of Antiochian Christians will serve to remind our government of the significant presence of millions of Eastern Christians in the Middle East and in the United States and that these Christians, as they should, are concerned about equality and justice for all peoples—Jews, Christians, and [Muslims]." ⁶⁵ *The Washington Post* covered the convention and reported that the Patriarch was impressed by his meeting with President Carter about the Middle East situation and that "the patriarch pledged that he would light a candle for the President at the oldest shrine in Syria, near Damascus" (Hyer 1977).

The *Post* also reported that "[c]onvention delegates adopted, unanimously, four resolutions dealing with the Middle East" (Hyer 1977). The resolutions called on Israel to end its human rights abuses, called for "Islamic-Christian" dialogues, and called on the media in North America to more fairly report on the Arab-Israeli conflict and "stop being part of the insidious campaign to misrepresent the Arab world" (Hyer 1977). This rhetoric against Israel was not anomalous, and did draw some outside criticism. A Religious News Service article from the spring of 1977 reports that a rabbi from the

⁶⁵ An advertisement for the convention in the April issue of *The Word*, boldly labeled the Washington, DC, meeting as "A Meeting of Church *and* State" (emphasis in original).

American Jewish Committee accused Metropolitan Saliba of being paid by Arab governments to propagate his anti-Israeli and thus anti-Jewish agenda within the National Council of Churches (Religious News Service 1977).⁶⁶ Being anti-Israeli in 1970s America was about as toxic as being anti-Israeli in post-9/11 America, as pro-Arab is often equated with anti-American. Emphasizing their continued support for the Palestinian people in the face of growing anti-Arab discourse and opposition from an increasingly powerful Jewish lobby was tumultuous.

Even though this chapter shows that Antiochians invested in the processes of multiculturalism, specifically the Bicentennial, their participation in multiculturalism was selective. While these Arab Christians knew that they could celebrate the Bicentennial and “contribute” to the diversity of the U.S. religious and cultural landscape, they also had a tacit knowledge of their positionality vis-à-vis U.S. policy and U.S. supported interventions in their Middle Eastern homeland as well as popular culture representations of Arabs in the 1970s. Though I examined these articulations and negotiations through the years 1976-1977, it is important to point out that the same types of negotiations occurred anytime there was heightened tension between the U.S. and the Middle East, such as during the first Gulf War and after 9/11.⁶⁷ I now turn to two instances, both in the post-9/11 moment, of sustained politicized action on behalf of a homeland in crisis: the Israeli “war on Lebanon” in the summer of 2006 and the Israeli siege on Gaza in the winter of 2008-09.

⁶⁶ The Church has consistently been active in the National Council of Churches, and Saliba served as Vice President in 1976.

⁶⁷ Nabeel Abraham (1994) makes the argument that anti-Arab racism and sentiment in the U.S. exploded during the first Gulf War.

Post-9/11

Much like 1976, in 2006 Arab Americans were caught between popular culture discourses of Arabs and United States' political involvement in the Middle East. Following the terrorist attacks of September 11, Arab Americans (and all Arabs and all Muslims and all people suspected of being Arab or Muslim) were scrutinized by the media, government policy, and public opinion. Many of the stereotypes and tropes from the days of the Arab oil embargo, the Iranian Revolution, and the ongoing Israeli/Palestinian conflict were easily modified and recycled to fit the post-9/11 moment (Naber 2008). The unconditional support of Israel by the United States and the tenuous position of Arabs as citizens but “othered” through popular culture and political discourses, was the same post-9/11 as it was in previous decades. Finally, in both moments the Antiochian Orthodox had to navigate their continual support for Palestinians and Lebanese by mitigating their stance through their Christian identity, a point I discuss further below.

Before and after 9/11, the parishioners of St. Mary's Antiochian Orthodox Basilica in Livonia, MI, always mobilized in response to developments in their collective homelands, whether it was in celebration of the Oslo Peace Accords in 1993, the mourning of King Hussein of Jordan in 1999, the vocal political support of Lebanon in 2006 and calls for a cease fire, or the mobilizing of humanitarian relief during the 2008–09 Israeli siege on Gaza. This activist mentality has long been a part of the parish. In a booklet that was produced for the 1991 dedication of their cultural center, a page of photographs of church members engaged in community service and politicized action is prefaced with the question, “What is St. Mary's?” The answer, written at the bottom of the page is, “A parish whose members take tremendous pride in their heritage and who

believe that true Christians MUST speak out against injustices and man's inhumanity to man."⁶⁸ This self-professed mission is evident in the fact that members of the church have consistently been leaders in the Arab Detroit community and that the parish collects thousands of dollars each year for humanitarian causes in the Middle East and across the world. Currently the children raise money to support an orphanage in Syria, and the parishioners regularly contribute to archdiocese-sponsored charities, like the International Orthodox Christian Charities (IOCC), which not only collected money for relief after the siege on Gaza, but collected aid packages for quake victims in Haiti in 2010.⁶⁹

In the February 2002 issue of *The Word*, just a few months after the terrorist attacks of September 11, and less than two years after the start of the second intifada in Palestine, the archdiocese printed an acclamation of their charitable contributions across the world: "*Charity*: Did you know that 13.6% of the Archdiocese's budget goes to charity? Whether it is the annual Food for Hungry People program or aid for those who suffered due to the events of September 11th, in the Middle East, Venezuela, or other areas of need, your Archdiocese always heeds the words and spirit of the gospel of Jesus Christ" (Teebagy 2002). But the announcement was also a justification for those diverse charitable donations. It continues, "The archdiocese doesn't exist in a vacuum. She must respond not only to the needs and desires of the parishes but to the Orthodox world, to the

⁶⁸St. Mary's Cultural Center Dedication book (Livonia, MI: St. Mary's Antiochian Orthodox Basilica, 1991), 28. Available in the library at St. Mary's and the Heritage and Learning Center Archives, Antiochian Village, Bolivar, PA.

⁶⁹ The Antiochian Archdiocese was instrumental in the founding of International Orthodox Christian Charities (IOCC) in 1992. An important aspect of this organization is that their "mandate is to undertake purely humanitarian activities. Thus, IOCC does not support programs of Church mission (Church reconstruction, religious education, seminary support, etc.)" ("Mission and Focus"). The IOCC is "registered with the U.S. Agency for International Development and is eligible to receive funds for foreign assistance from the U.S. Government. It is a member of InterAction, a coalition of U.S. based non-governmental organizations that carry out humanitarian assistance programs overseas" ("Mission and Focus").

moral condition of our country, and to human rights in the Middle East and elsewhere. As the world grows more complex so too must the Archdiocese's response."

This official rhetoric trickles down to the parish level as the archdiocese frequently issues letters that are directed to be "read from the pulpit," detailing the archdiocese's stance or actions on events in the homeland. One such letter from Metropolitan Philip Saliba addressed the Israeli siege on Gaza in the winter of 2008-09, and was distributed to the parishioners of St. Mary's in liturgy on January 11, 2009. The letter reads, in part, "With each news update, we hear of more and more people, many of them women and children, whose lives have been abruptly and needlessly ended by the brutality of the ongoing invasion of a foreign army." Saliba then urges donations to be collected and sent through International Orthodox Christian Charities (IOCC), which was working to stave the humanitarian crisis. Heading the call, the St. Mary's congregants took up collections to send to the victims of the fighting in Palestine, including a special collection from their annual Holy Land Christmas Concert featuring Orthodox Christian choirs from across the Detroit area.

Throughout the siege, in which Israeli forces pinned down Palestinians in the Gaza strip in an attempt to fight Hamas militants, Fr. George's homilies addressed the violence and offered hopes for peace. For example, his homily on January 4, 2009, began:

We gather on the first Sunday of the new year to pray as a community. We gather with a heaviness of heart and mind and soul, that the world once again is at war. And this war is back home. Those who are powerful claim self defense and those that are occupied claim a sense of humiliation. I do not know if the gun can solve this conflict. It is when the world will stand up to defend what is right. A child is a child...whether Jew or Palestinian.

For liturgy on February 1, the IOCC sent a representative to the Livonia church to receive the donations that the parishioners had collected over the previous weeks. Fr. George said that the IOCC was the only charity left working in the West Bank and Gaza, which placed more urgency on the donations from the parishioners. After liturgy, the donations were formally handed over to the IOCC's representative, a young man named Peter dressed in a black cassock, who gave a speech about the cycle of violence in Gaza. Peter ended his speech by accepting the donations and saying, "Thank you for putting your faith into action."

Although sending money to Palestinian causes can be seen as a political act in the context of U.S. alignment with Israeli interests, the Orthodox parishioners, many of whom are Palestinian, see it mostly as a Christian, humanitarian act, and as reaching out to their families, friends, and co-ethnics in the Middle East. As Fr. George says, "Charity begins at home," with home in this sense being Palestine. But the references in Fr. George's sermon to occupation and as Metropolitan Philip's letter refers to the Israelis as the "invading foreign army," this puts the Antiochian stance at odds with most official and popular U.S. discourses about the Israel-Palestine issue, where the Palestinians are routinely figured as the aggressors.

When asked if they think that sending money to Palestinian causes is a political act, none of the parishioners saw it that way. They responded quickly with the fact that it is their homeland, and if they don't support the Arab peoples, who will? One second generation male parishioner said:

As long as whatever is being addressed from the pulpit is being done in the spirit of Christianity and the spirit of Christ I think it's ok. If the priest is saying our brothers in Gaza our dying, let's do something to help them, I think that's fine because you are helping the cause. There are thousands of causes out there.

There's things going on in Rwanda and Darfur, and you can't help everybody. Obviously those people [the Palestinians] are much nearer and dearer to your heart.

A third generation female parishioner sees the church's role as an educator and says of Fr. George's homilies and announcements about Gaza, "I appreciate it because I didn't understand what was going on. If the church had not taken that kind of role, I may not have known as much."

But as many scholars have noted, especially in the wake of 9/11, charitable contributions to the Middle East can be politicized,⁷⁰ even though Christian charities have not seen the same kind of scrutiny as Muslim ones. St. Mary's has never experienced any problems associated with gathering donations specifically for Palestinian causes, even at times when the discourses in the U.S. equate Palestine with terror. It seems it is "safer" to stand in solidarity with the people of Gaza as Christians and to support a Christian-run charity, the IOCC, than to engage in the same activities from a Muslim stance.⁷¹ Whereas in U.S. popular and political discourses the Muslim religion is stereotyped as having an inherently political agenda, Christian churches, even Arab Christian churches, are able to operate without the same assumptions about an *a priori* political motive.

In the Detroit area and across the country, the threat of Muslim charities being shut down and prosecuted in the post-9/11 environment is very real. But Christian charities, like International Orthodox Christian Charities, that work within official U.S.

⁷⁰ There are numerous recent works that address the politicization of humanitarian aid in the context of the war on terror. Other than Howell and Shryock's essay in this volume, see Cainkar (2009), Ophir (2007), Bellion-Jourdan (2007), and Bakalian and Bozorgmehr (2009). All of these scholarly sources, though, focus on Muslim charities and religious organizations.

⁷¹ Although the archdiocese's charities are born of Christian values and their missions are supported by biblical references, the aid they deliver is not intended exclusively for Christians. This does upset a few of the more nationalist Lebanese parishioners who do not want to send aid to Palestinian Muslims, but they are a vocal minority in the parish and the archdiocese.

networks have no concerns, even as their money eventually ends up in the same areas. In all of the recent “post-9/11” scholarly work, there are no recorded instances of Christian-sponsored charities being investigated or shut down, even though the Antiochian Orthodox Church runs, sponsors, or is involved in numerous charities that explicitly support Middle Eastern peoples, specifically Palestine, Lebanon, and Iraq. As Howell and Shryock (2003) discuss, this discrepancy has much to do with “reasons embedded in popular religious sentiment” in the U.S. that privilege Christianity, especially in the context of foreign policy matters (459).

Arab American religious institutions are a particularly key factor in negotiating this relationship between dominant U.S. discourses and policy in the Arab world, which take on local form in the everyday lives of Arab Americans.⁷² And although most research on Arab religious communities tends to focus on Muslim immigrant communities, the histories and experiences of Arab Christians in the U.S. raise important and timely questions about the distinct ways that discourses and practices of Christianity, when coupled with “Arab-ness,” open up new links between religion and cultural identity, the local and the transnational, and the political and the cultural. One of the most intriguing spaces of analysis is the popular discourse of the U.S. as a Christian nation, which allows Arab American Christians to claim a more legitimate cultural citizenship within the nation-state while still being critical of state policies that affect them and their homelands.⁷³ This was clearly evident in the context of a “Christian Arab” press

⁷² See Howell and Jamal 2009, Read 2008, and Nadine, Stiffler, Tayyen, and Said 2009.

⁷³ My argument would be that Arab Christians more easily get to exercise their “racial options” as members of a “liminal” racial group (Cainkar 2008, 50). Also, much research has shown that Arab American Christians tend to experience race or ethnic based discrimination on a lesser scale (Jamal 2008).

conference in Detroit in 2006 and its appeal to the Christian sensibilities of the U.S. public.⁷⁴

In the midst of the violent war between Israel and Lebanon in the summer of 2006, a group of Arab Christians held a press conference at a hotel in downtown Detroit to “express [their] outrage and address the horrific events and injustices in Lebanon.”⁷⁵ The press conference was planned and assembled by Arab Detroit, an organization “dedicated to the promotion and dissemination of accurate information about Arab Americans and the Arab world,” and whose founder and director, Warren David, is an Antiochian Orthodox Christian. The August 2 press release from Arab Detroit quoted David as saying, “We want the American public to know that we are outraged by the horrific events taking place in the lands of our forefathers.”

The press conference, which drew local print media, all three local television news stations, and local Arab American media, featured speeches by academics, activists, and community leaders. Although not all of the participants were active church members, the press release listed each speaker’s religious affiliation, with the majority being from the Antiochian Orthodox Church.⁷⁶ Most speakers told personal stories about family and friends in Lebanon, some connected the current Israeli bombing to the continued occupation of Palestinian lands, and others simply tried to give accurate statistics about

⁷⁴ The same thing occurred in 1976 in response to the Lebanese Civil War, as the White House received a string of letters and telegrams that called on the U.S. to intervene to stop the killing of Christians. Congressman James A. Burke sent a few of the “hundreds” of letters he received from his constituents on the matter (mostly Maronites). See folder ND 18/ CO 82 8/9/74-4/30/76 General, box 64, White House Central Files, Gerald R. Ford Library.

⁷⁵ Press release from Arab Detroit, August 2, 2006.

⁷⁶ None of the speakers were from the Maronite Catholic Church, which is the largest Lebanese Christian community in Metro Detroit. The Maronites tend to eschew any affiliation with an Arab nationalist agenda and typically do not identify as Arab, so the organizers of the press conference intentionally excluded Maronites.

the conflict to counter the plethora of ill-informed media that had been saturating the papers and airwaves since the bombing began two weeks earlier.

One speaker read from a letter that Metropolitan Philip Saliba had written and sent to each Antiochian Orthodox parish titled, “The Water of Cana is Turned into Blood,” which referenced the shelling of civilians in Qana, Lebanon, on July 30, 2006. The letter starts by placing the history of Qana (known in the Bible as Cana) within Christian history, and then saying that the people of Cana have been “the victim of Israeli aggression” because of a rocket attack on a building in the city that left 37 children dead, among other casualties. After calling for a cease fire, the letter ends by comparing Israel’s leader, Ehud Olmert, with “his ancestor of old,” the biblical Joshua who, according to the Bible verse that Saliba included, destroyed Jericho without thought of the women and children. It is a powerful, angry letter, but attempts to convince Americans to support Lebanon through Christian rhetoric.

Speaking from the position of Christians has its benefits. The first is the shield it provides from being perceived as overly critical of the U.S. and Israel and hence being seen as supportive of “radical Islam” or terror in general. For the Arab American community in greater Detroit especially, this connection has been realized time and again. During the summer of 2006, vehement support for Lebanon was equated with support for Hizballah and carried real consequences, such as being singled out by the FBI for investigation.⁷⁷ Speaking out politically operates similarly to the operating of charities—Christians simply have more leeway to be more vocal and Arab American Christians can claim a more legitimate cultural citizenship while still being critical of

⁷⁷ Niraj Warikoo, “All Eyes on Metro Hizballah Presence- Federal Agents Focus Surveillance,” *Detroit Free Press*, August 3, 2006. Also Sally Howell and Andrew Shryock (2003) for a discussion of how the state limited the transnational ‘movement’ of Arab peoples and monies in Detroit after 9/11.

state policies that affect them and their homelands.⁷⁸ As part of the vast Detroit Arab American Study, Sally Howell and Amaney Jamal (2009) argue that “Muslim congregations...have fewer means by which to escape the stigma now associated with Arabness and Islam in America” (107).⁷⁹ This is evident in the context of the press release for the Arab Detroit press conference and its appeal to the Christian sensibilities of the general public. But speaking about Middle East events from a Christian perspective can also be a tactical maneuver to put a new spin on the tired media discourses of problems in the Middle East being one of Muslims and Jews. The American public may have a harder time remaining indifferent to violence in the Middle East if the violence has a Christian face.

Arab American academic and activist Steven Salaita questions the true power of Arab Christians as spokespeople for Middle Eastern justice, specifically the Palestinians, saying, “it creates a perception of legitimacy [in the eyes of a typical American audience] that lasts only as long as Islam remains suppressed” (2008, 42–43). But, in direct reference to the 2006 Arab Christian press conference, Salaita does say that these types of public “professions of solidarity” can be very useful, and it is only when Christian Arabs opt for exceptionalist rhetoric (e.g. *Christians* are dying as opposed to Arabs or people are dying) that there is a danger (44). There was no exceptionalist rhetoric at the Christian

⁷⁸ See Mearsheimer and Walt (2007) who argue that during the Israel/Lebanon war in 2006, the public discourse (as in news media) and the political discourse was firmly on the side of Israel. They painted it as one of the few instances during the Bush administration where both Democratic and Republican lawmakers were in agreement. They also say that the U.S. was virtually the only country in the world that was vehemently supporting Israel (313).

⁷⁹ Jen’nan Ghazal Read (2008) also found that Christians of Arab ancestry “may be able to use their Christian identity as a bridge to the American mainstream” and that Muslims have “fewer ‘ethnic options’ than their Christian peers” (305–306).

Arab press conference in Detroit. It was much more tactical.⁸⁰ That same tactic is evident within the Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese and at St. Mary's in Livonia, even as the justification for the opposition to the state of Israel, which informs much of the politicized action and humanitarian relief efforts of the Antiochian Church, comes from the Christian Bible. I see it as a way to preempt dismissal of the Palestinian position within U.S. popular and political discourses as simply a Muslim problem. After all, Arab Christians and Muslims in the U.S. have a shared history and, in the Orthodox case, have shared political sensibilities.

Biblical Case against Israel

The most prominent example of how the politicized action and humanitarian aid efforts of the Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese are motivated by its religio-cultural identity, is the unwavering support for Palestinian right of return. The Antiochian Orthodox case against the state of Israel is clearly laid out in the first official biography of Metropolitan Philip Saliba. In a section called "The Bible and the Holy Land," biographer Fr. Peter Gillquist says that because of the continued suffering of "innocent people," "it is only proper for the Orthodox Church to voice its opposition to the Zionist movement in Israel" (1991, 132). Gillquist says that "the view that Israel must return physically to the land" as part of biblical prophecy for the second coming of Christ, "is

⁸⁰ The same thing occurred in 1976 in response to the Lebanese Civil War, as the White House received a string of letters and telegrams that called on the U.S. to intervene to stop the killing of Christians. Congressman James A. Burke sent a few of the "hundreds" of letters he received from his constituents on the matter (mostly Maronites). See folder ND 18/ CO 82 8/9/74-4/30/76 General, box 64, White House Central Files, Gerald R. Ford Library. The reason this was detrimental to the Arab cause in general is because it was not accurate. Speaking from the position of an Arab Christian, Najib Saliba (1976) published a lengthy article in the March issue of *The Word*, in which he emphasized at the start that the civil war was not a religious war as some right-wing Maronite Christian groups tried to portray it, in order to garner sympathy from the U.S. government. So there is nothing inherently wrong in speaking from a Christian position, as long as it's not a Christian exceptionalist position, which is what Salaita (2008) warns against.

notably modern” and goes against Orthodox theology, which teaches that the Christian Church is the fulfillment of that prophecy (1991, 132). Metropolitan Philip is quoted as saying that “God is no longer in the real estate business” (Gillquist 1991, 136). The case against the state of Israel also argues, using biblical passages from Genesis, that the Palestinians are the historical inhabitants of “the Holy land” (Gillquist 1991, 133), which is a view that goes against the grain of popular U.S. discourses, particularly evangelical Christian rhetoric.

The biography of Metropolitan Philip is not the only place where the Antiochian Orthodox Church has asserted this viewpoint. In 1977 when the Patriarch visited the U.S. from Syria, Patriarch Elias IV said at a news conference that, “As far as we Christians are concerned, we are the new Israel. The coming to the Messiah has fulfilled all the Old Testament prophecies” (Hyer 1977).⁸¹ This interpretation of the Bible voids any claims, made by right-wing Christian groups, that the political state of Israel’s existence is the first sign of Christ’s return.

I have also heard homilies by priests, both non-Arab converts and those with Arab ancestry, where the evangelical beliefs about the state of Israel are labeled as “heretical.” Even as support for Israel in U.S. discourses was becoming more and more entrenched, in the wake of the second Palestinian intifada in 2000 and the attacks of 9/11, the Antiochian Church remained steadfast in their position.⁸²

In March of 2003, *The Word* published a lengthy feature article reiterating the Church’s stance. This article was also written by Fr. Peter Gillquist, who converted to

⁸¹ The *Washington Post* also reported that Patriarch Elias IV said, “We shall not spare any effort to insure that Jerusalem remains an Arab city, open to all believers and to the entire world” (Hyer 1977).

⁸² See Rashid Khalidi’s introduction to *The Iron Cage* (2007), in which he outlines the continually growing U.S. support for Israel in matters affecting Palestinian rights.

Orthodoxy from evangelicalism as an adult. The article opens by lamenting that Orthodox Christians, “especially those having roots in the Middle East,” watch as American evangelicals “cheer unabashedly” for Israel to the detriment of the Palestinian people (Gillquist 2003, 7). After outlining the evangelical belief that “the rapture” cannot occur until the Jewish people return to the Holy Land, Gillquist presents the “true Christian” case against the state of Israel. The Orthodox argument is that the “old covenant” ceased with the birth of Jesus, and that the Christian “Church” is the true people of God. Most importantly, the political state of Israel is not biblically mandated.

Though a few members of the archdiocese as well as other non-Orthodox Christians who may subscribe to or read *The Word* have objected to the archdiocese’s staunch support for Palestinian rights and its anti-Zionist editorials,⁸³ there is certainly a lot of support for the work that Metropolitan Philip and other leaders have done, even in the post-9/11 context where anti-Zionism is sometimes equated with anti-Americanism in U.S. political and popular discourse.⁸⁴ In the months surrounding the publication of Gillquist’s “What Do You Say to ‘Evangelical Zionists?’” there was an outpouring of supportive letters in *The Word* from both Arab and non-Arab Antiochian Orthodox that applauded Gillquist’s and the archdiocese’s commitment to social justice in the Middle East. One letter was signed by a man who emphasized that he was “a convert not of

⁸³ For instance a letter published in “The People Speak” section of *The Word* in January 2003, accused the editors of *The Word*, and by extension the archdiocese, of being anti-Jewish. Many of the letters against the stance of the archdiocese come from non-members affiliated with other religions who may subscribe to *The Word* for an Orthodox point of view. Also, the vast majority of letters in opposition to the archdiocese are signed by people with last names that can be coded as non-Arab, although using last names is not the best indicator of Arab identity, because the majority of the archdiocese is only partly Arab, or may be third or fourth generation Arab American, and thus may not have an Arab-sounding surname.

⁸⁴ Mearsheimer and Walt (2007) outline the virtually unwavering support for Israel within U.S. news media and political discourses. Their argument is that the powerful Israel lobby in the U.S. has constructed Israel as “the only country in the region that ‘shares our values’” and that the lobby wants U.S. officials to view Israel as “the fifty-first state” (5, 6).

Arabic descent” and argued that it was the biblical duty of Antiochian Orthodox to support Palestinians who remain “under the Zionist boot.”⁸⁵ An Arab member of the Church echoed this sentiment but also made a cultural case for the archdiocese’s Middle Eastern policies: “Let us not forget that those who established the Antiochian Orthodox Church here in America were from the Middle East, particularly from Syria and Lebanon. After all, it was in Syria where the followers of Christ were first called Christians.”⁸⁶

The Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese has solidly maintained their stance on the Middle East conflict. In the example of the case against the state of Israel, the Church has not only argued for Palestinian rights, but has based their views completely in Orthodox Christian theology. Moreover, the fact that the a large number of the membership in the archdiocese traces their ancestral ties to Palestine, and that the cultural identity of the archdiocese is celebrated as Arab, adds another dimension to the support for the Palestinian people, one that moves beyond a biblical duty to help the oppressed and “downtrodden” across the globe.⁸⁷ The continued support for Arab causes in the Middle East, particularly the Palestinian and Lebanese people, clearly represents how religion, culture, and politics all coalesce within the space of the church for Antiochian Orthodox Christians.

⁸⁵ Letter from Gregory Barron, “The People Speak,” *The Word* April 2003.

⁸⁶ Letter from Andre Ilias Khuri, “The People Speak,” *The Word* April 2003.

⁸⁷ In the wake of September 11 and the increased public anger towards Arabs, the Church has defended its continued political and humanitarian support for the Palestinians, Iraqis, and Lebanese, in terms of a Christian ethic. For instance, in a April 15, 2003 letter from Saliba that was instructed to be “read from the pulpit” at each parish, Saliba mourns for the innocent children in Iraq at the start of the war. He writes, “Suffering has no nationality and no boundaries. We recall the words of our Lord in Matthew: ‘Whatever you have done to the least of these, my brethren, you have done it unto me.’”

In the following chapters I will make an extended argument about the representational practices of the Antiochian archdiocese in the U.S.⁸⁸ Part of the representational practices of the Church is seen in the mobilization of a religio-cultural identity for politicized action that I detailed in this chapter. As the opening example of this chapter showed, Antiochian Orthodox have used “cultural education,” in which they highlight certain aspects of their cultural identity, particularly food, as a way to speak back to the proliferation of negative imagery of Arabs. Further, speaking out about political and social injustices in the Middle East from the vantage point of being Christian is also a representational practice, in that there is an attempt to disaggregate Arabness from Islam in order to add complexity to the conflicts in the Middle East that concern the Antiochian Church. Far from being an attack on Islam, in fact the archdiocese has a long history of interfaith action with Muslim groups in the U.S., the privileging of a Christian identity is an attempt to engage a U.S. public who may balk at supporting a position that is perceived as Muslim. It is just another example of how Antiochians mobilize their religio-cultural identity with a tacit knowledge of their “liminal” position in U.S. (Majaj 2000).

⁸⁸ The next chapter more fully explains how my use of “representation practice” comes from Stuart Hall (1994), in which he sees it as a group’s deployment of an image (and I extended this to include rhetoric) which “intervenes in the many potential meanings of an image in an attempt to privilege one” (228).

CHAPTER 3

Arabian Nights, Self-Orientalism, and Representational Practices

This chapter traces the development and maintenance of self-Orientalism in the space of the church within the Antiochian Orthodox archdiocese. I will show how Antiochian Orthodox Christians engage with the imagery and rhetoric of the *Arabian Nights* and adaptations of the *Arabian Nights*, specifically its magical, romantic, and exotic elements, and strategically re-present that imagery and rhetoric as something Antiochian and Christian. This strategy, what I call self-Orientalism, is a representational practice and one aspect of an Antiochian claim to cultural authenticity in the U.S. (Hall 1997). Self-Orientalism is a complex process of self-representation, which, at times, can reinforce dominant stereotypes about Arabs (such as churches offerings camel rides at festivals), but can also intervene in the many negative stereotypes of Arabs as backwards, non-Christian, or terrorist, and privilege the more positive, albeit still stereotypical, representations of Arabs as bearers of an ancient, magical “Arabian” culture, and a cultural group with a distinct cuisine and musical tradition. Antiochian self-Orientalism can be successful because in addition to being Arab they are also Christian. The space of the church can allow the public to engage with Arabs perceived to be “safer” than the undifferentiated Arab depicted in the evening news and Hollywood films and figured as potential “enemy Others” (Jamal 2007).

Whereas the previous chapter showed how cultural identity could be mobilized for politicized action, this chapter shows how cultural identity can be deployed within U.S. multiculturalism to make claims to a culturally authentic Arabness.⁸⁹ Building on Naber's (forthcoming) placement of "authenticity" within the context of U.S. multiculturalism, I argue that a constructed Arab cultural identity can be used to make claims to an authenticated Arabness when deployed within the liberal multicultural marketplace that commodifies identity.⁹⁰ I use the term authenticated, to describe an Arabness (a cultural identity) that Antiochian Orthodox constructed, which was authentic only in that it reflected what U.S. popular culture constructed as an authentic Arab.

Along with historicizing the complex engagements with Orientalist rhetoric and imagery within the space of the church and their function in the claims to an authentic Arabness, another goal of this chapter is to intervene in the scholarship on representations of Arabs and the Middle East in U.S. popular culture by analyzing a key component of the production, transmission, and reception of these images and discourses: the complex ways that Arab Americans themselves negotiate dominant representations of Arabs and the Middle East through their own processes of self-representation. Antiochian Orthodox

⁸⁹ Nadine Naber (forthcoming) argues that her fieldwork with Arabs in San Francisco shows that "Arab cultural authenticity draws upon liberal U.S. multicultural logics for articulating cultural identity and the dominant demands about race, class, gender, and sexuality required by middle-class assimilation and acceptability."

⁹⁰ Lowe says that in the context of the multicultural festival, that gem of liberal multiculturalism's commodification of cultural identity, authenticity had to be presented as something "outside" of the typified "social and geographical" experiences of the attendee (1996, 87). This is similar to Deloria's argument that in order for "Indians" to be seen as authentic, by the Americans who would purchase their goods and an "Indianized" experience, the Indians had to be "located outside modern American societal boundaries" (1998, 115). If Antiochians graft themselves onto the legacy of the *Nights*, it instantly enhances their claim to cultural identity because of the *Nights* setting in time and space. Cultural identity becomes something to be authenticated in the context of the marketplace. Mannur (2007) and Shukla (2003) also address authenticity as something that exists when cultural identity enters the multicultural marketplace in the form of food and/or festival. This will be the focus of the next two chapters. Also see MacCannell (1976), L. Long (2004), and Halter (2000), for discussions of how cultural identity as a commodity, particularly in regards to food, becomes a claim to authenticity.

self-representations often strategically re-worked U.S. popular culture representations in an attempt to graft the Antiochian Orthodox experience onto the legacy of the *Arabian Nights*. Scholars consider the *Arabian Nights* to be the “single most significant textual component” of the period that saw the development of Orientalism, mainly the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Makdisi and Nussbaum 2008, 9). In nineteenth and early twentieth century popular culture, tales from the *Nights* are often depicted as the authentic version of an Arab and Islamic past.⁹¹ The Antiochian Orthodox, by positioning their claim to cultural authenticity in relation to that text and its adaptations, engage in U.S. Orientalism in complex ways. The instances of what I call self-Orientalism occur mostly in the context of the commodification of cultural identity in which Antiochian Orthodox attempt to claim their share of the diversity market or attempt to differentiate their Christian identity in a crowded U.S. religious marketplace.⁹²

I first trace the intersection of critiques of Orientalism and the body of stories and imagery associated with the *Arabian Nights*. The next section historicizes Antiochian self-Orientalist deployments of cultural identity within that Orientalist legacy and within the U.S. multicultural context. The final section highlights the complexity of the public deployment of cultural identity by analyzing how the same rhetoric and imagery functions within the in-group context of Antiochian Orthodox national conventions.

⁹¹ In other words, the *Arabian Nights* in the U.S. gets figured not as a representation of an Arab or Islamic literary past, but within U.S. Orientalism becomes an essentialist Arab identity, regardless of the fact that the *Nights* is composite of Persian, Arab, and other central Asian cultures.

⁹² I see two larger historical processes that contextualize the instance of self-Orientalism. First, in the early twentieth century, Antiochians were capitalizing on what Melani McAlister calls “commodity Orientalism,” which used the Orient as a stage on which to market a post-Victorian consumerism (2005, 21-22). Later deployments of self-Orientalist imagery, particularly beginning in the 1970s, operated as part of liberal multiculturalism’s emphasis on packaging and marketing cultural identity as part of the process of being ethnically hyphenated American. But through all historical periods, use of self-Orientalist imagery and rhetoric was part of a concerted effort for Antiochian Orthodox to achieve cultural authenticity by essentializing and reconciling their Arabness within U.S. Orientalist knowledge productions.

***Arabian Nights* and U.S. Orientalism**

Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978), along with the myriad of scholarly works that have sprouted from it or in response to it, is crucial to my project. *Orientalism* establishes the long history of Western knowledge production about a Middle Eastern "other" within a binary framework that continues to operate in U.S. popular and political discourses about Arabs and the Middle East.⁹³ In the U.S. this Orientalist legacy about the Middle East and its peoples is mobilized in different ways and at different times, sometimes as a culturally essentialist knowledge about Arabs for deployment in popular culture, other times as a means of justifying U.S. political and military intervention in Arab and Islamic nations. Following the long line of scholars that have mobilized and modified Said's framework, my use of self-Orientalism aims to investigate the ways that Arab Americans re-tooled Orientalist imagery and rhetoric as a representational practice and a strategy for constructing an authentic cultural identity.

As a representational practice, self-Orientalism at times speaks back to popular U.S. representations of Arabs and the Middle East in an attempt to privilege one (Hall 1997). As Amira Jarmakani writes, "constructions in U.S. popular imagination" have figured the Middle East in various ways, "at times characterized as a backward, primitive region full of squabbling peoples and tribes, at times heralded as the cradle of (western) civilization, or the geographical home of the Christian Holy Land, and at times remembered for its mysterious and fantastical tales filled with genies, concubines, and

⁹³ See Jarmakani (2008) for her discussion of this, as she uses "cultural mythologies" and focuses on the "civilizing mission" of the deployment of troops to Afghanistan, under the pretense of "saving" the women (11–12). Within the U.S., Orientalism functions as a discourse that comes out of a history of European colonial and imperial relationships in the Arab region, especially in relation to Islam.

despotic intrigue, as recounted in *Arabian Nights*” (2008, 11). As the popular representations of Arabs in the U.S. shifted throughout the twentieth century, Antiochians, through their public deployment of self-Orientalist imagery, attempted to consistently reaffirm the more positive aspects of the representations of Arabs, mainly the legacy of the *Arabian Nights* as the representation of an exotically authentic other and the biblical positioning of the Middle East as the Holy Land. Self-Orientalism, at times, also reinforces the more undesirable dominant discourses of Arabs and the Middle East as pre-modern or backwards in the attempt to assert an authentic Arabness.

Especially in the second half of the twentieth century, Antiochian self-Orientalism hoped to claim the authentic cultural Arabness of “ancient Araby,” removing the experiences of contemporary Arabs from the context of U.S. imperial projects in the Middle East.⁹⁴ Beginning in the late 1960s, images of rich oil sheiks and *kuffiyah*-wearing Palestinian “terrorists” were rampant in Hollywood movies, the evening news, and political cartoons, but Antiochian Orthodox attempted to privilege a more positive set of representations of Arabs. Though the use of *Arabian Nights*-style imagery was anachronistic and did not represent any “reality” of Arab American life, by self-Orientalizing through exotic, ahistorical imagery, Antiochians could market their food and religion in the de-politicized space of multiculturalism. But at its most critical, self-Orientalism offers the power of selective participation within multiculturalism. While marketing this exoticized Arabness to the general public, Church leaders were simultaneously engaged in politicized action on behalf of the Lebanese and Palestinians,

⁹⁴ For this analysis I draw from Deloria (1998), who writes that “Indianness,” as something culturally authentic, was constructed in relation to the perceived modernity of the American public, especially in relation to Indians and Indianness. In other words, the authentic Indianness was that which was figured to be anti-modern, pre-contact, and existing outside of, or in spite of, the realities of imperial projects of the U.S. on Native lands (101–105).

who Church leaders portrayed as victims of Israeli's Zionist policies. This politicized action counters the demands of liberal multiculturalism, where cultural groups are only expected to mobilize their difference in the de-politicized marketplace.⁹⁵ There is a tacit knowledge of when to mobilize behind a cultural identity, and when to claim a cultural authenticity.⁹⁶ And for Antiochian Orthodox, claiming a cultural authenticity typically means inserting themselves into the popular culture legacy of the *Arabian Nights* and its associated stereotypes.

Michael Suleiman, in his book *The Arabs in the Mind of America*,⁹⁷ is concerned with the prevalence and functions of anti-Arab ideologies, and works through the relationship between American perceptions of Arabs, their roots in news media and popular culture, and the influence these perceptions collectively have on policy decisions, showing the real consequences of representation. He clearly argues that for the average American, "there is a 'mind set,' a general picture of Arabs, which though vague, is distorted and incorrect and almost invariably negative, at times bordering on racism" (Suleiman 1988, 2). His goal is not to discuss the "merits" of the stereotypes, but to show that their deep roots in society make it "easy for anyone hostile to the Arabs to whip up public sentiment against them" (2). Suleiman also points to the *Arabian Nights* as a text that has created a fixed and mostly negative view of Arabs in the minds of the general public. He writes: "Arabs became identified with the book, and the traits and life-styles of

⁹⁵ The politicized actions of the Antiochian Orthodox on behalf of their Middle Eastern homelands is the focus of the previous chapter. Schulman (2002) argues that multiculturalism was a response to the rejection of "integration as an assimilationist nightmare" by African Americans, Chicanos, Natives, Asian Americans, and even white ethnics, as they asserted cultural nationalism and difference in lieu of celebrating a "national community" (62, xvi).

⁹⁶ Both cultural identity and cultural authenticity are constructed, but unlike a claim to authenticity, cultural identity can be mobilized for politicized goals.

⁹⁷ His title, *The Arabs in the Mind of America*, is a direct response to Israeli-born Rafael Patai's Orientalist diatribe, *The Arab Mind* (1973).

the characters in these tales were automatically and repeatedly transferred to ‘the Arabs’” (9). My argument is that, precarious as it was, Antiochians used this “general picture of Arabs” to construct their claim to cultural authenticity.

Suleiman is not the only scholar to use the *Arabian Nights* as evidence of the “general picture of Arabs” that dominates the Orientalist-informed U.S. popular and political discourses. Recently, Amira Jarmakani (2008) and Sunaina Maira (2008) critiqued the prevalence of exoticized images of Arabs U.S. popular culture, particularly images of Arab women, such as belly dancers and “harem girls,” tracing these Orientalist representations of Arabs back to their earliest incarnations in Western adaptation of the *Arabian Nights*. Important for my work is how both scholars, specifically Jarmakani, show the function of these Orientalist representations as a large part of the discourse that figures Arabs as essentially pre-modern or outside of history and the consummate other. Both scholars also analyzed these representations of Arab women through U.S. consumerist practices, which position the Orient as an exotic other to be commodified and purchased. The *Arabian Nights*, its adaptations, and the plethora of associated imagery (belly dancers and harem girls) that are mobilized within U.S. Orientalist discourses for the construction of an authentic Arab, have a long history.⁹⁸

The collection of tales is heralded both critically and uncritically as having “shaped the West’s perception of the ‘Orient’ as the quintessential ‘Other’ [and] has also contributed decisively to developing and channeling creative imagination in virtually all

⁹⁸ The commodification of culture within multiculturalism is always gendered, specifically within the context of food. I take up an analysis of this gendered space of multiculturalism in the next chapter.

areas of human activity” (Marzolph 2006, vii).⁹⁹ For my purposes, I will refrain from making such grandiose statements. I see the *Arabian Nights* as a ubiquitous collection of texts and images that, through their repeated translation, interpretation, circulation, and adaptation, has helped to construct the U.S. popular culture view of the Middle East as well as the manner in which Arab American Christians presented and marketed themselves to the general public.¹⁰⁰

The use of images from the *Arabian Nights* and its countless adaptations as the basis for self-Orientalist depictions fits neatly with the construction of Arabs in U.S. discourses as an authenticated, exotic other. The ubiquitous collection of stories that has circulated for centuries and has been instrumental in creating, within Orientalist modes of knowledge production, a mythical, magical, Arab other is a ripe pool of imagery to draw from. Translations and adaptations of the *Arabian Nights* have been deployed by Western Orientalists and “image makers” to legitimize imperialist ventures in the Arab world and have worked in tandem with other Orientalist texts to exoticize, other, and vacate the Middle East of real humans and actual history. Building on analyses such as Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978) and similar to Ella Shohat and Robert Stam’s *Unthinking Eurocentrism* (1994), Saree Makdisi and Felicity Nussbaum, in their introduction to the edited volume *The Arabian Nights in Historical Context* (2008), make the argument that the *Arabian Nights* was integral in the construction of an Oriental “other” through the ever-changing and contextual Western gaze. They write that the *Nights* is a palimpsest, which was “written, rewritten, and overwritten as the tides of imperial power—and the

⁹⁹ The illustrations that accompany the *Arabian Nights* have been around for hundreds of years, as the first illustrated editions were published in 1785 in both England and France, though there were a few illustrations connected with the *Nights* as early as 1706 (Kobayashi 2006).

¹⁰⁰ Naber (forthcoming) similarly argues that Arab American articulate their cultural identity based on discourses that are available to them in the U.S.

extent of Europe's obsession with Eastern alterity—ebbed and flowed” (Makdisi and Nussbaum 2008, 3).¹⁰¹

Since its early proliferation of more than eighty English language editions in 1800 to the current plethora of textual versions, including children's books and comics, the illustrations and stories have heralded along the creation of what Jack Shaheen, in the Hollywood context, calls “Arabland,” the “mythical, uniform ‘seen one, seem ‘em all’ setting” with harem girls, oases, Arabs on camels, ornate palaces, and of course belly dancers (2001, 8). Robert Irwin also shows how the illustrations and tales from *Arabian Nights* influenced early Hollywood, particularly set designers and directors. Irwin argues that the Orientalist paintings and illustrations for *Nights* editions “were certainly drawn upon” by early Hollywood film producers (2004, 228).¹⁰² Both Irwin and Shaheen argue that following the first enunciation of this Arabland and its “visual clutter of oriental knick-knacks” on film, future directors and property masters throughout the following decades became “mostly autocannibalistic” (Irwin 2004, 228) as the Middle East and its inhabitants were continually portrayed using recycled images, stereotypes, and tropes, basically plagiarizing earlier films, which created the “seen one, seen ‘em all” effect (Shaheen 2001).¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ The study, translation, illustration, and dissemination of *Nights*, including the filmic versions in the 20th century, allowed Westerners a chance to play out their Orientalist fantasies, whatever they may be, on and through the text, as the text “function[ed] as a kind of subtext for much larger, even global, relationships” (Makdisi and Nussbaum 2008, 3). Much like Edward Said analyzed early scientific and humanistic works on the Middle East and its peoples, Makdisi and Nussbaum establish that the *Arabian Nights* was used to define the West against the East. For example, during the first century of the European translations in the 1700s, “the tales offered an avenue into modernity through its magical opposite,” where the Middle East was envisioned a fantastical land of genies and flying carpets (Makdisi and Nussbaum 2008, 4).

¹⁰² See Kobayashi (2006) for a brief overview of ‘Orientalist painting’ in relation to the *Arabian Nights*. One of the earliest pieces of scholarship that includes a discussion of how the *Arabian Nights* figured into the American image of the Arab is Cindy Arkelyan Lydon’s article in *Mid East* (May-June 1969) “American Images of the Arabs.”

¹⁰³ I am cautious about using Irwin here for my analysis. In much of his writing he defends what Said (1979) and Shohat and Stam (1994) would label as Orientalist or even imperialist academic work. I resolve

The films based on the *Arabian Nights* are just one component, though the most recognizable, of the creation of the U.S. popular culture imaginary of the Middle East as always ancient, mythical, and Muslim. The majority of the images that Arab Christians produced about themselves were culled from these movies, as well as the accompanying books, toys, and advertisement campaigns (mainly for cigarettes) based on *Arabian Nights* stories and imagery.

Antiochian Deployments of the *Arabian Nights*

A striking recent example of this strategic self-Orientalizing is a flyer for a public *hafli* (literally “party”) at an Antiochian Orthodox church in New Jersey in 2008 (Figure 3-1). The flyer features an *Arabian Nights*-style palace in the background and the text “Arabian Night Hafli” overtop, with the tagline underneath that reads “Join us for some fun at Palace St. George.”¹⁰⁴ There is also an image of a Palestinian or Lebanese dancer in traditional dress and a photograph of Middle Eastern pastries, which highlights that the event will involve music, dancing, and food. The entire advertisement, one that this church used multiple years in a row, is not atypical for Antiochian Orthodox parishes. The only reason this one stands out is that the main image of the palace is taken directly from Disney’s *Aladdin*.¹⁰⁵

this by not using Irwin’s theoretical model, but only drawing on his content as a scholar of both the *Arabian Nights* and cultural productions associated with the publication of the tales.

¹⁰⁴ Holding ethnic food festivals was a structural component of the Little Falls, NJ, parish. A January 1976 article in *The Word* about the consecration of the parishes new church building, mentioned that the new construction also included a separate banquet hall and kitchen, which was “custom designed” and “will serve the many activities sponsored by the parish, complete with sheesh-kabob charcoal stove.”

¹⁰⁵ I have shown this image to undergraduate classes at two large state universities (one in Ohio and one in Michigan). Within a few moments of asking if anybody recognizes the image of the palace on the flyer, multiple students instantly yell out that it is from *Aladdin*.

There are two reasons why the use of *Aladdin* stands out. First, Disney's animated *Aladdin* (1992) is a strong example of what Irwin calls the "autocannibalistic" nature of filmic depiction of *Arabian Nights*' tales. Further, the production of Disney's *Aladdin* shows how adaptations of the tales are both products of their historical moment but continue to represent the Middle East as if it exists outside of history. The wildly popular *Aladdin* did not spring solely from the imaginations of its animators. As one scholar states, the Disney version "like many of its predecessors, did not so much bring 'Aladdin' to the screen as present a composite of images culled from *Alf laylah wa-laylah* [A Thousand and One Nights] and refracted through a number of intermediaries," such as *Thief of Baghdad* (Cooperson 2006, 265). The *Thief of Baghdad* (1924) is considered the "first film version of an 'Oriental tale'" and it is cited as producing many of the stereotypes and "oriental knick-knacks" adopted by later films, particularly the onion-domed palaces of Disney's *Aladdin* (Cooperson 2006).¹⁰⁶

The second reason why St. George's use of *Aladdin* is so intriguing, is that Arab American advocacy groups took issue with Disney's adaptation of the story, and not for its unoriginality. Upon its theatrical release, Arab American advocacy groups were furious at the film's opening lines: "Oh I come from a land/ From a faraway place/ Where the caravan camels roam/Where they cut off your ear/ If they don't like your face/ It's barbaric, but hey, it's home." Jack Shaheen sums up the outcry against Disney by simply stating, "Why begin a children's film with lyrics such as 'barbaric,' and 'cut off your ear?'" (2001, 51). Eventually Disney's executives cut the "cut off your ear" line for the film's video release, but left the "barbaric" reference. On its own, these references,

¹⁰⁶ In addition, Disney illustrators relied on illustrations from Victorian-era editions of the *Nights* (Irwin 2004, 229).

particularly for such a popular film, are jarring enough. But as Michael Cooperson (2006) argues, the film is part of the context of the first Gulf War, a time when Nabeel Abraham argues that anti-Arab racism and violence “reached an all time high” (1994, 204). Cooperson argues that because of the associations of the Middle East and Arabs with the U.S.-led war against Saddam Hussein, Aladdin and his fellow animated characters needed to be removed from the realities of war-torn Iraq, and thus Disney changed the setting for their *Aladdin* from Baghdad (the site of the first filmic depiction of Aladdin in 1924’s *The Thief of Baghdad*) to made-up Agrabah. Although Disney did not want negative media coverage of the recent events in Baghdad to influence the public’s reception of their animated film, they did not seem to care about perpetuating negative and harmful stereotypes about Arabs, as evidenced by the opening lines to the movie and the Americanizing of the protagonists of the movie, versus the dark-skinned, hook-nosed, thick-accented villains (Cooperson 2006, 276; and Shaheen 2001, 52).

Given the anti-Arab stereotyping in Disney’s *Aladdin*, why would an Antiochian Orthodox Church of mostly Palestinian and Lebanese adherents use an image from the animated feature as their logo promoting their ethnic food festival? Although Disney’s *Aladdin* was singled out by Arab American advocacy groups for its egregious stereotyping, especially given the context of the on-the-ground realities of the U.S.-Middle East relationship at the time, the use of the image by the parish of St. George was part of the larger history of the circulation of the *Arabian Nights* within the Antiochian archdiocese for at least the last 70 years. The self-Orientalizing, even through images and rhetoric that was once used to marginalize Arabs and the Middle East as violent and decidedly un-American, was now being used in a playful way to claim a cultural

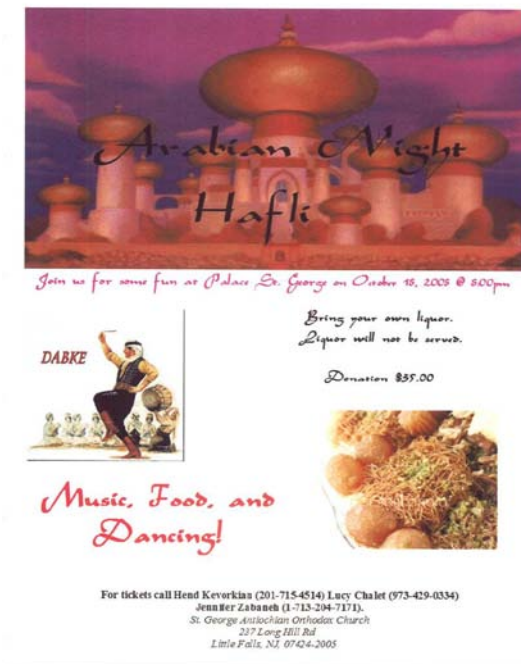


Figure 3-1 Flyer for 2008 *hafli* at St. George, Little Falls, NJ.

authenticity.¹⁰⁷ Their strategic use of self-Orientalism is relatively straight forward: utilize familiar reference points to draw in outsiders to their event. As the Arab Christians adopted these sometimes centuries-old depictions of their homelands, they were in a sense selling the American public the “Orient” that was created by and through the multiple, contextual, and Western-mediated incarnations of the *Arabian Nights*. As I argue that Antiochians were marketing an authentic or authenticated Arab, I use the term “authenticated” strategically, as in authentic within the bounds of the commodification of cultural identity in U.S. multiculturalism.¹⁰⁸

But self-Orientalism functions in decidedly more complicated ways than simply attracting outsiders to a fundraising event. This “Arabian Night Hafli” flyer, and the

¹⁰⁷ I define my use of “play” in the following chapter. I build off of Roger Abrahams (1980; 1987) folkloric use of the term. Abrahams sees “play” in the “festive” context, as “stylized behavior” (1980, 120).

¹⁰⁸ See Halter (2000) and Comaroff and Comaroff (2009) in addition to the following chapter in this dissertation for an elaboration of this concept.

dozens like it that I have found, are part of the larger story that the archdiocese tells about itself in relation to its construction of an authentic cultural identity. As part of their annual Middle Eastern food fair festivities, members of St. George (Pittsburgh, PA) created and distributed a “souvenir book” of recipes, folklore, and selections and illustrations from well-known Arabic stories and folktales (Figure 3-2).¹⁰⁹ As with most publications by Antiochian parishes, the booklet also included the requisite advertisements and sponsorships from congregants and local businesses, the majority of which were Middle Eastern themed.¹¹⁰ The cover image on the booklet, titled “A Thousand and One Delights: Arabian Nights Entertainments,” was taken from the cover of a 1908 edition of the *Nights* and depicts the iconic frame story of the heroine Scheherazade occupying the King with magical tales.¹¹¹ The booklet features a letter on the inside cover addressed to visitors, offering to “instill a little magic in [their] evening, for the flavor of Arabic foods is as vivid, as exotic and enchanting as Arabic dancing; as Arabic folklore in the tales told by Scheherazade to the King for a thousand and [one] nights.” The letter further depicts the Arab American Christians as carriers of ancient Arab traditions of food and folklore: “While we live in the now, in today, our roots stretch back and we constantly draw strength and wisdom from what has gone before, be

¹⁰⁹ Theresa Johnson, John E. Khalil, and Philip Nemy. 1983. “A Thousand and One Delights: Arabian Nights Entertainments.” Souvenir book. (Pittsburgh, PA: St. George Antiochian Orthodox Church). I am indebted to Very Rev. Fr. John Abdullah for mailing me a copy of this booklet.

¹¹⁰ The congregation in this Pittsburgh parish in 1983 mirrored the changing demographics in the archdiocese as a whole. Founded by Syrian immigrants in the steel and railroad town of Pittsburgh over 100 years ago, in the 1970s it was beginning to change from a completely Arab church, to a more diverse membership through conversion and the halted flow of immigrants from the Arab world to the region. Beginning in the 1970s and 1980s, Antiochian parishes across the nation began receiving large numbers of non-Arab converts. Parishes in cities or regions that did not continuously receive steady numbers of immigrants from the Middle East began changing from Arab immigrant churches to American ethnic churches, and not always wholly Arab or Arab American. Regardless of the ethnic composition of the parish, celebration of Arab-themed food festivals has been a staple for decades at Antiochian churches across the country.

¹¹¹ *The Arabian Nights Entertainments*, selected and edited by Andrew Lang. London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1908.

it a few years, centuries, or eons.”¹¹² Here, the parishioners construct an authentic Antiochian cultural identity as a legacy of the *Arabian Nights*.

The booklet for the 1983 food fair connects the food prepared and eaten by church members with the “Tales of Ancient Araby” by juxtaposing stories and illustrations with recipes that “have been handed down from generation to generation from times more ancient than history.” The *Arabian Nights* and its associated imagery of flying carpets, minarets, harem women, and sword-wielding Arab men, has served as a sort of record of a mediaeval, mythical, Arab world. The Arab American Christians were utilizing that frame of reference to market their cultural identity to the general American public by inserting themselves into the dominant discourses of “ancient Araby,” as the booklet claims, and highlighting how the members of their church are descendants of the Middle East depicted in the *Arabian Nights*, even though they are Christian. Regardless of the fact that the *Arabian Nights* details an Arab-Islamic society and that the mosque is more prominent in representations of the Middle East than the church, the members of St. George showcase what they present as their knowledge of Arab culture; one that is palatable and relative to the dominant U.S. Orientalist constructions of Arabs as a romantic, mystical other.

But embedded in this construction of an *Arabian Nights* cultural authenticity is an example of the sustained construction of authentic Christianity by establishing the parishioners of St. George, and by extension the archdiocese, as carriers of the Christian faith that began in their homeland, the Holy Land. The front of the booklet contains an “Ahlah Wa Sahlan” [welcome] by The Society of St. George, which is an organization at

¹¹² The earliest known Arabic manuscript of the collection of tales known as the *Arabian Nights* or *Alf layla wa layla* is of Syrian origin, as were many of the parishioners at St. George.

the church with “religious, socio-cultural and humanitarian” concerns. The society proclaims that, as Antiochian Orthodox Christians, they “owe their spiritual allegiance” to the “venerable See of Antioch.” The message then states the oft-quoted Bible passage about Antioch, which is also on the letterhead for the archdiocese, that the ancient Syrian

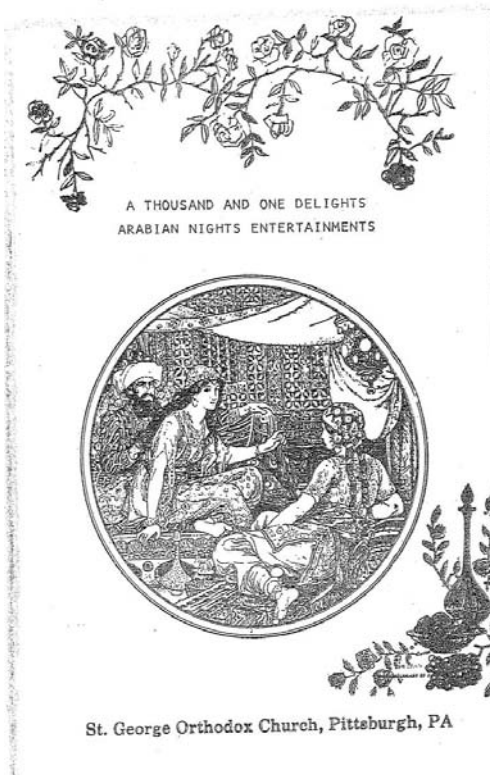


Figure 3-2 Cover of program book from 1983 St. George (Pittsburgh, PA) food fair.

city is “where the disciples were first called Christians.” As I will explore further in the final chapter, the members of the Antiochian Church see themselves as true descendents of the apostles and carriers of the one, true Christian faith. Both their claims to authentic Christianity and authentic cultural Arabness are mediated through the space of the

church, which keeps the spirit of an “ancient Antioch” alive, and are part of a commodification of cultural identity.¹¹³

Making a claim to cultural authenticity from the space of the church is a double-edged sword.¹¹⁴ Antiochians, *as Christians*, are given more flexibility with which to shape their self-representation than are Muslim Arabs. Arab Christians have a solid claim to cultural citizenship¹¹⁵ and can be seen as white ethnics, totally meltable into an American multicultural society, because of their claim to Christianity and their participation in the construction of an American cultural identity. Their self-Orientalizing was playful and safe, precisely because they were not the potential Muslim terrorists that U.S. media and popular culture had constructed. But their self-Orientalization is made more complex in the light of their position as potentially more American than Arab Muslims, but less authentically Arab. Especially since, as Paul Eid argues, “Christian Arabs find that their relation to ‘Arabness’ is mediated by an Islam-laden categorizing frame of reference made up by the majority group” (Eid 2007, 25). Their self-Orientalizing, in order to be authentically Arab, has to speak to and through the proliferation of Muslim-themed imagery about the Arab region.

¹¹³ See Mara Einstein’s *Brands of Faith* (2008) for one view of the need for churches to employ marketing techniques to set themselves apart. Michael Emerson and Christian Smith (2000) also discusses how congregations need to “specialize” in the saturated “religious marketplace” (136).

¹¹⁴ The church is where they are most comfortable within a nation-building process. As Arabs they are less authentic than Muslim, based on the *Arabian Nights* and the spate of U.S. popular culture representations, so they don’t fit in to the Arab nation so neatly. As Americans they have conditional citizenship because of their Arab affiliation, so that also are uncomfortable within that nation. But as Christians, they are the authentic ones, so they fit perfectly into that nation. This is why the religious identity will always be trump card for Antiochians.

¹¹⁵ I take the idea of cultural citizenship from Aihwa Ong (1996). Ong views cultural citizenship as a process, where “cultural practices and beliefs produced out of negotiating the often ambivalent and contested relations with the state and its hegemonic forms that establish the criteria of belonging within a national population and territory.” It’s a dialectical process of “self-making and being made” (Ong 1996, 738).

Eid writes about the flexibility and complexity that this positioning creates for Arab Christians, as they may be seen as less “authentic” Arabs, because of their religious affiliation. He writes that “the various ways that Arab Christians combine their Arab and Christian identities, depending on the majority group they interact with, constitute a prime illustration of the influential power of outside labeling on minority groups’ self-definitions” (Eid 2007, 158). So it’s a double-edged sword to play up the Christian aspect of the identity construction, because although the space of the Christian church is normalized within the U.S. and may attract more outside members to a festival, Islam is more authenticated with regards to an Arab cultural authenticity.

As a whole, the festivals and their advertisement are exemplary of the Antiochian archdiocese’s long engagement with presenting itself in relation to the dominant popular culture representations of Arabs and the Middle East, mainly the *Arabian Nights*. The Antiochians representational practice of self-Orientalism is a complex and strategic process that has three important functions. Following Hall’s (1997) discussion of representational practices, I see self-Orientalism as intervening in the dominant discourses and representations about Arabs, which were increasingly hostile beginning in the 1960s and 1970s (as opposed to the more exoticizing earlier images) in order to “privilege” the representation of Arabs as exotic but not dangerously so. By drawing on the imagery of the *Arabian Nights*, Antiochians could disassociate themselves from the negative representations of Arabs in U.S. media, and attempt to privilege representations that would be successful in claiming a cultural authenticity in the multicultural marketplace.

Self-Orientalism functions to market a familiar cultural identity within culturally essentialist historical processes that are inherently tied to consumerism as a means of experiencing the other, mainly “commodity Orientalism” and liberal multiculturalism. By recycling popular culture representations of the Arab world, the Antiochians were presenting themselves within a familiar frame of reference. In order to draw in as many people as possible to their food festivals, Antiochian parishes had to market in stereotypes. Or in the words of Susan Nance, the Antiochians had to present a “comprehensible novelty” to an American audience, one that offered “new content,” as in a Christian Arabness built on unique foods and exotic music, but “that still flattered preexisting attitudes” about Arabs and the Middle East, namely the referential imagery of the *Arabian Nights* (Nance 2009, 9-10).¹¹⁶

Finally, and in a less critical but still important function of self-Orientalism, it serves to capture and construct a nostalgic Arabness using Western-mediated imagery of an Oriental pre-colonial past.¹¹⁷ Typically these Arab American Christians, many of whom by the 1970s did not speak Arabic or had never been to the Middle East, painted themselves into the Orientalist fantasy of the *Arabian Nights* as an opportunity to capture a cultural heritage. Their cultural Arabness was created in part by grafting their own understanding of their cultural heritage (mostly through food and music) onto

¹¹⁶ Although I draw on Susan Nance’s (2009) important intervention and investigation of the practice of “playing Eastern,” hers is a more capitalist deterministic approach. She writes of performers that made a living trading in stereotypes: “The most profitable and ubiquitous performances, therefore, were those that did not openly challenge cultural difference or consumerism, but functioned as idealized suggestions of how the Muslim world could be useful in the process of consumer individuation” (18). I agree that Antiochian Orthodox needed to play to stereotypes to successfully market their Arabness, but theirs was not simply a capitalistic venture, and my three functions of self-Orientalism point to this.

¹¹⁷ See my discussion on Roger Benjamin (1997) in the following footnote.

representations of Arabs and the Middle East from U.S. popular culture.¹¹⁸ In the words of Susan Nance (2009), who is drawing from Phil Deloria, they were “playing Eastern”—constructing an authenticated Arabness, which was authentic only in that it reflected what popular culture constructed as an authentic other.¹¹⁹

The collection of Arab folklore was the perfect set of imagery for Arab American Christians to graft themselves onto in order to market an authenticated product to the American public. The *Arabian Nights* tales themselves, as well as their Western translations and interpretations, “weave past and present together in a kind of temporal contact zone,” combining “nostalgic pleasure inspired by an enchanted past with an updated modern amorality, energized by mercantilist zeal, industrialization, and imperial ambitions” (Makdisi and Nussbaum 2008, 16). The parishioners at St. George, in putting together their food festival and accompanying souvenir recipe book, tapped into this “nostalgic pleasure” and mapped their own imagined past onto their present.

But how did this work? How can predominantly Arab American parishes, especially in a post-industrial city like Pittsburgh, where the economic ills of the late

¹¹⁸ The Antiochians’ use of self-Orientalism as a representational practice is part of a larger tradition of the reclamation of Orientalist art by non-Westerners. For example, as Makdisi and Nussbaum (2008) offer a telling image, after the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the subsequent killing of Saddam’s sons, Uday and Qusay, “their palace was laid open to public view.” Adorning the walls of the palace were large murals of “exoticized images” from the *Nights* that had a “[close] affinity to Walt Disney’s cinematic animations of the tales.” Makdisi and Nussbaum’s analysis of this event is quite clear and speaks directly to my argument about self-Orientalism. They write of the murals: “Determining what is native and what is imported, what is authentic and what is invented...is nearly impossible” (17). Much like Antiochian self-Orientalism is a representational practice that inserts their *reality* as Arab Americans into an exoticized European Orient, Roger Benjamin, writing about the collecting of Orientalist paintings by privileged Arab collectors, says that these individuals “exerted control over the image of their past and of their heritage—an act of repossession” (1997, 33). Benjamin further argues that Arab collectors of Orientalist paintings, many of which were inspired by or contracted for illustrations of the *Arabian Nights*, were engaging in a “new sense of positive empowerment expressed through the acquisition and thus redefinition of western colonial documents” (1997, 35). Using Benjamin’s empirical analysis of Arab collectors of Orientalist paintings as a comparison to Antiochians in the U.S. is striking, as both groups were drawn to these exotic images of a pre-colonial past as both markers of nostalgia and as a chance to assert their “claim upon the image of their past” (Benjamin 1997, 39).

¹¹⁹ Deloria (1998) argues that to claim authenticity is to claim the position of other.

1970s and early 1980s could easily be blamed on the media's "greedy Arabs," celebrate their Arab culture and heritage and expect the community around the church to willingly support them? The parishioners constructed their Arabness based on earlier, less politicized representations of Arabs and the Middle East. As Ronald Stockton argues about the "essential quality of stereotypes": "they take people 'out of history'" (1994, 120). The Antiochians were not creating a "real" Arab with this self-Orientalizing, because they knew who the real Arabs were. They were the priests and the parishioners of their faith, as well as the other Arab activists, both Muslim and Christian, that they worked with to obtain social justice for their people in the homeland and the hostland.

For example, as I outlined in the last chapter, at the same time that parishes were celebrating ethnic food festivals using self-Orientalizing imagery and rhetoric, there was significant and sustained politicized action and humanitarian efforts on behalf of the homeland. It was not unusual for weekly church bulletins as well as the archdiocese's official monthly magazine, *The Word*, to report on parish food festivals as well as ongoing political and humanitarian support for Palestine and Lebanon in the same pages as religious news and debates on theological and doctrinal matters. All were treated as pertinent church issues.

Further, parishes across the country were consistently collecting donations for refugee children from Lebanon and Palestine via the church-sponsored and heavily promoted Arab Children's Relief Fund. Even if raising money to send to Palestinian refugee children was purely a humanitarian effort, in light of U.S. discourses that figure Palestinians as enemies and Israelis as victims, the humanitarian effort becomes

politicized.¹²⁰ Though this politicized humanitarian action on behalf of the collective homeland was occurring simultaneously as the production and celebration of the food festival, the food festivals remained de-politicized. The space of the ethnic food festival, even in this larger context of anti-Arab racism and violence of the 1970s and the post-9/11 period, was not the space where the Antiochians advanced their transnational commitments to their homelands. They had other outlets. The self-representations that were deployed in the context of the commodification of cultural identity through food, operated in, and were most useful to, the cultural context as a functional self-Orientalism.¹²¹

Not only were Antiochians savvy enough to separate their continued support for the Palestinians and other Arab causes from their ethnic food fairs, but liberal multiculturalism, which imbues the ethnic food festival with its power, does not allow a space for ethnic politicking. Fitting within this contradiction of multiculturalism, Arab American Christians can market their diversity but must leave their homeland politics at the door for fear of being seen as un-American and equated with the contemporary “political Arab” rather than the “liberal multicultural Arabian.” The reconciliation of the Arab Christian’s use of stereotypical imagery relies heavily on the contradictions of liberal multiculturalism, which allow ethnics a space in the construction of the national

¹²⁰ There have been constant debates in church publications since the 1970s about the balance between continued loyalty to the people of their Middle Eastern homeland, a biblical and Christian imperative to help the poor and “downtrodden,” and critiques of Israel and other U.S.-supported endeavors in the Middle East by choosing to send money to peoples labeled as “aggressors” or “terrorists.” See Stiffler (forthcoming).

¹²¹ I take the idea of examining the usefulness of these self-representations from Susan Nance’s call to investigate the contextualized use of cultural performances or productions, instead of uncritically labeling all iterations of the Middle East as Orientalist, thus implying their service in America’s “imperiousness” (2009, 6). I hope I am being as critical as Nance suggests scholars should be.

culture, but only within a power structure that continues to marginalize difference.¹²² The Arab Christians were adapting images readily available in popular culture in order to sell an authentic product back to the general public who would easily recognize the images of a camel or a sheikh as “truly” Middle Eastern.

There is a long history of this type of representational strategy within the archdiocese, predating liberal multiculturalism. The parish of Worcester, MA, one of the oldest in the archdiocese,¹²³ held a “Mardis-Gras [sic]” to benefit their parish in August of 1933. The four-page booklet that was distributed to festival attendees lists the activities for the event, the organizers, and a note of thanks in both English and Arabic.¹²⁴ The Mardi Gras had all of the elements of a typical Antiochian ethnic festival: music, dancing, connections to an ancient Biblical and Arab cultural past, the focus on the space of the church, and some sort of allegiance to or mention of the American context. The Mardi Gras began with a liturgy performed by the priest, followed by a “Special Prayer for the safety and long life” of President Franklin D. Roosevelt. Once all of the pomp was finished, the festivities kicked off with something called “Debate Singing,” featuring two local Arab signers performing “Arabian Desert Poetry.” A “Round Circle Syrian Dance,” most likely the *dabkeh* (that staple of Antiochian festivals), was accompanied by the “old Biblical Sheperd [sic] instrument” (whatever that is). The mention of a Biblical instrument highlighted the Antiochians’ role as conduits for their Christian Holy Land.

¹²² This comes from Lisa Lowe’s (1996) “contradictions of multiculturalism,” in that multiculturalism is concerned with “importation” and not “immigration.”

¹²³ The Worcester church was established in 1902, though Orthodox Syrian immigrants had been meeting for religious meetings earlier (N. Saliba 1992, 40). Saliba reports that through the fund-raising efforts of the Ladies Society, mostly through their food preparation and sale, the church’s mortgage was paid off in a little over 15 years (48). Church historian Najib Saliba argues that the Worcester, MA, church was “the standard bearer of the Church in Antioch and its birth place” in the U.S. (1992, 47).

¹²⁴ “St. George Mardi-Gras.” 1933. Brochure. Heritage and Learning Center Archives, Antiochian Village, Bolivar, PA.

The next two events served to place Antiochian Orthodox within the history of an ancient Arab Islamic culture, as portrayed in the *Arabian Nights*. First was the performance of “Bagdad Music, used in the days of Chalif Al-Rasheed [sic],” which was followed by a “very attractive” “Old Arabian Nights sword and shield play,” carried out by two local Arab men. I have found no photos or written recollections of these events, so I can only imagine the sight of grown Arab men reenacting a “sword and shield” play at an Orthodox Church in 1930s Massachusetts. If this was an isolated incident, it would seem curious. But since Antiochian Orthodox churches have continually engaged in this type of imaginative construction of an authentic Arab cultural identity, it is a rich site for cultural analysis.

Though separated by fifty years, the 1933 Mardi Gras in Worcester, MA, and the 1983 “Thousand and One Delights” food fair in Pittsburgh accomplished similar feats. They both centered the members of the church as the carriers of an authentic Christianity and an ancient Arab culture, allowing the space of the church to be a place of worship, a place of community fundraising, and a place for the creation and maintenance of constructed authentic cultural identity. In both cases there, there is an engagement not only with dominant U.S. Orientalist imagery and discourse, but larger historical forces.

In the case of the 1933 Mardi Gras, the presentation of the Arabian Nights “sword and shield play” was in keeping with contemporary U.S. popular culture representations of the Middle East and Arabs as romantic and exoticized others. The members of the Worcester parish were offering community members the same type of commodification of cultural identity prevalent in the commodity Orientalism of the period. Melani McAlister’s discussion of the late 19th century development of “commodity Orientalism”

as both a challenge to Protestant ethics and a phenomenon that brought the Orientalist ideas of “exhibition,” “spectacle,” and “foreignness” into the growing consumer culture where Americans could purchase the other (2005, 22), fits directly with the audience that Antiochian churches were intent on reaching with their self-Orientalism. Finally, because the Mardi Gras was taking place at a Christian church, a familiar referent for community and cultural identity in the U.S., the representations of Arabs and the Middle East were in a sense translated for an American audience by Arab Christians that were claiming a cultural authenticity. They were “playing Eastern” within the terms of U.S. Orientalism.

At the ethnic food festivals later in the century, as exemplified by the 1983 “Thousand and One Delights” event, the self-Orientalist representations were contextualized within liberal multiculturalism’s establishment of the ethnic food festival as the ultimate form of marketable and consumable cultural identity (the focus of the next chapter). By representing themselves as bearers of an ancient and authenticated “Arabian” culture, their public deployments of cultural identity were subject to authentication by the American consumer. The in-group constructions of cultural identity within the space of the church are a complex part of that process, though. The in-group context, such as archdiocese conventions which were attended almost wholly by the Antiochian faithful, were spaces for both the celebration of an Arab cultural identity and, more importantly, for celebrating a shared religious faith. Finally, the conventions were not public spaces, in that they were not subject to the same commodification of identity as the ethnic food festivals. For all of these reasons, the internal negotiations of cultural identity were much more complicated.

Internal Negotiations

Though the marketing of the festivals that I have analyzed are public spaces, in which a larger not-necessarily-Arab public takes part, the majority of the rhetoric and images that are deployed at the public festivals originally were developed and negotiated in an in-group context. I turn now to an analysis of images that were all produced by or for churches within the Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese for a mostly Antiochian audience. The images clearly show continuity of how these Arab Christians, separated by space and time, have attached themselves to a very specific set of imagery. We see the themes of “Ali Baba” and desert-dwelling Bedouins, tales from *Arabian Nights*, and camels.¹²⁵ The majority of these images and associated rhetoric circulated at national and regional archdiocese conventions and highlight the complex negotiations that took place within the space of the church over the last half-century.¹²⁶

The archdiocese holds yearly conventions in which all of the priests and bishops, along with delegates and congregants from each parish, gather for a week and hold meetings, religious services, and make decisions regarding the operation of the Church in America. Each year, since the mid-1940s, these conventions produce large and elaborate “souvenir” program books. These books, which are distributed to convention attendees, contain welcoming letters from church hierarchs, the local sponsoring parish, prominent Arab American community leaders, and local government officials, such as mayors. The souvenir program books typically tell some sort of history about the local parish and the archdiocese, almost always focusing on the early immigration from the Middle East, and

¹²⁵ The image of the camel is well known among Arab Christians in the United States. An email forward in the early 2000s that circulated among Arab American Christians put it best when it lists as one of the top reasons that you know you are Lebanese or Palestinian, as “you have at least 1 picture/object resembling a camel in your house (even though there are no camels in Lebanon).” See the epilogue to this dissertation.

¹²⁶ All of the images from the convention program books are courtesy of the Heritage Learning Center Archives and museum at the Antiochian Village, and its curator Julia Ritter.

recap any major events and decisions in the previous year. The bulk of the souvenir program books, though, consist of sponsorships and advertisements from local merchants and organizations, many of which may be owned or operated by a parishioner. There is a tremendous amount of overlap between the cultural identity constructed within the pages of the convention books and the posters and flyers for public parish-sponsored festivals, as all were part of the space of the church. But the function of the images in the in-group setting is more complex.

The highlight of each convention, other than the celebration of the hierarchical Divine Liturgy on the final day, is always the *hafli* (or *haflis*, as was the case at conventions in the 1970s and earlier). It is certainly a “see and be seen” event where parishioners eat Middle Eastern food and dance the *dabkeh* in their finest clothes. The convention *haflis*, with their associated Arab imagery or food, music and stereotypical rhetoric, functioned to solidify in-group membership. As liturgical services were performed more in English than Arabic beginning in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and as membership was becoming less Arab immigrant and more Arab American, and even non-Arab through conversion, and as leadership was pushing for an Orthodox unity in the U.S. that would temper any ethnicism in favor of theological unity, the convention *haflis* were one of the last “official” spaces within the church to celebrate a cultural Arabness.¹²⁷

¹²⁷ After the 1980s, self-Orientalist imagery and rhetoric became much less common in official church publications, giving way to more “serious” discussions of theology and even political action on behalf of the Middle East. Individual churches did continue the circulation of the images of camels, sheiks, and flying carpets, mostly in the context of food festival advertisements. The conventions becoming more focused on the business of religion began when the conventions switched from SOYO conferences as regional youth meetings, with a large focus on fellowship and fun (i.e. pageants, *haflis*, such), to regional “parish life conferences,” at which the focus was on faith and church business. There was still an emphasis on fellowship, but always in the context of religion (e.g. Bible bowl, oratorical festival, etc).

But because these *haflis* were produced for an in-group Antiochian audience, the self-Orientalist rhetoric had a different function.¹²⁸

For example, at the 1968 convention there was the “Night of the Sultan” party followed the next year by the “Baalbek in the Tropics” night at the Miami convention. The thematic elements of these in-group *haflis* are very similar to the ways in which the parishioners marketed themselves to their respective local communities, in that they drew from the romantic and exotic legacy of popular culture representations of the *Arabian Nights*. The *hafli* at the 1977 Midwestern regional convention in Detroit was called “1,001 Nights” and featured Tony Hanna, the “Golden Voice of the Middle East” who, it is noted, recently performed in the “Middle East nite club” at the Aladdin Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas.¹²⁹ Even though the *haflis* at official archdiocese conventions were playful, they functioned differently from the public festivals, like the 2008 “Arabian Night Hafli” in New Jersey. While the thematic elements of these in-group *haflis* are very similar to the ways in which Antiochians marketed themselves to their respective local communities, they can be seen as tongue-in-cheek. Without the outside gaze, there is no need to maintain any sense of constructed authenticity. The parishioners, as Arabs and Arab Americans, most likely understood that they had no authentic connection to any *Arabian Nights*’ sultan, or that a Middle Eastern-themed party in Miami did not reproduce Baalbek in the U.S.

¹²⁸ Throughout the 1950s, 60s, and early 1970s, the convention program books for regional and national conventions list multiple Arab-themed *haflis*, dinners, or musical shows. By the conventions in the late 1980s, it became common to see only one Arab-themed social engagement on the schedule. And by the 1990s, the *haflis* were listed simply as *haflis*, and did not receive any self-Orientalist nomenclature.

¹²⁹ *The Word*, May 1977, 24. The *haflis* were a main site in which ethnicity and cultural stereotypes were in play, and not always only Arabness. There was also a cultural engagement, on a very superficial level, with the prominent cultural identity of the host city. For example, at the 1960 convention in Houston, TX, there was a “Go Texan” square dance and a “Western Barbeque” in addition to the nightly “Arabic Sahria.” The 1966 national convention in San Francisco featured the “Chinatown Oriental Revue and Luncheon.”

The conventions *haflis* were not public, and in a sense neither were the large souvenir program books. They were produced for an Antiochian audience. But within the pages of the program book, Antiochians either deployed or were exposed to self-Orientalist rhetoric in the form of advertisements, which also circulated in more public spaces.

Even within the private convention space, Antiochian Orthodox engaged with self-Orientalism through the advertising of Middle Eastern-themed restaurants that were either owned by parishioners or supported the Antiochian archdiocese through the purchase of ad space in the convention program books. Although the large souvenir program books, with their bevy of advertisements, were distributed at conventions and were created for an audience of almost exclusively Antiochian Orthodox, the advertisements for local restaurants, which were typically owned by members of the church, would have had a circulation outside of the archdiocese, as most restaurant ads do. It is here that the distinction between cultural identity and its deployment as a claim to cultural authenticity is so apparent. The in-group construction of cultural identity, like the “Night of the Sultan” *hafli*, solidify membership in the Antiochian archdiocese, whereas the self-Orientalist imagery and rhetoric in the advertisements attempt to claim a cultural authenticity within the public sphere.

From the 1950s through the 1990s, there were numerous advertisements in the convention program books with stereotypical Arab imagery and rhetoric, most of which were adapted from the *Arabian Nights* or Hollywood representations of Arabs and the Middle East. One advertisement from the 1959 convention program book is for Sinbad’s Restaurant and Gift Shop, boasting not only “Ohio’s Finest Syrian Restaurant,” but

“Everything from tapestries to camel saddles” for the “pleasure” of the guests (Figure 3-3). “Sinbad” is one of the most popular of the *Arabian Nights* tales, so it makes sense to draw on its popularity to sell Middle Eastern food, but the presence of “camel saddles” at a Syrian gift shop in northwestern Ohio is what makes this playful, self-Orientalist so strategic. It offers something stereotypically Arab, but not something that the owner would recognize as “real” Arab. Most likely the owner or his family emigrated from the Mt. Lebanon area of Syria, where there are no camels. The owner is selling the American public what it expects—Sinbad, camels, and an Arabian fantasy.¹³⁰



Figure 3-3 Advertisement for “Sinbad’s.” From 1969 convention program book. Heritage and Learning Center Archives, Antiochian Village, Bolivar, PA.

¹³⁰ Other scholars of Arab American identity have written about the role of food and ethnic restaurants among Arab immigrants and their descendents. Randa Kayyali, mentions that many Middle Eastern ethnic restaurants in the U.S. have “capitalized on the appeal of the exotic side of their culture” by staging belly dances or “having patrons sit on the floor while eating from brass trays” (2006, 85). Although she says that this tends to feed into the larger Orientalist “trend,” Kayyali also argues that these settings offer the Arab Americans a chance to “show the hospitable and warm side” of their culture, functioning much like the self-Orientalist church-sponsored festivals.

An advertisement for a restaurant called “Mecca” appears in the program book for the 1961 convention, which was held in Pittsburgh (Figure 3-4). The ad features a young woman in a cocktail dress seated at the bar, with an Orientalist tapestry in the background, a large hookah, and two scimitars hanging on the wall. Even though the restaurant is called Mecca, a city in Saudi Arabia and the site of the Muslim *hajj* or pilgrimage, it specializes in “exotic Syrian music,” which mirrors Orientalism’s conflation of diverse groups into one monolithic category. The Arabic writing on the advertisement, though upside down, is a note welcoming the Antiochian convention goers to Pittsburgh, most likely written by the owner of Mecca. I read the restaurant ad as being intended for a non-Arab public (because Syrian music to Syrians would not be “exotic”) but the hand-written greeting shows that the owner is also concerned with an Arabs and Arab American audience at the convention. This ad pulls double duty. Whereas the imagery and rhetoric of the ad claims a cultural authenticity, the Arabic script and the note of welcome to the convention claims a valid membership within the Arab diaspora and part of the construction of a cultural identity.



Figure 3-4 Advertisement for “Mecca” restaurant. From the 1961 convention program book. Heritage and Learning Center Archives, Antiochian Village, Bolivar, PA.

Another advertisement showing a direct correlation between Hollywood representations of Arabs and the Middle East and Arab American self-representations, is an advertisement for a Miami restaurant called the “Son of Sheik.”¹³¹ Opened in 1932, the restaurant took its name directly from the famed 1926 sequel to Rudolph Valentino’s smash hit *The Sheik* (1921). Clearly the owners were capitalizing on the success of the film, regardless of the fact that *The Sheik* presented Arabs as violent, desert-dwelling fanatics.¹³² And continuing the “oriental knick knack” tradition, an Arab Christian owned restaurant and bar in Johnstown, PA, “The Pyramids,” not only features a camel and palm tree in front of an illustrated pyramid in its 1985 advertisement, but the restaurant itself is constructed to resemble pyramids (Figure 3-5). Because these knick-knacks are in the market as commodities, their deployment is attempting to claim an authenticity with the public, not add to the Antiochian cultural identity.

Finally, an advertisement in the 1969 Midwestern regional convention program book features an illustrated camel, palm trees, and a non-descript Middle Eastern-style dwelling in the background. This ad for “The Desert Inn” in Canton, OH, shows that the owners were most likely Antiochian, because part of the ad space includes a poem about the role of Orthodox youth in the world today (Figure 3-6). The poem makes direct references to domestic and international problems by stating, “With the rioters,

¹³¹ Incidentally, this ad appears in the program book for the convention where the name of the archdiocese was officially changed from the Syrian Antiochian Orthodox to simply the Antiochian Orthodox, thus dropping any national or ethnic affiliation in favor of focusing on the biblical roots of the Church.

¹³² Detroit’s first Arab-themed restaurant, also named “The Sheik” was owned by Lebanese Christian Maronites in the 1940s. Historians of Detroit’s Arab American community claim “The Sheik,” owned by a Maronite, was the first Arab restaurant in Detroit. By all accounts, 1944 was the first time it advertised to non-Arab public with a sign that said “The Sheik: Syrian Food” and, as William and Yvonne Lockwood claim, “For many old Detroiters, The Sheik was the place where their conception of Arab food was created” (2000, 517). This is another example, albeit from a Maronite and not an Antiochian, though the owners of The Sheik did advertise in Antiochian publications, of the interplay between popular culture and a constructed Arab cultural identity.

highjackers [sic], and militants that dwell/ Within our realms of a mountingless [sic] hell.” The poem ends with the hope that the Church’s leaders will guide the laity through these “world-wide problems.” The mention of hijackers and militants, as a political reality in the lives of Arabs and Arab Americans, is an interesting juxtaposition with the self-Orientalist representation of the Desert Inn. But since the thrust of the poem is about the Antiochian archdiocese’s role in solving crises in the U.S. and the Middle East, the ad fits within the space of the church. There is a similar reconciliation here as with the “Mecca” restaurant advertisement. The owners are simultaneously claiming a cultural authenticity to the public, which draws on the legacy of desert-themed imagery as representative of Arabs and the Middle East, but are also proclaiming their membership in the Antiochian archdiocese and their place within the Arab diaspora. This is a great example of how complex the uses of cultural identity are within the space of the church. Some articulations of Arabness are coded as public, others are meant for an in-group audience. And both can occur simultaneously.



Figure 3-5 “The Pyramids Lounge” in Johnstown, PA. Photo by the author.

The presence of the advertisements for these restaurants in the official convention program book makes their imagery and rhetoric part of the circulation of a particular Arabness within the space of the church. In addition to the examples here, there are dozens and dozens more examples of similar self-Orientalist imagery that have circulated in church publications since at least the 1940s. The restaurants' advertisements also function in similar ways to the ads for church-sponsored food festivals, in that the goal is to market a safe, friendly, ethnicity to an American public hungry for (de-politicized) diversity.

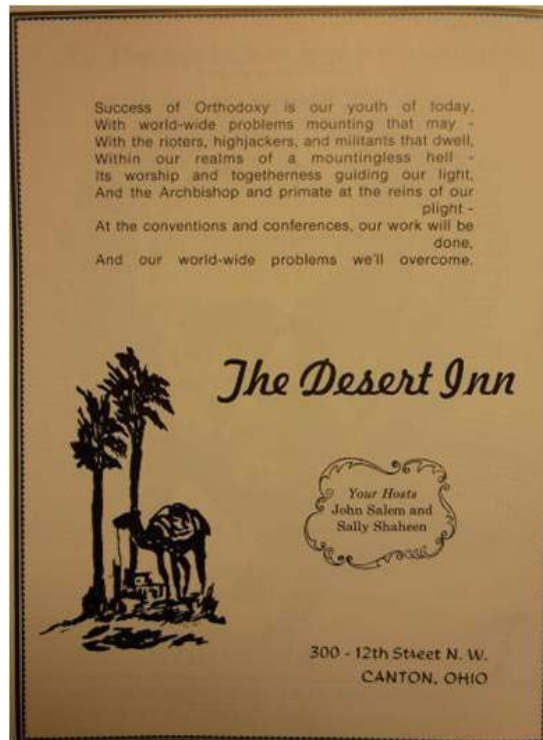


Figure 3-6 Advertisement for “The Desert Inn.” From the 1969 convention program book. Heritage and Learning Center Archives, Antiochian Village, Bolivar, PA.

Although the public festivals and their attempt to construct a cultural authenticity remained a constant, beginning in the 1980s, the archdiocese's official publications and spaces, such as the convention and its souvenir program book, became more serious

spaces for the discussion of religious matters and politicized discussions of humanitarian problems in the Middle East. By the 1990s, the playful, self-Orientalist rhetoric and imagery all but disappeared from conventions. Even though each convention continued to have a *hafli* on Friday night, and parishioners continued to eat Middle Eastern food and dance the *dabkeh*, the *haflis* ceased to be advertised using self-Orientalist names and imagery. Because the convention *haflis* were for in-group celebration of a religio-cultural identity, and there was no marketing or commodification of that identity, the archdiocese eventually began to separate the self-Orientalism used in public festivals as part of a constructed authenticity from their in-group celebrations.

There are numerous reasons for this in-group downplaying of a constructed cultural authenticity, the most prominent being the change in the demographics of the archdiocese. Although the hierarchs, until the 2000s, were all Arab-born, spoke Arabic, and maintained a heightened awareness of political developments in the Middle East, the majority of the archdiocese was not Arab-born, was speaking less and less Arabic, and was interested more in building an American Orthodox Church that happened to have Arab roots, than an Arab Orthodox Church that happened to be in the U.S. For decades, the archdiocese had been spearheading the move to unite all Orthodox churches in the U.S. under one umbrella, rather than having them broken down into national or ethnic divisions (e.g. Greek, Romanian, Ukrainian, etc.) As part of their push to break down ethnic divisions within Orthodoxy, the Antiochian archdiocese became more and more welcoming to non-Arab converts.

The presence of the self-Orientalist advertisements in the program, even as the rest of the program books were less and less self-Orientalist, displays a complex

engagement with cultural identity and authenticity. Even though the cultural identity constructed within the convention space can be read as tongue-in-cheek, those same images were also circulated in the public as advertisements for parishioner-owned or parishioner-supported restaurants. The reconciliation of this contradiction is complex, but hinges on the line drawn between in-group cultural identity and a public marketing of a cultural authenticity.

Even as the official in-group rhetoric of the archdiocese was less and less concerned with constructing an authentic cultural Arabness, the individual parishes (and restaurants owned by parishioners) continued to deploy their adapted *Arabian Nights*' imagery in the context of the commodification of a culturally authentic identity, in order to increase sales at church festivals, bazaars, and other fundraisers. The next chapter focuses on this long history within the archdiocese of the commodification of cultural identity using food, but it is important to note that the complex in-group/out-group use of self-Orientalism shows that parishes and their affiliated organizations understood, for the most part, their cultural authenticity was a construction, even if that construction at times reinforced dominant U.S. discourses about Arabs and the Middle East.

Conclusion

In revisiting what Michael Suleiman labeled as the “general picture of Arabs,” which he contends is a composite of the available U.S. popular culture representations of Arabs, it is important to ask the question: How do Arab American Christians reconcile the fact that dominant discourses (the “general picture”) present a cursory, stereotypical, and thus ahistorical view of Arabs? Liberal multiculturalism’s celebration of diversity (read, an apolitical, decorative existence in America society) and American Christians’

fascination with the Holy Land and the biblical stories of ancient civilization and Christianity, allow Arab Christians space to market their religio-cultural identity in direct relation to the stereotypical imagery and rhetoric in, for example, the *Arabian Nights*.¹³³ In the 1980s, Suleiman argued that if Arabs “register at all in the mind of most Americans,” it is through the stereotypes of Bedouins, desert fantasies, and hostile engagements with the West, all of which create ““a people who have lived outside of history”” (1988, 11).¹³⁴ Although in recent years, particularly after 9/11, “Arabs” have been frequently present in U.S. popular and political discourses, mostly in the vein of “hostile engagements,” Antiochian Orthodox now and in the past have attempted to privilege the romantic view of Arabs as exotic desert dwellers.

Before the advent of U.S. political and military projects in the Middle East, which Little (2002) argues began in full force after WWII, the representations of Arabs were of Oriental “exotics” more than dangerous terrorists or greedy oil sheiks.¹³⁵ This is a large part of the reason why the Arab Christians were able to recycle the more romantic images for their own use and self-representation. If, as Suleiman argues, this romantic image is one of the “combination” of stereotypes that Americans hold and can be “conjured up if and when an ‘appropriate’ situation presents itself,” the church-sponsored food festivals are one such situation (Suleiman 1988, 146). Antiochians knew that U.S. popular culture

¹³³ Suleiman (1988) mentions the American fascination with “the Bible as a literal interpretation of what happened in the Middle East” as a specifically American stamp on the larger field of Orientalism (9). Also, see Melani McAlister’s (2005) lengthy analysis of the relationship between American Christianity and the Holy Land.

¹³⁴ Suleiman also makes the point that in addition to lacking sufficient knowledge of the Middle East and its peoples, the Americans are biased against Arabs and are “unaware” that they are biased or rely on stereotypical thinking (145).

¹³⁵ Numerous scholars trace the relationship between U.S. imperial projects in the Middle East and representations of Arabs in media, most notable Shohat and Stam (1994), from whom I draw heavily. Little (2002) argues that until WWII, American interests in the Middle East were dictated mostly by private oil companies, but that Cold War ideology of containment, Israel’s declaration of statehood, and U.S. national interests in energy placed the Middle East at the forefront of national policy beginning in the 1940s.

and media discourses presented an often uniformed perspective about the Middle East and Arabs that typically resulted in a mix of Orientalist-informed stereotypes.¹³⁶

Antiochians attempted to solidify the romantic image in the minds of Americans (to paraphrase the title of Suleiman's book), as opposed to the more negative discourses on Arabs, while taking the opportunity to teach the general public about their heritage through the space of the church and through cultural symbols like food and music, albeit sometimes often in uncritical ways that simply reinforced popular culture discourses. Self-Orientalism is a complex process that says as much about Antiochian cultural identity constructions as it does about a U.S. multiculturalism that requires cultural essentialism as an entry fee for participation.

To be Arab American is to construct an identity that is simultaneously part of, but different from, the nation.¹³⁷ In other words, constructing a cultural identity is not only about holding onto a homeland identity, but about performing American-ness.

Antiochians attempt to utilize the space given to them by multiculturalism, based on their constructed authenticated difference, to construct an Arabness that is culturally engaging, profitable, and one that speaks back to the proliferation of negative images of Arabs in popular culture in media. The self-representation is also a "thinness" that is required by multiculturalism, in that the images must be uncomplicated and contribute to an easily-understood story that fits a U.S. model of cultural identity (Shryock 2004, 303).¹³⁸ Such "thinness" is best examined through food and its relationship to claims of cultural authenticity.

¹³⁶ Church leaders were always active in Arab American advocacy groups, like the National Association of Arab Americans (NAAA), and occasionally published articles and editorials in *The Word* about racism and cultural bias that faced Arab Americans.

¹³⁷ See Lowe (1996).

¹³⁸ See my discussion of "thinness" in the festival context in the following two chapters.

CHAPTER 4

The Antiochian Food Festival: Multiculturalism and the Deployment of Cultural Identity

The following is a brief 2007 newspaper article about the annual Middle Eastern Summer Festival at an Antiochian church in northern Ohio:

The grounds of St. George Antiochian Orthodox Cathedral on Woodley Road again became a center for Mideast culture last week as it held its annual Middle Eastern Summer Festival. Paul Antypas [...] takes the opportunity to puff on a hooka at the special hooka lounge. A hooka is a kind of water pipe associated with the Middle East, with a long, flexible tube for drawing the smoke through water in a vase or bowl and cooling it. Helping feed the hungry festival goers is Tony Khoury, top left, as he prepares gyros on a grill. The live camels weren't available the time Joelle Al Haehen [...] visited, so a stuffed camel took the child's attention. Besides all the good food available, the festival included a petting zoo, tours of the cathedral, a dance ensemble, and a Middle Eastern band.¹³⁹

Compare this write-up with a 2008 article from Syracuse, NY:

The sights, sounds and aromas of a Middle Eastern village will fill the air this weekend at one of the bigger events of every Central New York summer: the St. Elias Middle Eastern Cultural Festival in Onondaga. The festival will feature homemade Middle Eastern food and pastries, live music from Amin & the Sultans and children performing the dances brought to America by their Middle Eastern ancestors. [...] Shoppers will want to visit The Souk marketplace, featuring gold jewelry, Middle Eastern gifts and CDs, cookbooks and religious items. There's a raffle drawing with a chance to win \$1,000, and church tours will be available.¹⁴⁰

Both of these newspaper descriptions capture the essence of an Antiochian ethnic food festival; the festivals are public spaces where a playful cultural identity is being marketed, particularly through food. Both descriptions compare the local church grounds

¹³⁹ "Festival Offers a Mideastern Flavor," *Toledo Blade*, July 26, 2007.

¹⁴⁰ "Festival Offers Music, Dance and Food of the Middle East," *The Post-Standard (Syracuse, NY)*, July 17, 2008.

(Woodley Rd. in Ohio and Central New York) to an imagined distant place, both spatially and temporally (“center of Mideast culture” and “a Middle Eastern village”). Both articles highlight the self-Orientalism that the Antiochian churches deployed as part of their claim to a multicultural authenticity (hooka, live camels, and a “band” of Sultans).

A third newspaper example from 1963, which predates liberal multiculturalism’s emphasis on the food festival, shows that Antiochian parishes in the U.S. have long capitalized on their ability to provide a “departure” from the ordinary to an U.S. public hungry for diversity:

Many Americans, in spite of the space age and jet flight, have never had an opportunity to visit an Oriental country, but on Saturday, Sept. 7 [...] a little of the Orient will come to Altoona [PA].

Those planning to attend the St. George Syrian Orthodox Choir ‘Hafla,’ which means an Oriental evening party, will learn something of the intrigue of Arabic tradition and culture.

The first awareness of the departure from American culture may be realized through the haunting strains of Arabic music.

A ‘Hafla’ without an array of Arabic cuisine is unusual, so this one will be no exception. ‘Laham mishweee,’ better know in this country as shish-ka-bob, is cubed lamb with seasonings, cooked on skewers over a charcoal grill. [...]

A gala time will be offered to the public in this simulated atmosphere of the Orient.¹⁴¹

This unnamed newspaper beat writer speaks directly to my work with the description of the *hafla* as a “simulated” Orient. The festival space was supposed to playfully depict the constructed cultural identity of Arab Christians as inherently different and, hence, commodifiable. It would appear from these articles that the self-Orientalist imagery and rhetoric used by Antiochian parishes to market their cultural identity, particularly through food, was successful. The writers all seemed to buy the notions of authenticated difference that the parishioners were selling through their festivals. That is,

¹⁴¹ “Hafla to Include Arabic Music, Dancing, Food,” *The Mirror (Altoona, PA)*, August 19, 1963. Clipping provided by Michael Farrow.

after all, the point of a public food festival.

This chapter operates with two main assumptions, both dealing with food and its celebration in an American ethnic context. The first assumption is that food, as a cultural production, is a potent site for the analysis of identity creation, maintenance, and transmission of a cultural identity. I make this claim based on the space that liberal multiculturalism, particularly Bicentennial-era multiculturalism, opened up for the marketing and selling of ethnic foods through the identification of the so-called “new ethnics” with modern consumerist practices, which ties identity to the sale and purchase of commodities.¹⁴² Second, I take the ethnic food festival as an important site for the historical and ethnographic analysis of the cultural production of a specific, playful, public cultural identity, which is used for claims to cultural authenticity. The ethnic festival, much like the commerce in ethnic foods, was popularized as a community building and, simultaneously, a nation building process as a product of the planning and celebration of the nation’s bicentennial. As Penny Van Esterik argues, “the ethnic food festival is an example of the staging of ethnicity for American consumption” (1982, 217). Not only does the analysis of the church-sponsored food festival place the construction and maintenance of cultural identity squarely within the space of the church, but the food festival also highlights the role of women’s labor and knowledge in the life of an Antiochian parish and the construction and commodification of Arabness within the gendered multicultural arena.

¹⁴² Marilyn Halter (2000) discusses in depth the role of modern consumerist processes and the rise of the marketing and selling of ethnic identity.

Food and its Festival

Food, as the “ultimate consumable commodity,” and the cultural productions associated with it such as cookbooks and festivals, offer the “fullest way” of perceiving the other, because it involves so many senses, and because food has ability “to hold time, place, and memory” (Lupton 1994, 666; L. Long 2004, 21; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2004, xiii).¹⁴³ Within multiculturalism, ethnic food and its celebration has become a key commodity and marker of identity. Consuming ethnically “coded” food, is a “long-standing material practice in global commerce and exchange” (Mannur 2007, 28), and in the U.S. multicultural context, is a depoliticized method of performing and consuming “diversity.” In the Arab American context, scholars assert that “perhaps no aspect of culture is so resistant to change, so tenaciously held” as food (Lockwood and Lockwood 2000, 516), and my ethnographic data shows that the celebration of food that is coded as culturally “Arab” or “Middle Eastern” is the main site of Antiochian claims to authenticity.

The cultural and semiotic aspects of foods are especially significant in festive contexts, events in which the “intention is not principally to satisfy physical hunger and the need for nutrition...but rather to celebrate” (Humphrey and Humphrey 1988, 2).¹⁴⁴ As is the basis of this chapter and the following chapter, by focusing on food in a “festive context,” I can analyze the “performance of a particular vision of the community, of its values, assumptions, world views, and prescriptive behaviors” (Humphrey and Humphrey 1998, 3). I would also add that the festival, as a community celebration, is a rich site to

¹⁴³ Deborah Lupton (1994) argues, in a sociological context that “Food may be regarded as the ultimate consumable commodity” and “acts symbolically to define boundaries between Self and Other and constructs a cosmology” (666).

¹⁴⁴ The editors later add that through the study of the food in the festival context, we may see “a performance of a particular vision of the community, of its values, assumptions, world views, and prescriptive behaviors” (Humphrey and Humphrey 1988, 6).

examine the public interactions between ethnic groups and the surrounding communities.¹⁴⁵

Middle Eastern themed food festivals are often the centerpiece of the year at most parishes, excluding the celebration of religious holidays of course. These well-planned, multi-day community celebrations create a space of fellowship and fundraising for the Antiochian community.¹⁴⁶ In areas with historically sizeable Arab and Arab American populations, such as Pittsburgh, PA, Worcester, MA, Toledo, OH, Houston, TX, and the Detroit area, Antiochian Orthodox churches have been holding these annual events since ethnic festivals became popular in America in the 1970s, and often way before. But what may be surprising is that in areas and cities not known for having an ethnic Arab population, Antiochian parishes have routinely held large festivals that successfully draw in large numbers from the surrounding non-Arab communities, such as in Lexington, KY, Indianapolis, IN, Charleston, WV, and Portland, OR. Bicentennial-era multiculturalism's focus on ethnic festivals, combined with the long history of fundraising in U.S. churches, helped to make the food festival a viable fundraising option for Antiochian Orthodox churches.¹⁴⁷ The viability of the festival, and in turn the marketing of an Arab cultural

¹⁴⁵ It is important here for me to clarify that I am not arguing that the Antiochian Orthodox are interacting with some un-marked white public when they hold their festivals. On the contrary, the festivals can draw other ethnic and racial groups. But even here I can not argue that the festivals signify an interaction between only the Arab Christians and a larger non-Arab public, because even other Arab groups, such as Muslims, can certainly be in attendance. In this sense, I see the festivals as a general in-group/out-group interaction. Of course the majority of the festival attendees, other than the church members, would be non-Arab, and much of the advertising reflects this reality, as the previous chapter addressed.

¹⁴⁶ For example, the 1979 food fair at St. George [Pittsburgh, PA] netted the church over \$7000.00, which was over 50% of their net proceeds for the entire year. The 2009 Sahara Fest in Livonia, MI, despite the bad weather and poor economy, grossed \$50,000 for the four day festival.

¹⁴⁷ The majority of the ethnic food festivals at Antiochian parishes, at least for those that were not started recently, were begun or intensified in the bicentennial era. Festivals that have been around longer, typically grew from the dinners that ladies societies started hosting as early as the 1920s and 30s. A search of parish-sponsored websites, church publications, and newspapers in locales with active Antiochian Orthodox parishes, found that at least 10 parishes began hosting yearly festivals during the 1970s or intensified

identity, also brought visibility,¹⁴⁸ as churches seized on these opportunities for unparalleled publicity of their church and their faith, and rare positive publicity for Arabs in general.

The food festivals and their preparation attract local media who often publish or broadcast lengthy cultural features on the churches: their histories and their unique or “exotic” cultural traditions. For example, each year that the small but noticeable Syrian and Lebanese Christian community of Altoona, PA, planned their annual food fair, the local newspaper ran features with lead lines like “Something of the unusual this month will be offered to the community in the form of an Arabic Hafli.”¹⁴⁹ The articles typically had pictures of the food being served, recipes, or a group photo of the ladies society, who were in charge of staging the *hafli*. The articles used “exotic” and “delights” and “different” to describe Arab communities and their festival. Outside of coverage about wars in the Middle East and their impact on the Arab communities here, the food festivals were one of the only ways these Arab Christian communities could draw attention. And they knew this.¹⁵⁰ They learned how to advertise their festivals effectively, often

existing ones (such as expanding to a second or third day). Considering that in 1977, there were only 106 parishes in the archdiocese, that percentage is significant.

¹⁴⁸ I take my usage of the terms viability and visibility from Anita Mannur (2007), who writes that: “For diasporic communities, spatially and temporally distanced from the geographic parameters of the nation-state, a collective sense of nationhood, an affective longing for the home, and a fear of ‘losing’ tradition morphs into a desire to retain viability and visibility through a systematic attempt to ossify the fragments and shards of cultural practices deemed ‘authentic’” (27).

¹⁴⁹ “Orthodox Church Plans ‘Arabic Halfi’ Night,” *Blair Press (Altoona, PA)*, May 3, 1972.

¹⁵⁰ Many festival organizers tout the opportunity for the surrounding communities to have a positive image of Arabs and the Middle East by coming to the festival. Especially during times of heightened tension in the Middle East, when news coverage is saturated with unflattering portrayals of Arabs, the festivals are seen by Antiochians as a important intervention. For example, following the 1998 bombing of the USS Cole in Yemen, the organizers of the “Middle Eastern Festival” at St. Luke’s in Orinda, CA, said “‘In any group, there is a thorn...Not everyone in the Middle East is a terrorist’” (Matthew S. Bajko, “Mideasterners Share Their Fun: and Food: At Weekend Fest,” *Martinez (CA) Record*, September 17, 1998). At the end of the intense fighting of the Lebanese Civil War in 1990, the 22nd annual “Mideastern Festival” in Atlanta, hosted by St. Elias Antiochian parish, one of the food booth operators was quoted as saying, “‘We are trying to make the other face of Lebanon visible—the real one. A country that is a mixture of various peoples and nations, a country that is a major contributor to civilization’” (Carlos A. Campos, “City’s

sensationalizing their Arab heritage in ways that can only be described as self-Orientalizing.

Scholars also argue that each ethnic groups in the U.S. “feels it must assert its identity by having a distinctive cuisine” (Anderson 2005, 200-01). So the construction and marketing of a distinct ethnic cuisine is one part of Antiochians’ claim to cultural authenticity that “draws upon liberal U.S. multicultural logics for articulating cultural identity [...] required by middle-class assimilation and acceptability” (Naber, forthcoming). Although Antiochian parishes, as well as other “ethnic” churches, have been holding food festivals since the early twentieth century, it was the rise of liberal multiculturalism, particularly the planning and production of the Bicentennial, that solidified the food festival as the site for encountering the ‘other’ and the commodification of cultural identity.

Bicentennial-era Multiculturalism and the Festival

As I argued in the introduction to this dissertation, my use of the term Bicentennial-era multiculturalism focuses on the performance and consumption of ethnicity that was intensified during the 1970s. My conception of Bicentennial-era multiculturalism can be summed up using the official theme for the celebration of the American “present” during the Bicentennial, “Festival USA.” “Festival USA” sought to

Arabs Celebrate Peace,” *The Atlanta Journal* and *The Atlanta Constitution*, November 15, 1990). In 2006, during the Israeli bombardment of Lebanon and the associated unflattering portrayal of the Lebanese by American media, Sawsan Awwad, one of the festival organizers of the large “Middle Eastern Festival” at a parish in Syracuse, NY, was quoted in the local newspaper: “‘Especially with what’s going on over there today,’ she said. ‘What’s on TV is not very flattering to Middle Easterners.’” The article continues, “It’s important, Awwad said, for non-Arabic people to know there is a culture in the Middle East, that people in many areas love their neighbors as much as they love themselves” (Dick Clarke, “Homage to Heritage—Middle Eastern Festival as much about Culture as it is about Food,” *The Post-Standard [Syracuse, NY]*, July 20, 2006).

balance the wavering faith in the national community with the “the continuing preoccupation with a communal, racial, and ethnic past” (Bodnar 1992, 244). Nearly sixty-six thousand events took place nationally in conjunction with the Bicentennial, most with a local focus and many with an ethnic flavor, as a way of demonstrating how ethnic America was and how American it was to be ethnic (Bodnar 1992, 238).¹⁵¹ Holding a festival was a popular way for ethnic groups to demonstrate their “contributions” to the nation, which is how historian John Bodnar (1992) critiqued the functions of the Bicentennial celebrations, and participate in the commodification of ethnic identity required for acceptance within liberal multiculturalism.

The relevance of studying festivals and ethnic food as outgrowths of Bicentennial-era multiculturalism is not only founded on the fact that the official American Revolution Bicentennial Administration (ARBA) encouraged local ethnic, religious, and community festivals as a way to celebrate America’s past, present, and future, but that critiques of multiculturalism have often centered festivals as their unit of analysis because of their function as simultaneously community celebrations and *American* ethnic spaces.¹⁵² Also, the fact that foodways scholars and historians of the 1970s highlight the decade as one where the traffic in ethnic foods exploded, and much of

¹⁵¹ There are two items worth mentioning in the *Final Report* with regards to Arab Americans. First, Middle Eastern groups caucused with other minority groups as part of the Bicentennial Ethnic/Racial Coalition, in order to promote “broader participation” in the celebration (ARBA 197). In conjunction with the Smithsonian’s “Old Ways in the New World” festival, “St. George Orthodox Church served as the focal point for community activities when Lebanese folk performers traveled to El Paso, Texas” (229).

¹⁵² Such as those offered by Lisa Lowe (1996), Sundryha Shukla (2003), and earlier by Penny Van Esterick (1982).

this was in the festival context, makes Antiochian church-sponsored festivals a poignant entry point.¹⁵³

This is especially relevant in the case of Arab American festivals, given the intense scrutiny that Arabs and Arab Americans were under in 1970s U.S. media, popular culture, and political discourses.¹⁵⁴ With the ongoing conflicts on ancestral lands in Palestine and with the outbreak of the bloody Lebanese Civil War in 1975-76, Arab Americans seemed to have little to celebrate, but still fully participated in the Bicentennial festivities. In the “twin cities” of Fall River and New Bedford, MA, both with large Arab and Lebanese Christian populations, there was a series of events tied to the Bicentennial that were sponsored by the Lebanon-American Society and its Ladies Auxillary.¹⁵⁵ This Lebanese Cultural Festival featured religious services, folk dancing, recitation of poetry, art and photography exhibits, and, of course, food. The mayor of Fall River, MA, even declared October 2-9 “Lebanese Culture Week.” Loretta George, president of the Ladies Auxillary, stated the purpose of the festival:

As we in America celebrate our bicentennial, Lebanon bleeds and her sons sacrifice their lives for its survival. Although we of Lebanese descent are heavy-hearted because the homeland of our fathers is experiencing the tragedies of being torn apart by civil and political war, we feel compelled by a spirit of determination to retain our rich culture, proud heritage, and identity, and thereby project to America, the contributions made to its greatness by our people. (Younis 1976, 8).

¹⁵³ See Schulman (2002) for the larger 1970s context. For arguments about the salience of ethnic foods in the consumption habits of Americans in the 1970s, see Gabaccia (1998); Shukla (2003); Van Esterik (1982), and Halter (2000), among others.

¹⁵⁴ Numerous scholars of the 1970s, a young but growing subfield, list several developments in the Middle East as important markers of this time period, among them the oil embargo of 1973, the Arab/Israeli Wars, and the Iranian Revolution and hostage crisis. See Schulman (2002) and Bailey and Farber (2004).

¹⁵⁵ Although this festival was largely orchestrated by the Maronite and Melkite community, it is almost identical in structure and function to the numerous Antiochian-sponsored festivals like it. See Younis (1976) for more information on this Lebanese Culture Festival.

It is clear from this quote that the festival, particularly in conjunction with the nation's bicentennial celebration, was an important space for an Arab American cultural identity to be constructed. The focus on the contributions that Arabs have made to the nation's greatness in this instance echoes the same assertions that the parishioners of St. George Antiochian Orthodox Church made during their 1983 "A Thousand and One Delights" festival, which I introduced in the previous chapter.

A full-page advertisement in the 1983 St. George (Pittsburgh) booklet makes a cultural and political argument about how the Arab Christians, particularly the Syrian and Lebanese ones, are descendents of Baalbek "the oldest and greatest religious center of the white man" as well as Byblos where "the earliest alphabetical writing was found." This ad demonstrates that part of an Arab Christian ethnic identity construction is detailing the contributions that their ancestors have made to Western civilization. More specifically, the ad argues that the United States' constitution "was copied" from the government of the "Phoenician city" of Carthage.¹⁵⁶ This ad, along with the entire booklet, does a tremendous amount of cultural work by positioning Antiochians as members of an ancient and great civilization, heritage, and religion. It also establishes their community as proto-Americans because they claim that their "white" ancestors originally developed what became the United States' system of government.

¹⁵⁶ This claim to a Phoenician heritage has a long history among Lebanese Christians, particularly the Maronites. The "myth" of Phoenicia, as some scholars refer to it was constructed in order to racially and culturally separate the Lebanese Christians from their fellow Muslim countrymen as well as Arabs in general. See Deeb (2008). The deployment of the claim to Phoenician heritage has its roots in European colonialism and intervention in the Middle East that shored up the Maronite Catholics of Lebanon into political power. The Phoenician myth is often used in the American context by Arab Christians as a way to deflect any anticipated anti-Arab racism or discrimination. Although my dissertation is concerned mostly with Lebanese Orthodox and not Lebanese Maronite Catholics, there are some Lebanese Orthodox who do not identify as Arab. See Naber, Stiffler, Tayyen, and Said (2009) for a much fuller ethnographic discussion of the differentiated use of "Arab" among Maronite Catholics and Antiochian Orthodox in the U.S.

Because “A Thousand and One Delights” was a food festival, food is the dominant discourse in the souvenir program book. It is evident from the rhetoric and images in the booklet that the congregants of St. George were selling more than just food. They were offering to the general public an authentic and ancient “enchanted evening” full of the genuine Arab hospitality that Antiochian Orthodox always boast of. As the opening page of the booklet proclaims, “A’l Beb Maftooh’—The Door Is Open to Everyone.”¹⁵⁷ Through the serving and celebration of food, Antiochians parishioners showcase what they see as the best parts of their Arab heritage, which by the early 1980s when the booklet was produced, was often maligned in American political discourse and popular culture.¹⁵⁸ Whereas in the political context Antiochian Orthodox had to balance their support for Lebanese or Palestinians by reaffirming their commitment to the U.S., in the multicultural context, the Arab Antiochians were free to play to the expectations of Arab culture as “exotic,” full of delightful sounds and tastes, and hospitable to outsiders. As I showed in the previous chapter, self-Orientalism rhetoric was often deployed in the festival atmosphere, and it is through references to the tales from *Arabian Nights* that Antiochians typically engage in this work of claiming cultural authenticity, and almost always through food, and the parishioners of St. George are no exception.

“The Middle Easterner finds great peace and joy in ‘breaking bread together,’” and “to entertain many together is to honor them all mutually,” proclaims a full-page ad

¹⁵⁷ The production of this booklet and the middle-eastern food festival at St. George is representative of other Antiochian communities across the nation as well as other ethno-religious communities that packaged and sold their ethnicity to an American public hungry for diversity in the age of multiculturalism. From the publishing of ethnic and community cookbooks, to the selling of ethnic “authentic” foods, the church became *the* space for the creation, deployment, and maintenance of a specific Arab Christian cultural Arabness.

¹⁵⁸ See Slade (1981), where she analyzes the results of a 1980 telephone survey to show that Americans have a complicated, though generally negative, viewpoint of Arabs. Of note to my work, and to the context of this festival, 40% of Americans polled perceived Arabs as “anti-Christian” and more than 40% had “low” or “very low” opinions of Palestine and Lebanon.

offered by the “Hazeem Family.” This quote appears underneath a large illustration taken directly from an edition of the *Arabian Nights*. It depicts King Shahrayar and protagonist/storyteller Scheherazade in the midst of storytelling and a great feast. The copy underneath the illustration ends with: “The ‘breaking of bread together’ created an eternal bond of brotherhood which nothing could destroy. ‘Baiti baitak’ (My house is your house) they said it and meant it.” The ad serves as a warm welcome to the surrounding community to come and celebrate in peace and create an “eternal bond” with the ethnically Arab Christians of St. George church.

The welcoming letter, advertisements from parishioners, and accompanying recipes firmly establishes Antiochian Orthodox as American Christians with authentic roots in the Holy Land. By printing the recipes for traditional Middle Eastern dishes like Syrian bread (or Pita bread), *kibbee*, and *koosa* [stuffed squash] the booklet offers the visitors to the church’s food fair, many of whom would be non-Arab, “the ingredients to create [their] own enchanted evening.” This rhetoric of “enchantment” along with the illustrations taken directly from *Nights* editions show how Antiochian Orthodox are marketing their ethnicity through the imagery and rhetoric of the *Arabian Nights*, which is arguably the most recognizable reference point for Arab and Middle Eastern culture that the general non-Arab public (and as this chapter will argue, the Arab Americans themselves) would have. Not only does the food festival and its marketing through this booklet draw on the *Arabian Nights* for authentication, but the advertisements for the locally-owned restaurants and Middle Eastern markets play up the ancient Arabian imagery, with names like the “Arabian Nights Cocktail Lounge” and “Ali-Baba Restaurant” (Figure 4-1).

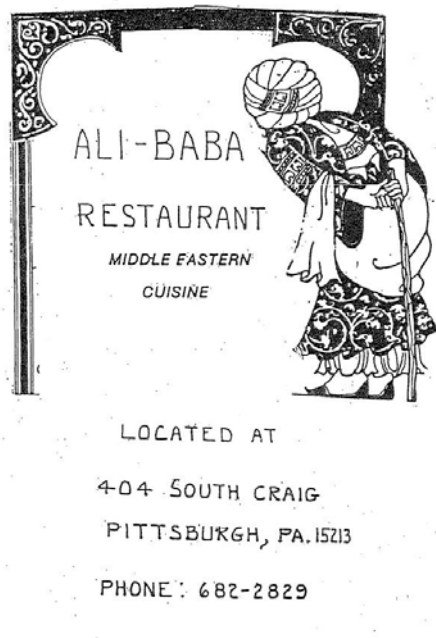


Figure 4-1 “Ali-Baba Restaurant” advertisement. From the 1983 St. George of Pittsburgh food fair booklet.

The Antiochians used food and the food festival, drawing on the legacy of the *Arabian Nights*, which I have shown to be the “authenticated” record of an Arab past, to showcase both their ancient culture and their contributions to the United States as an American ethnic community. In fact, the publication of this book of recipes and cultural artifacts (illustrations and proverbial quotes) through the space of the church was, by the 1980s, an “indisputably American” practice (Gabbacia 1998, 181) and Americans would have been accustomed to ethnic difference being played out through a religious affiliation.¹⁵⁹ The space of the church becomes naturalized in the U.S. multicultural

¹⁵⁹ This was especially true in the context of “the church.” Because their cultural celebration was tied to their religious affiliation, that of an ancient Christianity, their difference was “mediated” through the space of the church (Warner and Witner 1998, 16). Scholars have long pinpointed religion as “social category with the clearest meaning and acceptance” in the U.S. (Williams qtd. in Warner and Witner 1998, 16). In the context of ethnic marketing, the church in the U.S. had also come to serve as a main site of community and ethnic marketing and fundraising, with community potlucks, festivals, bazaars, and the publication of ethnic cookbooks (Gabbacia 1998, 188-89). It was a very American idea for the Antiochians to associate their ethnicity with, and base it in, their religious space.

context a main site of the commodification of ethnicity.¹⁶⁰ Church food festivals, bazaars, and ladies society dinners are results of the U.S. context that positioned places of worship as fund-raising centers, and have also become accepted places for the sale and consumption of ethnic identity.¹⁶¹

The Festival as a Playful Space

In one series of announcements for the 1979 “Feast from the East,” which appeared in the weekly bulletin for St. George Antiochian Orthodox Church in Pittsburgh, PA, we can follow “Cleopatra the Classy Camel,” the interlocutor for the preparations for the “Feast from the East,” as she observes the handsome “A-rab” men preparing for the food festival, watching Bill Salem wildly wield his knife as he hacks into the carcass of a lamb to make kabob (Figure 4-2).¹⁶² Cleo then retires to her “oasis” and offers a seemingly sexualized invitation for some of the “A-rab” men to “come up and see [her] sometime.” In another advertisement for the same festival we see a mysterious and generic-looking Arab man, as if right out of a story from *Arabian Nights*. The announcement reads, “We are cleaning up the flying carpet getting ready for takeoff,” in reference to the upcoming food fair (Figure 4-3). These two advertisements manage to cover the entire gamut of exoticized stereotypical images and tropes about Arabs and other peoples from the Middle East that were popular in the 1970s: Flying carpets, deserts, sword- and knife-wielding crazed men, camels, and highly sexualized women. Even the exaggerated pronunciation of “A-rab” [Ayrab] is included. These ads

¹⁶⁰ Donna Gabbacia (1998) points out that church-sponsored food festivals have been a major part of immigrant communities since before World War II. After the 1930s, what began as church pot-lucks and “expressions of community solidarity” “had become fundraisers for enclave communities with eager multi-ethnic customers” (188).

¹⁶¹ See Gabbacia (1998).

¹⁶² From the collection, Syrian Orthodox Church, Pittsburgh, Pa., ais198001, Archives Service Center, University of Pittsburgh. Records of St. George Orthodox Church.

play with and respond to the imagery of Arabs and the Middle East readily available in the popular culture and media of the 1970s. These ads and many like them would have appeared on flyers posted throughout the local community, newspaper advertisements, and in weekly church bulletins alongside that week's prayers, hymns, and Gospel readings.¹⁶³



Figure 4-2 “Cleo the Camel.” From the weekly bulletin of St. George of Pittsburgh. 1979. Records of St. George (Syrian) Orthodox Church, Pittsburgh, Pa., ais198001, Archives Service Center, University of Pittsburgh.

Though these “Feast from the East” examples and the “A Thousand and One Delights” booklet that I analyzed earlier come from the same parish, they are certainly not isolated cultural artifacts. Parishes across the U.S. have been holding food fairs as fundraisers for nearly a century. Church-sponsored *mahrajans* [festivals] or *hafllis* [parties] have been a yearly or semi-yearly tradition for most Antiochian parishes.¹⁶⁴ For

¹⁶³ The presence of these images and advertisements in church bulletins not only ties cultural identity to the space of the church, but legitimizes it.

¹⁶⁴ I do not have space in this dissertation to talk about the larger culture of *mahrajans* that developed in Arab American communities, both Muslim and Christian, as early as the 1920s. There have been large *mahrajans* in New York and Detroit that have taken place on church grounds, at mosques, and on streets in

example, Antiochian Orthodox churches in Houston and Oklahoma City were holding Syrian and Lebanese dinners and bake sales as early as the 1930s, in order to raise money (Ham 1997; McGuire 1972). I want to set the larger context of how ubiquitous these ethnic food festivals have been in the Antiochian Orthodox archdiocese for more than seventy years and how the playful environment of the food festival allowed for the frequent deployment of self-Orientalist imagery and rhetoric as part of a claim to authenticity.

The late 1970s and the early 1980s was a ripe time in the archdiocese for the establishment or intensification of Arab-themed food festivals, which mirrored the growth of ethnic food festivals in this post-bicentennial period across the U.S. The small Antiochian parish in Danbury, CT, caught this “Festival Fever,” as the parish council put it, and staged their first “Mid-Eastern Festival” in 1981 after “the idea had been cropping up at parish council meetings for the [previous] three years” (Matthews 1982). Their festival was so successful, both in terms of money raised and “fellowship and love,” that the 1982 festival was expanded to a three day affair.

Many of the festivals in the post-bicentennial era employed self-Orientalist rhetoric, mostly as a way of differentiating the Arab ethnic festivals from the plethora of other festivals (ethnic and otherwise) that had begun popping up across the country. In 1982, the church in Houston, TX, began their “Mediterranean Festival,” which continued to at least 2010. As the organizers of the festival recall about the preparations, “The season was summer, a time when Houston, Texas is besieged by festivals. So our competition was keen” (Tannous 1983, 27). How did the Antiochian parish differentiate

municipalities. The Antiochian parishes both influenced and learned from this culture. See Rashid 2002 for the importance of *haflis* and *mahrajans* to the early Arab immigrant communities in New York.



Figure 4-3 “Flying carpet” announcement. From the weekly bulletin of St. George of Pittsburgh. 1979. Records of St. George (Syrian) Orthodox Church, Pittsburgh, Pa., ais198001, Archives Service Center, University of Pittsburgh.

themselves from all of the other festivals? Well, at the Mediterranean Festival “Habibi the Camel,” a “two-humped plushy wonder” (or a person in a camel costume) “made regular sorties...delighting the children, nuzzling adults, and mugging cameras” (Tannous 1983, 28). Of all of the festivals in Houston that summer, I’ll bet the one at St. George had the market on people dressed as camels, as well as *kibbee* and *falafel*, cornered.

During the same time period, St. George church in Jacksonville, FL, teamed up with the local Ramallah-American Club to host their annual “Arabic Festival,” which began in 1980. The second year of the festival was a huge success, with local media

broadcasting from the three day event held in the Jacksonville Civic Auditorium. Besides the financial success of the event, the organizers were proud that community members, “by touring our booths and seeing our religious and cultural aspects of the Middle East, were able to see Arabs as human and religious people and not as ‘terrorists’ as we have so often been portrayed by the news media” (Farah 1982, 24–25). As part of the festivities, the priest offered a slide show on the “Holy Land,” there were booths that sold cultural items such as “hand carved camel sets of olive wood...mother of pearl scenes of the Last Supper...Arabic coffee sets...and many other Arabic items,” and of course the food: “Rows of delicious Arabic food enticed all to try the famous kibbee, shish-kabob, rice hashweh, tabooli, grape leaves, falafel, and humos [sic].” All of this seemed like standard presentations at an Antiochian ethnic food festival, especially the meshing of religion and culture. However, there were two curious events that deserve a closer reading, at least in the context of self-Orientalism.

A photo that accompanies the write-up on the festival, which appeared in the archdiocese’s official monthly publication *The Word*, depicts a *dabkeh* troupe comprised of youth from both the church and the Ramallah Club performing in “traditional” dress (although the women’s dresses appear more 1980s-inspired). In the background is a large, movie-screen sized banner (most likely a painting) of a *kuffiyeh*-clad man riding a camel. Given the festival’s goal of dispelling stereotypes, the prominent image of this camel-riding man seems striking. As much as the painting may represent some sort of historical reality (that Arab men in the Middle East do wear *kuffiyehs* and can ride camels), given the stereotypes of Arabs, especially in the 1970s and 80s, as backwards, “camel jockeys,” and a people outside of modernity, the choice to make an image of a traditionally-dressed

man on camelback is an interesting one, but certainly fits the Antiochian archdiocese's engagement with self-Orientalism. The camel painting can be read as a representational practice that attempts to intervene in the plethora of negative association of Arabs and camels, and an attempt for Arab Christians to represent themselves on their own terms. So, too, can the second curious item.

Given the long history of people in the U.S. "playing Eastern" or "playing Arab" (Nance 2009), the presence of a "picture booth" at this festival "where people dressed in Arabic costume and had their picture made" is fascinating (Farah 1982, 25). The booth, which was "very popular" according to the write-up, sanctioned festival goers, both Arab and non-Arab, to play Arab. If, according to organizers, the presence of religious items and "information about Orthodoxy, helped clear that misconception that all Arabs are Moslem [sic.]," the presence of self-Orientalist representations at the festival can be read as an opportunity to complicate the typically one-dimension portrayal of Arabs in the media as terrorists, backwards, and/or Muslim. At this Arabic Festival, the Arabs were Christians and "modern" enough to recognize that looking like a Hollywood Arab required a code switch and a costume change. And this, in essence, is the function of self-Orientalism. It is a tacit understanding of Arab and Arab American positionality vis-à-vis U.S. multiculturalism and Orientalist discourses, and an attempt to engage with that positionality on one's own terms and in a familiar space, that of the church. The ethnic festival was the perfect place to enact this representational practice because it is a public, playful space sanctioned by bicentennial-era multiculturalism as a "a limited context where awareness and expression of ethnic identity is approved, a special time and place...set aside where ethnic differences are stressed" (1982, 209).

Even in the post-9/11 era, the ethnic food festivals have not stopped, with many churches establishing festivals in the past few years. I want to present the broad range of self-representations that Antiochian parishes have produced recently (as in post-9/11) to show the continuity of the self-Orientalist rhetoric, even as the parishioners in the archdiocese (due to the rate of conversion to Orthodoxy) were increasingly less and less Arab born or even of Arab heritage. Festival names such as “Feast from the East,” camel rides, belly dancers, a “bazaar” of goods, and of course ethnic foods and music persist at Antiochian Orthodox festivals in the years following September 11, 2001. In addition, the rhetoric and imagery used to advertise these festivals is very similar to the festivals in the 1970s and 1980s that I have discussed.

The poster for the 2009 annual “Feast in the Middle East” festival at St. George in El Paso, TX, features text printed in a stereotypical Oriental-style font that could have been used for the opening titles to a bad 1940s-era Hollywood movie. The main image on the poster is a drawing of the church building in the middle of a dune-swept desert. The festival boasted a live Arabic band, “authentic” Middle Eastern food, and belly dancers, all very typical at Antiochian festivals.¹⁶⁵ This 2009 festival was the 43rd annual incarnation for the El Paso congregation, showing that neither 9/11, nor any of the other periods of heightened anti-Arab racism in the U.S. (e.g. 1973, 1991) deterred them from celebrating their Arab and Arab American heritage.

The organizers of the 2009 three-day “Middle Eastern Festival” in West Saint Paul, MN, according to their website, invited the surrounding community to celebrate the 96th anniversary of their parish: “We greet you with the phrase: *Ahlan wa Sahlan* which

¹⁶⁵ St. George Antiochian Orthodox Church, El Paso, TX, flyer for May Festival and Dinner, <http://www.stgeorge-elpaso.org/mayfestivaldinner-print.html> (accessed March 15, 2010).

means *you're like family*, so take it easy.”¹⁶⁶ The phrasing of this is similar to the greeting at the front of the program book for the 1983 “Thousand and One Delights” festival in Pittsburgh. In addition to the ethnic foods, festival goers could enjoy a drink from the “Tavern of Tripoli,” buy trinkets in the “traditional souk” [marketplace], join in on a *dabkeh*, or have their picture taken while riding a camel. This last option, the camel ride, is a staple at many Antiochian-hosted festivals around the country. I have personally seen camel rides offered at festivals in Livonia, MI, and Sylvania, OH.



Figure 4-4 Flyer for St. Mary’s (Johnstown, PA) “Feast Day Celebration,” 2006. And flyer from “St. Michael’s [Greensburg, PA] Feast,” 2006. Flyers courtesy of Helene Jaber Stiffler.

Two final examples are from flyers for food festivals at two churches in western Pennsylvania in 2006 (Figure 4-4). Both advertisements employ what I would term “Bedouin chic,” referring to the use of anachronistic Bedouin-style sheik figures as mascots. The images are cartoonish (both literally and in their presentation of an admittedly imagined and imaginative Arab ethnic identity) even in a self-Orientalist

¹⁶⁶ St. George Antiochian Orthodox Church, West St. Paul, MN, The 2009 Middle Eastern Festival, http://www.saintgeorge-church.org/2009_festival.php (accessed May 10, 2010).

context. The drawing of the Bedouin-looking man roasting a live sheep on a spit, wool and all, is laughable but, I would argue, does successfully conjure up Jack Shaheen's "Arabland" (2001) and Robert Irwin's "oriental knick knacks" (2004). Though the congregations that created these images are historically Lebanese, there is nothing inherently Lebanese about these images. There is a tremendous amount of play between popular stereotypes and images of Arabs in the media, the understanding of what it means to be Arab for the Arab Christians, and the use of the images as simultaneously symbols of a hyphenated ethnicity and advertisements for the sale of traditional Arab food.

The only difference, then, between the festivals of previous decades and the ones hosted after 9/11 is the changing demographics of the parishes. For example, in the 2000s at St. George in Pittsburgh, PA, according to an article written by one of its parishioners, "Burnett, Humphrey, Hogg, and Ferguson worship side-by-side with Khalil, Nassar, Esper, and Khorey" and "[k]ibbee is served with German potato salad at Church dinners" ("Bishop Thomas Leads Cathedral" 2008).¹⁶⁷ The Pittsburgh congregation is representative of the majority of parishes in the archdiocese. Founded in the first decades of the twentieth century by Arab immigrants, St. George of Pittsburgh, like many of the older parishes, have slowly turned less Arab and more Arab American as large-scale immigration from the Middle East halted to all but a few cities in the U.S. Further, because of out marriage, congregations that were once completely Arab in the 1950s and 1960s, are now half or less-than-half ethnic Arab. And these parishes, particularly ones in small towns away from metropolitan areas that have received continued immigration

¹⁶⁷ When talking about how the parish used to be, the article remembers the early Syrian, Lebanese, and Palestinian members who "were great cooks and they hosted the public for food festivals, picnics, and hufliis" ("Bishop Thomas Leads Cathedral" 2008).

from the Middle East (like Detroit) have *haflis* and festivals that are run by third and fourth generation Lebanese- and Syrian-Americans, the majority of whom don't speak Arabic and have never been to the Middle East. The ethnic identity construction in these parishes relies almost wholly on the self-Orientalist rhetoric and images that have circulated within the archdiocese for generations. At these parishes, the yearly festivals may be the only expression of Arabness for the church members, making these church-sponsored ethnic festivals, and the space of the church more broadly, the main site where Arabness was in play, an issue I take up in the following chapter.

This changing composition of the archdiocese has impacted the way that individual parishes represent themselves to their surrounding communities. Though most parishes still hold festivals with Middle Eastern or Arab themes in the post-9/11 era, about half of the Antiochian Orthodox parishes that hold annual ethnic food festivals have "International Festivals" or "Mediterranean Festivals," or the generic "Heritage Festivals." This is not because they are retreating from an Arab identity in the face of anti-Arab discrimination, but because the reality is that their congregations include large numbers of Greek, Ukranian, and Russian Orthodox members, as well as converts from Roman Catholicism and Protestant sects. As the parishioners in Pittsburgh claim, "the Middle Eastern people at St. George, while retaining their heritage, have reached out and embraced America" ("Bishop Thomas Leads Cathedral" 2008). When Arabness is presented, even in the context of an international festival as opposed to a Middle Eastern one, the presentation is still very similar to mostly Arab parishes of decades past, due to the historical memory of the Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese.

Theorizing the Festival

Most scholars view “the festival” as “cut off in time and space” from social realities (Van Esterik 1982, 209). If the term “realities” is too fraught, then festival time is different from the typified everyday experiences of both the producers of the festival and its attendees. Festivals are “time out of time” and are suspended, or “autonomous,” from the passage of days and hours and are instead “divided internally by what happens within it from its beginning to its end” (Falassi 1987, 4).¹⁶⁸ Within this festival time out of time, the “modalities of normal daily life” are also altered: “people do something they normally do not; they abstain from something they normally do; they carry to the extreme behaviors that are usually regulated by measure; they invert patterns of daily social life” (Falassi 1987, 3). For example, in the ethnic food festival context, festival goers may try new foods and hear new music; festival workers may skip their everyday job to volunteer; ethnic identity is played up by wearing clothing with slogans like “Kiss me I’m Italian,” or by waving large German flags; and spontaneous ethnic dancing may occur in which visitors are encouraged to be part of the ethnic community. All of these elements of the festival are what allows them to be such playful spaces. The festival, according to Roger Abrahams, is a “licensed play environment” (1980, 120),¹⁶⁹ and as far as its role in the construction and maintenance of a cultural Arabness within the space of the church, it is *the* site where Arabness is in play. In the U.S. multicultural context, this

¹⁶⁸ For example, the schedule of events for the festival becomes more important than what day or time of the day it is.

¹⁶⁹ Abraham links festival with play: “the creation of a licensed play environment seems to invite the entire range of playful activities. Thus, in a festival, one often finds games and performance as part of the festivities” (1980, 120). I take performance here to mean dance as well as playing a role. I also build on Abraham’s conception of the relationship between festival, play, and community identity. I take his statements that “festivals embellish the edges and margins of the community under the closely monitored conduct of play” and that festivals “are ultimately community affairs” (Abrahams 1987, 178, 181) and add to it the structuring context of multiculturalism, to form the basis for how I see the church-sponsored ethnic food festival as *the* cultural site where Arabness is in play.

playful festival space is where the community, in a very public way, establishes who it is and invites visitors to partake (meaning both to be a part of and literally to eat) the construction of their cultural identity.

An ethnic festival, then, is supposed to be a space when an ethnic identity is not only presented, but stressed and, of course, sold, and where outsiders are encouraged to be part of the community. The ethnic festival in the multicultural context is where both community members and visitors pretend that “[c]onstraints of the everyday world are denied, and inter-ethnic tensions, discrimination and exploitation cease to exist” (Van Esterick 1982, 225). The festival is where everyone “plays nice.”

Folklore and anthropological scholars view the festival as a space where “all the basic behavioral modalities of daily social life,” such as food, dance, and music, are “modified” and “stylized,” allowing these basic modalities, especially food, to “take on an especially meaningful symbolic character” (Felassi 1987, 3).¹⁷⁰ It’s not that social roles or categories are inverted, as Bakhtin’s discussion of the carnival may suggest,¹⁷¹ but that they are stylized or enhanced. What is this “stylized” modification? In the Antiochian case, it occurs with the movement of private social items into the public realm. For instance, the consumption of pita bread for Arab American Christians is a routine event in homes or at church luncheons and gatherings. At the public festival, the pita bread becomes a marker of Arabness. It can be referred to as pita bread, Syrian bread, or, as it was labeled at one Antiochian festival, “Aladdin’s Arabic bread.”¹⁷² At the festival, a mundane object such as bread, becomes something Arab American or

¹⁷⁰ Abrahams also describes the festival space as “stylized.”

¹⁷¹ I am referring to select essays in Bakhtin’s *Rabelais and His World* (1993). Bakhtin is also less helpful to me because I am studying the festival space within a specific context, the structuring role that bicentennial multiculturalism has played and continues to play.

¹⁷² “Syrian Church Society Plans for Bake Sale,” *Altoona (PA) Mirror*, February 6, 1971.

something ethnic. Especially in the 1970s, before pita bread was widely available in grocery stores as it is now, the festival might have been the only chance for the public to eat Aladdin's Arabic bread. And of course, as my previous chapter has shown, Antiochian churches played this exoticism up. Certainly Arab American Christians, as my ethnography below will show, knew they were on display to the larger public (the Americans or "white people," as festival planners at St. Mary's in Livonia referred to them). And as Andrew Shryock (2004b) and Dean MacCannell (1976) have theorized, this understanding of being on display leads to back stage negotiations and a "staged authenticity," one in which the idea of presenting one's community to a larger public is the whole point.¹⁷³ Recalling the previous chapter's use of "authenticated," the festival is a public space through which to deploy the authenticated Arabness that the Antiochians have constructed in relation to U.S. popular culture representations of Arabs and their own understanding of their cultural heritage.

But the play that the festival space enables and encourages is much more than just allowing Antiochian Orthodox to be creative with the naming and marketing of foods; it

¹⁷³ I take the term "staged authenticity" from Dean MacCannell's oft-cited work on tourism (1976). What is important here, besides a discussion of the terms "back region" or "staged authenticity" (MacCannell) or Shryock's (2004b) use of the "stage magic" of "culture work," is that all of these analysis are predicated on the fact that there is a larger public that the community is engaging in. The entire point of the festival is that there will be tourists or visitors, or non-community members there. It is a self-conscious construction. So how does this fit into the idea of festivals being a playful space? If I follow MacCannell, the festival can be a "stage set," or a "touristic space" (1976, 100). I don't think it wholly coincidental that the use of the term "stage set" makes one think of the performance of a play. He says that these stage sets are "unique among social spaces" because "the only reason that need be given for visiting them is to see them," and that they are physically proximal to serious social activity, or serious activity is imitated in them," and "they are open, at least during specified times, to visitation from outsiders" (1976, 100). This describes the festival setting perfectly, because the play that occurs inside of it is set aside as a "time out of time" but is also *real*, in the sense that within multiculturalism, the play within the festival space has consequences. As Abrahams writes, the festival space is stylized behavior, not unreal. Shryock also discusses the problems of negotiating the "reality" of culture work, or staged authenticity, especially in a media-literate world (2004b, 285-86). Shryock, like MacCannell, assumes that the visitor as well as the ethnic producers are aware of the staged nature of the representations, but stress that to see them as fake is to miss the entire point of their production.

is also a space for the majority of the Arab American Christians to *be* Arab or to be *more* Arab. As Andrew Shryock writes about the Arab-themed festivals in Dearborn, MI, they can be about “reclamation ethnicity... a kind of public, expressive culture, a social construction, yet one rooted in the ‘biological fact’ of shared blood” (2004b, 298). I extend this to mean that the play that Antiochian Orthodox engage in at the festival is as much about presenting and representing Arab as it is about being Arab. At the typical Antiochian festival, there are musical performances with traditional Arab vocals and instruments, like the *oud* and the *derbekke*. There will certainly be numerous *dabkeh* dances, many of them spontaneous. Arabic or Turkish coffee may be served. Hookah, or *argileh*, may be available. There may also be camel rides. None of these items are anything out of the ordinary in the broadly-defined Arab region of the world (though camels and camel-riding are certainly not the norm in some areas of Levant where the majority of Antiochians trace their roots). But for many Arab American Christians, especially the third or fourth generation church members, the festival may be their only exposure, or at least the most intensive exposure, to Arab food, music, and recreational activities in the entire year. Even for those Antiochians who were born in the Middle East or whose parents were, which makes up the majority of the members of St. Mary, the festival may be the only place where they perform their Arab ethnic identity in such a public manner. As Van Esterik states, the festival “represents not ethnic realities in the community but a collective ethnic fantasy” (209).¹⁷⁴ The festival may be a “stylized” modification of the everyday social world, but it is also most certainly an

¹⁷⁴ As I showed in the previous chapter, through the examples of how Antiochians tended to envision their own heritage in part through popular culture representations of Arabs, the “ethnic fantasy” that is displayed at the festival is a product of a trans-ethnic imaginary and the structuring role that multiculturalism establishes for the commodification of ethnic identity.

intensification.¹⁷⁵ The intensified Arabness at the festival is predicated on the fact that the festival is first, a public event and second, is the perfect space for the enactment of multiculturalism's marketing of diversity which can legitimize the cultural citizenship of the ethnic Antiochian Orthodox.¹⁷⁶ As I showed in the previous chapter, the more the Arabness plays to the public's expectations of what Arabness is, the more successful the festival can be.

A Publicly Traded Commodity

Foodways scholar Donna Gabaccia (1998) makes a great case for the role of food festivals in the lives of American churches. She argues that given the non-profit status of churches under the U.S. separation of church and state, and the fact that churches could not and did not receive direct government support, they were forced to turn to alternative fundraising methods. Gabaccia says this was especially true of those churches, like eastern European Catholic and denominations, that were state churches in their homelands: "For immigrants accustomed to state-sponsored churches, a first step toward religious Americanization was fundraising" usually taken on by "ladies' aid societies" (Gabaccia 1998, 188). This was certainly the case for Antiochian Orthodox churches in the U.S. The American context forced them to make the church the center of life for more than cultural assimilation. The parishioners had to adapt the operations of the church to the U.S. context, which above all meant supporting the church through community-based fundraising. When I argue that the church is where Antiochian Orthodox are most Arab,

¹⁷⁵ Abrahams argues that all play is simultaneously an intensification and a restriction (1980, 120). In my case, the play is an intensification of the ethnic role, but it is also a restriction on the types of roles available. I argue that at the Antiochian Orthodox festivals, you are either Arab or you are not. You are either Orthodox or you are not.

¹⁷⁶ Here I am drawing on Aihwa Ong's (1996) conception of cultural citizenship, as well as Arlene Dávila's (2001) discussion of citizen as consumer.

the other side of the coin is that it is also the place where they are the most “American.”¹⁷⁷ Though ethno-religious churches have always undertaken numerous fundraising activities, such as raffles and bazaars,¹⁷⁸ food remains the most popular means to raising money, whether through bake sales, “spaghetti dinners,” or well-planned food festivals. The church building or church grounds, as opposed to, say, an ethnic association’s or cultural group’s headquarters, is a much more inviting space for the general public. Even if the specific Christian denomination is outside of the realm of the usual, as most Eastern Orthodox churches are in the U.S. context, the church is a familiar community meeting place.¹⁷⁹

But to think that the public shows up just because there is a festival at a church, and that there have been festivals at churches for decades, is to miss the fact that ethnic food is being marketed and sold at these festival. As I have noted above, food is a powerful symbol of ethnicity both to members of that ethnic group and the U.S. consumer who, since the 1970s, have craved ethnic foods more and more. At the festival the symbolism of ethnic food is heightened further. The food festival is a public space, constructed as an interaction between an ethnic group, their co-ethnics, and the general public. The Lockwoods situate their study of Arab American foodways as a cultural

¹⁷⁷ I argued this in the previous chapter as well, saying that scholars have long pinpointed religion as “social category with the clearest meaning and acceptance” in the U.S. (Williams qtd. in Warner and Witner 1998, 16). In the context of ethnic marketing, the church in the U.S. had also come to serve as a main site of community and ethnic marketing and fundraising, with community potlucks, festivals, bazaars, and the publication of ethnic cookbooks (Gabbacia 1998, 188-89). It was a very American idea for Antiochians to associate their ethnicity with, and base it in, their religious space.

¹⁷⁸ The history of the church bazaar is one that deserves further attention, especially given the Persian/Middle Eastern etymology of the word “bazaar” and its usage by both Arab and non-Arab church groups in the US.

¹⁷⁹ The argument could be made that the mosque or the temple can also serve this same function. The general American public may feel comfortable attending a mosque for the purposes of an ethnic food festival, because it is a public space designed for the consumption of de-politicized ethnicity. But in the context of anti-Arab and anti-Muslim discrimination and racism, the church building, even if it is an Arab church building, is still seen as less threatening, or at least less foreign.

expression that grows out of the ethnic “contact” between non-Arabs and Arabs in the U.S. (515). As Shryock and Abraham (2000) argue, there must be a distinction between discussing an Arab immigrant community and an “American ethnic” one. And, as I understand cultural identity/ethnicity as a “process of contextualization rather than an actual objective state” (L. Long 2004, 24), the food festival provides a very visible and public context for the study of the creations and maintenance of a cultural identity. The Arab-themed festivals, which are typically conducted completely in English and carried out for the purpose of raising funds from the larger surrounding public are, in fact, “American” celebrations.

As Lucy Long argues, at public displays or festivals, food is “treated simultaneously as commodity and symbol” (2004, 9). Whereas Camp (1989) proposes that at an annual church spaghetti dinner, the spaghetti may be the least interesting thing, at an ethnic food festival, the food is not only the main attraction, but symbolizes both the ethnic identity being marketed and the larger cultural exchanges within multiculturalism. The public consumption at the festival becomes a powerful structuring force for the meanings of ethnic food items to both the consumer and within the ethnic group. For example, the types of foods sold at an Antiochian festival may have been selected based on what the Antiochian parishioners expect will sell best and what the consumer may be willing to eat (my chapter on the 2009 Sahara Fest examines this in more detail). Other considerations include the labor and cost in preparing foods or the ability to keep temperature-sensitive foods (like meats) hot or cold during the festival. In turn, the foods

selected to be sold are the foods that the festival attendee will continue to associate with Arabs or Antiochian Orthodox.¹⁸⁰

For example, an active member of St. George Antiochian Orthodox Cathedral in Sylvania, OH, says that the ethnic dinners that the ladies society has held for more than forty years, along with the yearly festivals that the church has hosted since 1976, have set the standard for “Lebanese food” in the area, because they were producing public meals and festivals before many of the Middle Eastern restaurants in the greater Toledo area were even open. He says that “the majority of the city [Toledo] is probably used to our seasoning of food because we have had our festival for so long. It has become a staple of Middle Eastern food.”¹⁸¹ As far as marketing ethnicity, the Antiochian parishes typically become branded as the ethnic Lebanese or Arab or Middle Eastern food suppliers to the community. And even when there are Middle Eastern restaurants, in the smaller cities and towns, they are usually owned by church members. Another long-serving member of St. George and its festivals said that although the members of the church are very proud of their faith and their Eastern Orthodox heritage, the food produced by the church “comes to people’s mind first” in the Toledo area.¹⁸² In other words, the space of the church becomes a site for the production and distribution of a distinct, authentic, Lebanese-style cuisine.

¹⁸⁰ The selection and reception of menu items in an ethnic context is critiqued by Lucy Long in her volume, *Culinary Tourism*. She examines the “negotiation” on both sides of the menu at an ethnic restaurant. The restaurant owners, in staging an authentic experience (see Molz [2004] in *Culinary Tourism* for discussion of “staged authenticity” in the ethnic restaurant), can “promote” certain foods “as a matter of ethnic or regional pride, as a statement of identity, as a demand for public recognition, or as social or cultural capital. They may also be a way to consolidate group belonging, define difference, and demonstrate distinctiveness” (37). According to interviews with the festival organizers at St. George in Sylvania, OH, conducted in 2007 by ethnographer Nathan Crook, the majority Lebanese congregation sees their festivals and dinners as defining the Lebanese style of food in the area.

¹⁸¹ Festival organizer, interviewed by Nathan Crook, 2007.

¹⁸² Festival organizer, interviewed by Nathan Crook, 2007.

But the festival is also about more than food. The choices made by the parishioners in “framing” both their menu and the entire festival presentation, such as the naming of it (Sahara Fest or Arabian Nights Hafli) or the décor (camels, palm trees, Oriental rugs), have ramifications within liberal multiculturalism.¹⁸³

In her discussion of “culinary tourism,” that is, the consumption of different foods (e.g. exotic, ethnic, historical, class-specific) as tourism, Lucy Long writes about the mutual relationship between producers and consumers of difference: “It is about groups using food to ‘sell’ their histories and to construct marketable and publicly attractive identities, and it is about individuals satisfying curiosity” (L. Long 2004, 20). Since foods are not “inherently strange or exotic” but are about the “experience of the individual” (i.e. consumer), “tourism depends on a perception of otherness rather than an objective reality of an item’s relationship to that individual” (L. Long 2004, 24). That perception of otherness is most often achieved through the “framing” of the food in which ethnic restaurants play up their perceived otherness in order to successfully sell food to the general U.S. public. Long writes of Korean restaurants “expecting a non-Korean clientele,” and how they “tended to use more stereotypical Asian décor, such as beaded curtains, dragon motifs, and red napkins” (38). Long sees the framing or presentation of the food as critical a negotiation that the “producers/presenters” of the ethnic food engage in within, I would argue, the confines of multiculturalism’s commodification of identity. It is within this context that “culinary tourism” offers power to ethnic groups, as it “[allows] producers and consumers to elevate food from being a mere sustenance to the realms of art and recreation, and therefore tools for the expression and manipulation of

¹⁸³ See L. Long (2004), for framing as a strategy of negotiating the culinary tourism on the part of the ethnic “producers/presenters” (37).

social power” (45). In the case of Antiochians, they can market their ethnicity and frame their presentation of food against the majority group’s frame of reference for Arabs and the Middle East. As the whole of these images and rhetoric may look like an uncritical self-Orientalism, they actually become a strategic representational practice.

The festival space encourages the construction of a cultural identity, as much as the presentation and eventual consumption of that identity. As I showed in the previous chapter, Antiochian Arabness was constructed with and through U.S. popular culture representations of Arabs and the Middle East. That constructed Arabness was then the basis of public displays of ethnicity, mostly through food and festive contexts. It is, as I have argued, a specific American Arabness. It is the combination of food as symbol and the public display of it that makes the ethnic food festival such a powerful site for community development and deployment. Because of the staged grandeur of the festival as a show of in-group pride and a strategy to raise money, the public display of once-private practices, like food preparation and consumption, can actually “become the community” (Shortridge 2004, 271). The festival reinforces the identity of group members and becomes an exchange: cultural identity as commodity.

But it is also that the cultural identity being deployed is a specific type. In discussing public culture and constructed ethnic displays in the Arab Detroit context, Shryock (2004) speaks to the argument that multiculturalism requires a “thinness” to which an ethnic food festival is perfectly suited. The playful self-Orientalism is this sort of thinness. It is a public construction of identity that occurs in the “mainstream,” and is thus where “homeland culture” can be reduced to a nonthreatening “heritage” or “identity” (Shryock 2004b, 308), because the space is depoliticized within

multiculturalism. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, I have never seen any overt politicized displays at an Antiochian-sponsored festival, even as the parishioners and hierarchs are constantly working on social justice issues in the homeland.¹⁸⁴

The manner in which I conceive of the Arab American Christian production and marketing of their Arabness is multifaceted. First, there is the straightforward economic exchange of their goods and services to the general public. Second, this straight forward economic exchange needs to be contextualized within the framework of the U.S. public's growing hunger for diversity, beginning in the 1970s. This hunger was quite literally for ethnic foods, but also for the broader commodification of ethnicity. Third, this schema of the marketing and consumption of cultural identity, in my case Arabness, was grounded in the contradictions of liberal multiculturalism, which allowed ethnics a space to sell their wares, but only in a power framework that continued to marginalize and other them.

Arab American Christians, in their engagement with the economic exchange of multiculturalism and their marketing of a cultural Arabness, followed this scheme but exploited the contradiction that took away their politicized voice within the consumption sphere by selling their food through the front and their politics out of the side door. The festivals that Antiochian churches produced were about visibility (recognition and worth) and viability (raising money and maintaining a distinct communal identity) and fit logical within the space that bicentennial multiculturalism opened up (Mannur 2007). As one

¹⁸⁴ Also, following the depoliticization of the ethnic festival space within multiculturalism, many large-scale or city-sponsored festivals prohibit political displays, even those closely tied with ethnic identity. For example, at the successful "Tucson Meet Yourself" festival, which began in the 1970s, organizers required that all booths sell food or art and not operate as "informational booths." The reason was to avoid political problems with groups handing out literature. A scholar writing about the festival said organizers were particularly worried about "Israeli, Arab, Armenian and Turkish participants" (Griffith 1988, 229).

festival organizer was quoted as saying, ““There are no politics involved [...] It is for the church.””¹⁸⁵

Far from being critical of the Antiochian parishioners’ commodification of their cultural identity, I aim to detail how they, in essence, have taken advantage of the space opened up for them through their selective participation in multiculturalism. Throughout the planning meetings for the 2009 Sahara Fest, the positionality of Antiochian Orthodox as Arabs and Arab Americans was always a matter for discussion, as in the negotiations through the terrain of multiculturalism (i.e. how best to market to the “Americans” or the “white people”). The chapter that follows is an ethnographic exploration of one such playful and public Antiochian ethnic food festival at a large, suburban church in southeastern Michigan. But first, it is imperative to investigate how the production and marketing of food, which relies heavily on the knowledge and labor of women, plays out in the gendered spaces of the church and multiculturalism.

Antiochian Women: Feeding Orthodoxy

I want to foreground the role of women, especially through the parish “ladies’ societies” or “ladies’ aid societies,” in the food festivals, and hence their importance to parish life. I don’t want to take at face value that in a religious tradition that has limited theological and liturgical roles for women, that the lifeblood of many parishes is the volunteer labor of the female parishioners. I also don’t want to reduce the role of women in the church to the kitchen, because this is not reflective of the reality of how Antiochian parishes operate today, or have operated for the last two or three decades. For instance,

¹⁸⁵ Debra J. Groom, “Fighting Impinges on Fest—Mideast Cultural Celebration Tinged with Trepidation,” *The Post-Standard* (Syracuse, NY), July 21, 2006.

the parish council president at St. Mary's in Livonia, as well as at my home church in Pennsylvania, in 2009 was a woman. Women also head many of the archdiocesan departments, including the heritage museum and archives. But I want to emphasize, for this discussion on food and cultural identity, the crucial role that Antiochian women have played in establishing the church as a fundraising enterprise and a space for the maintenance and transmission of cultural identity through the production of food.¹⁸⁶ As Antiochian churches make claims to authenticity within U.S. multiculturalism in an attempt to raise funds from the sale of food and other cultural goods, women's labor, which is mainly responsible for the production of these goods, becomes crucial. Histories of Antiochian parishes typically have a line like, "The role of woman was nowhere more visible than in church-sponsored fund raising drives which were based on their culinary skills" (McGuire 1974, 32). Following Moallem (1993), I argue that women's labor on these goods should be considered work, as the labor is vital to the life of the Church in the U.S., even as that work is conducted voluntarily as part of one's service to their faith.

There exists a contradiction where the role of women is both liberating but also stuck within patriarchal nationalist discourses, where participation in multiculturalism

¹⁸⁶ Mino Moallem (1993) discusses gender's role in Iranian immigrant ethnic enterprises. Using her framework, it is possible to view the production and sale of ethnic foods by ladies' societies as an informal economic enterprise (49). If we look at the church building as an extension of home, or in my conception broaden the space of the church to allow for the production of ethnic foods by women, whether that production takes place at home, at church, or at a restaurant owned by a parishioner, it is clear that the ladies societies fit Moallem's model of informal economies. She writes that "goods produced by women entrepreneurs at home," which can include prepared foods, "enter into the market and are exchanged for money, but because they are manufactured at home they are often not considered to represent 'work'" (49). I would agree with Moallem, because in the context of the church, women's production of food for fundraising efforts like festivals and *haflis* is typically seen as an extension of a familial obligation, like housework. Antiochian women may receive recognition for their efforts, but as their volunteer work is considered part of a religious or familial obligation, and thus their services are "donated" and not counted as "work." Especially in the context of multiculturalism, the food produced by female labor is celebrated but never compensated. Of course this labor must be seen as part of a religious conviction, in which faith drives the good works completed by the women, and thus expect no compensation. But multiculturalism's emphasis on this uncompensated labor makes women in precarious positions, where they have to balance work, home life, and volunteer church labor.

requires that cultural productions, mostly by women, be commodified, thus reinforcing the often critiqued notion of women as culture as nation (Chatterjee 1993). But it is from this position that women exact a measure of autonomy and power within the space of the church, a patriarchal space, and through their labor can actually help speak back to the proliferation of negative representations of Arabs in U.S. popular and political discourses, even if through essentialist notions of food as culture. I hope to show that the notion of women as bearers of culture within the patriarchal nationalist discourse of multiculturalism, can be seen in more complex ways, similar to how Julie Peteet sees women in Palestine and Lebanon as “rescripting motherhood,” in relation to the discourse of mothers as icons of the nation (1997, 105). As I have argued in this chapter and the previous one, marketing a cultural identity within multiculturalism can have power as a representational practice, even as claims to authenticity rely on essentialist notions of culture and the constructions of authenticity, as Naber (forthcoming) argues “is in part a mechanism for crafting a sense of unity, security, and comfort in the face of a perceived external threat or lived experience of violence, domination, or material or cultural erasure.”

One of the most prominent examples of how women’s knowledge and labor surrounding cultural foods impact the space of the church, is the publication of Helen Corey’s book, *Food From Biblical Lands: A Culinary Trip to the Land of Bible History* (1989). Part cookbook, part historical account, the book was publicized in the pages of *The Word*, and was “endorsed” by Metropolitan Philip Saliba himself. In the opening pages of the book a letter from Metropolitan Philip explains the endorsement and the importance of Corey’s work. The body of the letter reads:

It gives us much pleasure to endorse your new cookbook. This volume contains such a wealth of information for those who wish to properly prepare Middle Eastern cuisine. It is also the only book of its kind which faithfully portrays the religious and cultured significance of the various foods which our people have eaten since the dawn of time. We highly recommend that your book be used in all of our Antiochian Orthodox parishes.

Metropolitan Philip clearly sees food not only as a marker of cultural identity and religion, but a way to preserve esoteric knowledge.

Helen Corey's writings about Arab foods, though, have impacted not only how Antiochians and other Arab Americans understand their own culture through food, as she "appears often at Antiochian Orthodox Church festivals throughout the country giving food demonstrations,"¹⁸⁷ but she has had an impact on U.S. perceptions of foods from the Middle East. An article from *Saudi Aramco World* touts Helen Corey's first and most famous book, *The Art of Syrian Cookery* (1962) as responsible for "[m]uch of the popularity of Middle East foods among non-Arabs in the United States" (Harsham 1975).

More than making traditional foods visible to both Antiochians and to the public, women's cultural knowledge and labor is vital to the viability of the religion in the U.S. context. As I mentioned earlier, Gabbacia (1998) argues that the U.S. context of the separation of church and state forced immigrant parishes, who may have been accustomed to their church being state-sponsored, to find other means for funds. This work often fell to the women. The priest of one large parish known for its popular and lucrative annual ethnic food festivals laments that the festivals stopped because of the lack of women at the church with the time to be able to cook the vast amounts of food necessary. He writes: "We stopped having them [...] because we didn't have enough

¹⁸⁷ "About Helen Corey," *Helencorey.org*, <http://helencorey.org/bio.htm> (accessed May 20, 2010).

women who were not working outside the house to come.”¹⁸⁸ This off-the-cuff comment shows the important position women have had in the economy of individual parishes and the archdiocese as a whole. The production and selling of ethnic foods in the context of the parish ladies’ society has been an integral function in the life of Antiochian churches for nearly a hundred years, from Texas to Pennsylvania to Massachusetts.

In a DVD video produced for the centennial celebration of St. George Cathedral in Pittsburgh, a parishioner credits the women of the church, and their labor and knowledge of food production, for building and paying off the church, citing the “sacrifices” of time and money that the women willingly made. Newspaper articles covering the Altoona, PA, church’s *haflis* and food festivals always focused on the women’s knowledge and production of complicated ethnic foods, like *baklawa*, and featured multi-page pictorials and articles.¹⁸⁹ In the Altoona case, by the end of the 1970s the Antiochian ladies society became synonymous with the preparation of Middle Eastern cuisine, as the larger Altoona community equated the Antiochian women with ethnic food. Quoting one newspaper article from 1981, “When ethnic foods are mentioned, area residents quickly associate delicious goodies with those made by members of St. Mary’s Ladies Society of St. George’s Orthodox Church.”

Much of the rhetoric surrounding women’s labor for the preparation of church-sponsored food festivals, echoes Joanna Kadi’s introduction to her edited volume *Food For Our Grandmothers*, in which she discusses the preponderance of Arab American

¹⁸⁸ Fr. John Abdullah, e-mail message to the author, November 8, 2008. During a June 2009 phone interview with Fr. John Salem of St. George in Houston, TX, he recalled that at the Houston parish the festivals began in 1982 and “did well at the beginning” but then there were less women to work the festival because of work and familial obligations. He said the festival had to stop because when “you don’t have the ladies to cook...then we have to hire labor.”

¹⁸⁹ See for example, “Bakalawa—King of Pastries,” in the Altoona [PA] *Mirror*, May 5, 1972.

women who learned to cook traditional and ethnic foods from their grandmothers. She writes that the title of the book, “made sense...both because the book is an offering back to our grandmothers and to our community, and because it offers *appropriate* food for our grandmothers—the Arabic food that many of them made daily” (Kadi 1994, xx). In many of the newspaper articles about upcoming Antiochian food festivals, the authors chose to report on the difficulty, the time, and knowledge required to prepare the vast amounts of labor-intensive foods, like *tabouleh* and *baklawa*, and how these preparations rested on the culinary knowledge passed down between the generations of women members of the church. For example, an article on the 2004 festival in Little Falls, NJ, paints a typical picture of a ladies society:

Save for the microwave in the corner of the kitchen, the women of the St. George Ladies’ Society were preparing a feast Tuesday morning almost exactly like their grandmothers did half a century ago. One woman kneaded mashed dates in a bowl, while another used a cheesecloth to skim the solid particles out of a large vat of melted butter. Margaret De Gayter, a tiny, spry 80-year-old, took plates of hot, soft cheese out of the microwave, and passed them to a row of women who stretched the cheese into a rubber-band like consistency, then rolled it into perfect braids. Since its advent in 1978, the St. George Antiochian Orthodox Church’s summer festival has been one of its biggest moneymakers. The main draw at the festival are dozens of Middle Eastern specialties - all homemade.¹⁹⁰

The focus on “handmade” always goes hand in hand with “authentic,” as far as ethnic foods are concerned. In the articles covering the diverse array of Antiochian-sponsored food festivals, “homemade” or “handmade” typically appears in the same paragraph with “tradition” or “authentic,” and both words are used to describe the work of the women in the church.

In the days before their annual festival at St. George in El Paso, TX, the women’s

¹⁹⁰ Maya Kremen, “Middle East Specialties Unite Women and Church History” *The Record* (Hackensack, NJ), May 12, 2004.

group was working long hours in the kitchen. The newspaper reports: “Recipes for Middle Eastern cuisine, passed down through generations, gives a special taste to an annual tradition that keeps an El Paso community together. Jeannette Zacour, 73, said she keeps a family tradition alive when she cooks and bakes the Middle Eastern recipes she learned from her grandmother and mother.”¹⁹¹ Similarly, the members of St. Elias in Atlanta, GA, “prepare the festival foods every year, using heirloom recipes and traditional ingredients.”¹⁹²

Beyond media coverage, the histories that parishes write about themselves for commemorative events, such as anniversaries of the founding of the church or the construction of a new church building, *always* talk about the instrumental role of the ladies’ society or the ladies’ aid society of that parish.¹⁹³ Here are a sampling of entries from such parish commemorative books about the importance of the women and their labor, particular their selling of ethnic food:

The ladies of St. Elijah [Oklahoma City] have been the soul of the congregation. What the priest was to the Divine Liturgy, the women were to the life of the congregation. ...Physically, the Church existed around the eating of Lebanese cooking. (Ham 1997, 71-72)

Women providing sustenance in their roles as volunteers as well as wives and mothers have been the loving keepers of the Church [Montreal] and its values. (Courey 1999, 88)

St. George Ladies Society [Houston] or Ladies Aid Society, sold Arabic foods to pay for the church. It was said that ten ladies really paid for the church with their dinners. (McGuire 1972, 94)

¹⁹¹ Aileen B. Flores, “Baklava and Belly Dancing: Annual Food Fest a Celebration of Church, Family Traditions,” *El Paso Times*, May 13, 2009.

¹⁹² John Kessler, “Turkish Delights” *The Atlanta Journal* and *The Atlanta Constitution*, October 1, 1998.

¹⁹³ In his memoirs and historical account of St. Mary’s parish, Fr. George lamented that the plans for the original church building did not include a kitchen. He says it was a lost opportunity and “especially regrettable when you realize that the kitchen would undoubtedly have paid for itself in a year or two, as the number of social functions expanded to keep up with the growth of the young parish” (Shalhoub 2007, 137).

Before there was a church, the women of the Syrian Lebanese community [Lexington, KY] worked so that there could be a church. [...] To the women, however, the most important room was the kitchen. It became as familiar to them as the one in their own home. (“Mortgage Burning” 1979, 21)

Today, the second and third generation of Ladies [Houston] are still cooking. Even though many of them are working ladies (not like their grandmothers who did not work outside the home), they find time or they simply take the time to cook for the general public to make money that literally eats up those mortgage notes and expenses of The Church...Dinners continued to be served. The faith was preserved—not in a paraffin sealed jar—but by baking bread. (Faour 1990, 6)

In the planning meetings for the 2009 Sahara Fest at St. Mary’s in Livonia, MI, any considerations of what types of food to sell always hinged on the willingness and ability of the ladies’ society to prepare them.¹⁹⁴ Whenever food was discussed, the committee always deferred to the ladies’ society representative to see what they could do, or were willing to do, for the festival. Much of the planning of the menu rested with the Ladies’ Society. If the “ladies” decided not to make fried *kibbee*, the committee discussed the cost/benefit of buying it from one of the many local bakeries or not offering it at all. Even within such a hierarchical religion where men dominate all aspects of ecclesiastical procedure, the success and strength of the church, both figuratively and literally, in reference to the nourishment provided by women’s knowledge and labor, depends on the women. Food scholars as well as immigration and religious historians have written about this relationship between women, food, religion, and ethnicity.

The production of ethnic food within the church also brings with it a greater sense of responsibility and knowledge. For women to prepare food and cook meals for church

¹⁹⁴ It is important for me to mention here, even though I will expound on the point further in the ethnographic section on the 2009 Sahara Festival below, that men do contribute significantly to the production of food for these festivals, especially in the realm of the grilling of meat. As cliché as it sounds, at many Antiochian church food festivals, the men are in charge of the grill and the grilling of meat and chicken for kabobs, even if that meat was cut by women. At a festival in Houston in 1982, the parish had an informal bet on which would make more money, “the women’s kibbee or the men’s lahamishwe [shish kabob]” (Tannous 1983, 28).

functions, whether for public or in-group celebrations, they must understand the religious rules associated with food consumption (Gabaccia 1998, 46–47). In the Orthodox Christian Church, this requires the food producers, typically the women, to know when it is a fasting period and what the specific rules for that fast may be. The requirements can range from not using meat during the Advent fast preceding the Nativity to not using meat, dairy, or certain oils during the Great Lenten fast.

There is a tremendous amount of responsibility placed on this “domestic cultural economy” (Mannur 2007, 17). The ladies societies in Antiochian Orthodox churches are expected to prepare foods for regular church “feast days” (the celebration of a particular saint or biblical event) as well as public and in-group *haflis* and food festivals, all while maintaining ethnic and religious traditions. If food is one of the most prominent markers of cultural identity, then its production and the knowledge behind it should be, as it typically is, revered within the Antiochian communities. If the men are expected to be the religious and political leaders of the church, then women are expected to fuel the entire operation, both with food and fundraising obtained from the production and sale of ethnic foods.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁵ It is not a stretch to compare the role of women’s labor in the construction of cultural identity within the space of the church to Robnett’s (1997) critique of the limited position of leadership for women in the civil rights movement, especially considering the role of the Church in the push for civil equality. Robnett argues that there was a “gendered division of labor” within the civil rights movement, and that men were largely seen as the “formal and legitimate leaders” (6). Far from bemoaning the oppression of women within the movement, Robnett argues that the women’s labor in the movement was vital to its success, and says that the women she interviewed found their participation “liberating” because they were working against the “extreme oppression” of African Americans, and that men were de facto leaders “was not perceived as the critical issue” (37). Although Orthodoxy is a patriarchal religion where women cannot be ordained leaders, their labor as parish council presidents and their work in the ladies’ society ensures the viability of the operation of the church. As my work shows, women’s cultural labor and knowledge surrounding food is celebrated as vital throughout the archdiocese. And since I argue that the deployment of cultural identity within multiculturalism can exact a measure of power of both representation and financial gain, women’s labor in the Antiochian archdiocese is not longer only within the “domestic cultural economy” (Mannur 2007, 17), but a vital aspect of the public performance and commodification of identity.

In the multicultural context, where the sale of ethnicity through food products becomes a major source of income for ethnic and ethno-religious groups, the stress is placed squarely on the women as carriers of culture (Abu-Laban and Gabriel 2002, 23, 119–120). It is here where the well-critiqued theme of women as bearers of culture in the private sphere becomes something more. Because multiculturalism requires the public articulation of cultural identities and the commodification thereof, Antiochian women's labor becomes essential to what is seen as a public commodity. Anita Mannur situates women's production of food within the "domestic cultural economy" and argues that the "home site becomes a space in which to produce a version of Indianness" (2007, 17). It is certainly not a huge leap to connect the "home site" with my conception of the space of the church within the lives of Antiochian Orthodox, where the church becomes an extension of the family space. Thus, Antiochian women produce a version of Arabness that is then commodified within multiculturalism as part of a claim to authenticity. When "handmade" or "homemade" equals "authentic," in the context of an ethnic food festival, food produced by women becomes, to quote Deborah Lupton, the "ultimate consumable commodity" (1994, 666).

Finally, because I have been arguing that even as the claims to cultural authenticity are built on essentialist and Orientalist notions of an Arab culture, the cultural identity that Antiochians construct can operate as a representational practice which attempts to privilege the more romantic or "exotic" representations of Arabs and the Middle East as opposed to the more overtly negative representations of Arabs potential "enemy Others," and because food and its celebration is the main site for the deployment of this Antiochian Arabness, women's knowledge of, and production of, food

is imbued with even more power, even within the patriarchal religious system and the patriarchal nationalist discourse about women as bearers of culture that is the basis of multiculturalism (Abu-Laban and Gabriel 2002).

CHAPTER 5

The 2009 Sahara Fest

This chapter is an ethnographic investigation of the planning and production of an Antiochian ethnic food festival in suburban Detroit. The goal is to offer an extended discussion of the deployment of Arabness within post-9/11 U.S. liberal multiculturalism that occurs in the commodified, playful, public, and gendered space of the festival. Set in Livonia, MI, historically one of the whitest suburbs of Detroit and known as the whitest “big city” in the U.S.,¹⁹⁶ and only a fifteen minute drive from the heart of “Little Arabia” in Dearborn, the 2009 Sahara Fest at St. Mary’s Antiochian Orthodox Basilica offers a clear example of the complex negotiations that Antiochians engage in when marketing their cultural identity to the public through the space of the church. I contextualize the Sahara Fest within the history of other festivals at St. Mary’s parish as well as within the history of Antiochian ethnic festivals that the previous chapter established. Through a full discussion of the planning process for the festival, such as the its advertisement and the selection of foods to serve, as well as the performance of the four-day July festival, I

¹⁹⁶ The 2000 U.S. Census recorded that 95.5% of Livonia’s nearly 100,000 residents identified as white. In 1968 there was only one black family in Livonia (Darden et al. 1987, 138). It’s not only that the majority of the residents are white, but the popular perception of Livonia is that it represents the racial segregation between the city of Detroit, which is largely African American, and the mostly white suburbs. A *Detroit News* article says bluntly that “Detroit and Livonia are two of the most racially segregated communities in America. Detroit is 82 percent black, while Livonia is 95 percent white” (Nichols 2007). In a *Detroit News* series titled “The Costs of Segregation,” the relationship between Detroit and its suburbs, particularly Livonia, was highlighted. One article reports that Livonia is whitest “big” city in the U.S. according to Census Bureau (Gordon Trowbridge, “Racial divide widest in U.S.—Fewer Metro Detroit neighborhoods are integrated than 20 years ago,” *Detroit News*, January 14, 2002).

investigate the anxieties surrounding the construction and public deployment of a cultural identity, Arabness, particularly the separation the parishioners see between their “community” and the “white people” or the “Americans” in Livonia and surrounding localities.

These anxieties of self-representation are clearly evident in the name of the festival. Why would an Antiochian parish, where the majority of the members trace their ancestry to Palestine, Lebanon, and Jordan, name their ethnic food festival after the Sahara desert in northern Africa? I have heard three distinct answers to this question, all of which highlight the complex negotiations that occur when publicly marketing cultural identity within liberal multiculturalism. One festival planning committee member said the name Sahara Fest was chosen because it represented sunshine and the desert, which could be associated with summer. A deacon said the name was chosen for its “mystique,” while another member of the festival committee said it was chosen because “it kind of implies Middle Eastern, but it doesn’t.”

Unlike the names of most Antiochian festivals (the most popular being Middle Eastern Festival and Mediterranean Festival), which explicitly locates the festival’s food and music within a specific geographical or cultural region, Sahara Fest is not so direct. Given the long history of the Antiochian archdiocese’s engagement with desert imagery, it is clear that the name is supposed to be playful as it picks up on the archdiocese’s tradition of self-Orientalist imagery and rhetoric. In this sense the name Sahara is successful for its ability to evoke images of camels and palm trees, based on the prominence of the desert in U.S. popular culture representations of Arabs and the Middle East.

There are countless summer festivals and carnivals in southeastern Michigan. The festival committee at St. Mary's wanted to differentiate themselves from the numerous weekend activities, and theirs would certainly be the only desert-themed festival. Since, the goal of the festival was to make as much money as possible the committee knew that they would need to draw as much of "our community," as they refer to themselves, as possible, but also attract the "white people"/"Americans" from the neighborhoods surrounding the church. For this reason, the committee was ambivalent about marketing the Sahara Fest as solely an Arab festival, which is also reflected in the ambiguous name. As my ethnography shows, throughout the festival committee meetings, both before and after the event, there was never an agreement as to whether the Sahara Fest was a summer carnival, an Arab cultural festival, or a religious festival. But whether or not the planning committee fully intended it to be, the Sahara Fest did end up being a public expression of an Arab cultural identity.

Arabness in the Festival Space

To say that the Sahara Fest is a space where Arabness was in play is a drastic understatement. The Arabic music wailing from the main stage, people conversing in Arabic, the smells of the *argileh* burning, the *qahwa* brewing, the *falalfel* frying, and the *kafta* and *shawarma* grilling reminded me more of the streets of Amman than of suburban Michigan. Especially in the evening when the crowds grew, there were constant impromptu *dabkehs*, sometimes involving dozens of festival goers, typically with a man banging the *tabla* and dancing throughout the center of the *dabkeh* circle. Older Arab men sat at the tables in the large tent smoking *argileh* and playing backgammon on boards that they brought from home. In the evening, when the music was in full swing



Figure 5-1 Under the big tent, Sahara Fest 2009. Photo by the author.

and the lines for the food were growing steadily, it was truly an amazing sight to see hundreds of people assembled to celebrate and share their cultural identity and/or support the church community of St. Mary. The vast majority of the attendees were either Arab or Arab American or parishioners at the church. Most of the Arabs who were non-Antiochian came because of the music. As one committee member told me, many of the Arabic music groups have their own following in the area. I did observe a handful of “white people” or “Americans” at the festival. They may have been hungry for some Middle Eastern food, were friends or family of church members, or could have just wandered into the tent from the carnival that was set up adjacent to it.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁷ The main festival tent was a massive 180' x 60', supported by four huge support poles in the center and smaller poles tied down with stakes around the edges. The layout was different in 2009 from 2008 and included all of the vendors, the bar, the stage, and all the tables and chairs for the guests under the same tent. The tent this year was much larger than in previous years, which was intended to make for one, inclusive festival atmosphere, as the previous year the vendors were separated in a different tent and therefore did not see a high volume of foot traffic. The larger tent was supposed to rectify this situation. The larger tent did have one drawback, it was much more susceptible to the elements. After the first night of the festival there was a swift-moving thunderstorm through the area, and when we arrived on Friday morning, we found the west end of the tent sagging because one of poles had buckled in the wind.

It was not uncommon to see people donning national symbols or otherwise publicly and proudly displaying their Arabness at the festival. Whether it was the middle-aged woman with the cedar tree-emblazoned scarf, the teenage girl with the “Jordanian Princess” t-shirt, or the numerous cars in the parking lot with small Palestinian flags hanging from the rearview mirrors, attendees felt comfortable displaying Arabness in the festival space.

Besides the cultural identity markers of food and the music, there were other items that signaled that the Sahara Fest was an Arab or Arab American space, or at least demonstrated that St. Mary’s parish was part of the larger Detroit Arab American community.¹⁹⁸ Many of the sponsors of the Sahara Fest were prominent Arab-owned or Arab-run businesses and organizations. Even though the majority of these corporate sponsorships were attained through members of the church, a significant number were simply from Arab-owned establishments that wanted to support Fr. George and his community.¹⁹⁹

The most striking aspect of the Arabness of the festival, besides the food and music, was the vendors. Almost all of the vendors at the festival, about twenty, were either Arab, Arab American, or were offering goods and services relevant to the Arab American community. The committee member in charge of soliciting the vendors worked diligently to bring merchants and organizations that not only offered something unique, but were relevant to St. Mary’s community. To be a vendor at the festival, the committee had to grant approval and the vendor had to submit \$250 to secure a ten foot table inside

¹⁹⁸ The *Detroit News* reported that the 2008 Sahara Fest was an “Arabic festival” (Alex Kellogg, “Counting on Fun: Three-Day Festival Raises Funds for St. Mary Antiochian Church in Livonia,” *Detroit Free Press*, August 3, 2008).

¹⁹⁹ Sponsorships were granted to those establishments that either donated money or supplies, such as meat packing facilities or produce distributors, or services, like the media organization Arab Detroit.



Figure 5-2 Festival attendees browsing the vendors. Photo by the author.

the main tent. This approval process was necessary to keep multiple vendors from offering the same goods or services. The approval of vendors was also necessary to maintain the feel of the festival that the committee wanted and to avoid potential political conflict, which I will discuss further in the “anxieties” section below.

The vendors that were approved to participate represented a broad range of goods and services that were either owned and operated by Arabs or Arab Americans, or catered to them. There was a Canadian-Palestinian artist who was given a good spot in the tent because, as one of the committee members stated, “he’s one of us” (as in Palestinian). There was an Arab man from Pennsylvania selling Middle Eastern-themed religious objects, such as icons. Three vendors sold jewelry, beauty products, and apparel. One booth sold smoothies and another sold discount or knock-off perfumes and colognes. A pair of young Chaldean men sold made-to-order screen printed t-shirts with novelty sayings like “Kiss Me I’m Chaldean” or shirts with the Palestinian flag or with Lebanon

written in Arabic script. But three of the tables firmly placed the St. Mary's community within the institutionalized structure of Arab Detroit.²⁰⁰

ACCESS, the area's largest organization for Arab Americans, set up a vendor table and handed out pamphlets and information. Arab Detroit, the Arab American media organization that helped with the advertising of the festival, also operated a table to hand out pamphlets, a free audio CD of a local Arab American musician, and to sign people up for their email list. These organizations set up shop at the Sahara Fest because they knew the majority of the attendees would be Arab or Arab American. The same reasoning brought the vendor that I was most surprised to see at the festival, the United States Census Bureau. With the slogan "Census 2010" printed in English and Arabic on their poster, census workers from the local Detroit office were hoping to spread the word about the upcoming census, particularly to Arab immigrants. The "partnership specialist" in charge of the booth explained that the sole purpose for the census bureau's presence at the festival was to explain to the Arab community that filling out the census questionnaire would in no way jeopardize immigration status. She also stated that it was her goal to get a good, accurate read of the Dearborn Arab community, which would not only help the government but would be beneficial to researchers and community leaders.²⁰¹ The presence of this booth shows that the church is seen as a vital part of the Arab American community.²⁰²

²⁰⁰ I am referring here to Shryock's assertion that the Arab Detroit community does not just exist, but is "made" through the culture work of various institutions, one of which is ACCESS (2004b, 282).

²⁰¹ The census worker explained that she used to work for both Helen Samhan and James Zogby, two prominent and public Arab American figures. We talked for a while about the pros and cons of categorizing Arabs as a distinct racial category for the census, something that has been debated for decades within Arab American organizations.

²⁰² Action related to the census was maintained through the census numeration in the spring of 2010. In the weeks during the numeration, St. Mary's placed an advisory in their weekly bulletin for parishioners to "check other and write in Arab American" in regards to the race question.

St. Mary's and Festival

The story of the 2009 Sahara Fest at St. Mary's church in many ways begins in the 1970s, when the church participated in the Detroit Arab World Festival, by operating a booth and serving traditional Middle Eastern foods.²⁰³ The church saw their participation in this festival, and others like it, as mainly a way to raise funds. In reality, participating in the large international festivals around the Metro Detroit area also benefitted the members of St. Mary by giving them experience to run their own festivals. They learned what foods sold well and how to prepare and distribute large quantities of food in a festival setting. One of the committee members for the 2009 Sahara Fest, and the man in charge of grilling the chicken and *kafta*, would offer advice during the planning of the festival by saying, "When I used to help my father with the festivals back in the 70s... ." Many of the other committee members grew up attending the festivals that St. Mary's participated in and were instrumental in planning and executing the parish's many attempts over the decades at running their own large-scale festival.

The 2009 Sahara Fest is the second annual occurrence of the latest attempt. Though the festival can only be prefaced by "2nd annual," which makes St. Mary's look like a newcomer in the field of church-sponsored ethnic festivals, the parish has a long

²⁰³ The Arab World Festival, in which the Antiochians of St. Mary participated during the 1970s, was started in 1972 and has continued to grow, and is still celebrated on Hart Plaza in Detroit every summer. The Arab International Festival in Dearborn, was an offshoot of this original festival. The Arab World Festival was part of the Detroit summer ethnic festivals that showcased a different ethnic group each weekend throughout the summer. Begun in 1969, these summer ethnic festivals received funding from the American Revolution Bicentennial Association to expand their festivals beginning in 1974, in order to bring in international performers to the festivals (MARBC 1976, 57). In 1976, the festivals moved to Hart Plaza in Detroit, where there are still celebrated. But Arab festivals in Detroit pre-date the Bicentennial's focus on the festival as a site of cultural celebration. There is also a larger *mahrajan* culture in Detroit that dates back to the 1920s with cultural celebrations at mosques and later at the various Arab Christian churches throughout Metro Detroit.

festival history. Besides participating in city-sponsored festivals in both Detroit and Livonia, the parish has hosted large community and cultural celebrations in the past, such as holding a “church fair” as part of the 1992 Arab Culture Week celebration in Metro Detroit. Several of my interlocutors recall carnivals and food fairs in the church parking lot in the 1980s. Since 2000, the St. Mary’s community has hosted four full-scale summer festivals, some with camel rides, and all with handmade foods, music, and lots of *dabkeh* dancing. Finally, the fact that church members, including three of the planning committee members, own and operate more than a dozen local restaurants (many of which are Arab or Middle Eastern-themed), means that St. Mary’s second annual attempt at a large-scale ethnic festival was by no means novice.

As Fr. George will tell you, it is no accident that the members of St. Mary decided to begin hosting a large-scale ethnic festival in the wake of September 11, 2001. He says that “a hundred years ago Arab Americans were embarrassed or afraid to show who they are, so you find many of their generation could not wait until they abandoned, quote-unquote, all tradition or their language, so they would look pure American. Today it’s fashionable to be different.” It certainly is fashionable to be different, especially when that difference operates within the realm of multiculturalism and the difference is publically displayed against, as Shryock argues, “a “hegemonic model of ‘American culture,’ unmarked and unquestioned” in which, as Bodnar asserts, ethnic groups are encouraged to show how they have “contributed” to the building of the nation (Shryock 2004a 18; Bodnar 1992). The idea of planning the festival against an “unmarked” American culture is evident in the ways that the festival planning committee talked about

the non-Arab or non-Antiochians as “white” or “American,” which I will discuss further below.

At St. Mary’s festivals, like other institutionalized Arab Detroit events, the Arabness or Arab cultural identity that is on display is a constructed “thinness” that serves to “undermine stereotypes, celebrate diversity, foster tolerance, give institutional support to pluralism, and suppress any form of difference (cultural, religious, or political) whose display would make these representational goals more difficult to achieve” (Shryock 2004a 18). Especially after 9/11, Arabs in Detroit were compelled to assert themselves as Americans, within the multicultural public sphere (Shryock 2004b).²⁰⁴ An ethnic festival is one way to lay claim to a cultural authenticity within multiculturalism that demands essentialist representations and commodification. But the festival can also serve the function of allowing the parish to make money (to be “visible” and “viable” according to Mannur) and to serve as a representational practice which intervenes in the many images of Arabs and the Middle East to privilege one.²⁰⁵ As my research has shown, Antiochians have a complex engagement with the construction of cultural identity within multiculturalism, as they both commodify their identity through the sale of food, but consistently mobilize their identity for politicized action on behalf of Palestinians and Lebanese that runs against multiculturalism’s expectations for racialized groups.

²⁰⁴ An interesting side note is that when the 2005 Antiochian parish life convention was held in Dearborn, a place known for its Arab populations, each convention attendee received a large magnetic American flag with their registration packet. At first I thought this was an odd inclusion to the program book, maps, and convention schedules. But in the context of Arab Detroit post-9/11, the overt display of patriotism/loyalty was not so out of place. Shryock (2004b) writes about the conspicuous display of American flags on the homes and businesses of Arab Americans after 9/11.

²⁰⁵ This is the basis of my chapter on self-Orientalism. I take my use of representational practice from Stuart Hall (1997).

Gender in the Festival Space

Multiculturalism also helps to structure the performance of gender in a public festival. At the Sahara Fest, gender played out similarly to other Antiochian festivals that I have attended in Ohio and Pennsylvania, with regards to food production. Almost exclusively, men were in charge of the grills and the *falafel* frying (Figure 5-3). The women of the Ladies Society were in charge of the pastries, including the *zalabia* (small fried donuts), and also made the *kibbee* (Figure 5-4).

Because food, especially in a festival setting, is such a visible marker of identity and the “ultimate consumable commodity” (Lupton 1994, 666), the meanings behind the spectacle of the production of the food in some ways reflect the gendered space of the church as a whole. In the context of multiculturalism, the spectacle of smoke from grilling meat and the sounds of *falafel* frying in a large pot of oil may be the visual focus at a festival, but the heart of the festival, according to most of the newspaper accounts of Antiochian festivals, is the “handmade,” and thus more authentic, nature of the pastries and other labor-intensive foods, like the *kibbee*, which tends to rely on the cultural knowledge and labor of women.²⁰⁶

²⁰⁶ The previous chapter had numerous examples of these kinds of newspaper accounts of festivals. For instance, consider the following account of an Antiochian festival in 2007 in Lexington, KY: “St. Andrew Orthodox Church’s annual Heritage Festival has a lot of music and dancing, but really, it’s all about the food. Only once a year can we stuff ourselves with homemade foods that are made by parishioners of the church, who follow the food traditions of the Mediterranean, the Middle East, and Western and Eastern Europe. [...] They treasure the foods of their ancestors. Joanne Martha prepares the Lebanese recipes she learned from her mother. Many are time-consuming and prepared only on special occasions, but the simple dishes such as tabbouleh and hummus are everyday fare” (Sharon Thompson, Savor the Festival, *Lexington [KY] Herald Leader*, September 23, 2007).



Figure 5-3 The men at the grill and *falafel* fryer. Photo by the author.

Both men and women, in the case of St. Mary's, cut and prepared the meat to be grilled in the days leading up to the festival. But the *kibbee* and pastries were produced weeks and sometimes months in advance, and almost exclusively by women. For example, more than a week before the Sahara Fest began, a member of the Ladies Society told the festival committee that the Ladies had been preparing *kibbee* for more than six hours earlier that day. She said, "I ordered pizza for lunch. We had *kibbee* coming out of our eyes!" In all, the Ladies Society made 18 trays of *kibbee*, with each tray containing 80. They froze them ahead of time, and then had to fry them and box them each morning of the festival.

I am not arguing that one form of labor is more important than the other, or that there is a definite gendered division of labor at the festival. It is certainly time consuming and difficult work to cut and chop hundreds of pounds of meat, and there is an art to grilling meat without drying it out (and the male grillers at the festival took pride in their



Figure 5-4 Women of the Ladies Society of St. Mary's, selling their *zalabia* (covered) and other pastries. Photo by the author.

skills). But the labor of grilling is performed in public. The labor for the preparation of the other foods, particularly the pastries, remains more a part of the “domestic cultural economy” (Mannur 2007), but is also the labor that is most valued within multiculturalism’s commodification of cultural identity (e.g. the newspaper accounts of festivals), because it is “homemade” or “handmade” and thus more authentic. This reflects the larger space of the church that I analyzed in the previous chapter, where men may hold all clerical positions in the faith, but women’s labor is seen as the lifeblood of each parish. Since the festival space within multiculturalism is so visible, the public performance of gender around food is yet another reason why the festival is such an important site for the analysis of cultural identity, especially in a religious setting.

The Planning Meetings and My Role as Ethnographer/Worker

The festival planning committee allowed me to sit in on the planning process for the festival. I attended my first planning meeting for the Sahara Fest in March 2009. My intent in attending the meetings was to get first-hand knowledge about the negotiations of identity and marketing that occur in the context of large, public, church-sponsored festivals. I had already performed plenty of archival research within the Antiochian archdiocese, which showed me the outcomes of the festival planning: the advertising, the press coverage, and photos and menus from the events. I was hoping to observe how these things came to fruition in the months leading up to the festival and to at least overhear the types of conversations that were necessary to come to conclusions about how to market the festival and, in effect, the members of the church, as it was solely their sweat that pulls off these elaborate multi-day events. I was specifically interested in seeing how St. Mary's performed their Arabness through the festival, given the church's position as one of the largest parishes in the archdiocese, and one that continually receives immigrants from the Middle East, particularly Palestine and Lebanon. Whereas other Antiochian festivals and ethnic food celebrations that I have attended in the past were sponsored by parishes that were much more Arab American than Arab, I was also hoping to gain insight as to the differences, if any, between a heavily immigrant parish and churches that have large numbers of American born parishioners and non-Arab converts.²⁰⁷ As I entered the first meeting, I was unaware that my intellectual curiosities

²⁰⁷ In many ways the festival ultimately resembled any other Antiochian church-sponsored ethnic food festival. The main difference between St. Mary's Sahara Fest and, say, St. George's of Syracuse, NY, Middle Eastern Cultural Festival, is that the Middle Eastern food and Arabic music is not a novelty in the Metro Detroit area. The overwhelming majority of festival attendees were either of Arab ancestry or affiliated with the Antiochian Orthodox archdiocese. In cities where there is not such a large Arab population, like Syracuse, NY, the church-sponsored festivals function more as an ethnic awareness event.

to “observe” would end up giving me the opportunity to partake in the planning and execution of the Sahara Fest.

A few minutes into my first meeting, the chairman asked me to introduce myself. I explained that I had been working with one of the deacons on a related research project, and that I was interested in studying the Sahara Fest as one facet of the cultural expression of Antiochian Orthodox. “Welcome,” said the chairman, “But we are going to put you to work. You can’t just observe.” So by the end of the meeting, I had my first task: help distribute letters to last year’s sponsors thanking them and soliciting their contributions again this year. I found out quickly, as I had suspected, that the first rule of Sahara Fest, other than creating a celebratory space for the parishioners, was to make money. I was glad to help, but also found out at that first meeting that my presence could influence the very negotiations I was set to observe and document.

One of the first tasks at the initial meeting with the planning committee was to agree upon the design for the 2009 logo. As a sheet of paper with six possible designs for the logo circulated so that everyone could rank their favorites, I immediately began thinking of the implications of my participation. At first I had planned on abstaining from voting, but was urged by the other members to give my input, since they already saw me as a member of the committee once I agreed to complete the task of distributing letters to festival sponsors. As soon as I saw the collection of designs, I knew I was at a crossroads. All six of the designs featured a prominent shining sun, reflecting the message about desert and summer that the festival chairperson wanted to convey. Two of the designs had an image of an *argileh* or hookah on them. Two of the designs had an image of a man

If anything, the festival in Livonia serves as an introduction to the Antiochian faith, which is not very well known in the area.

in traditional Levantine dress, supposedly dancing the *dabkeh*. I did a double take as I realized that this dancing *dabkeh* man is the exact same image that was used on the 2008 St. George *hafli* poster with the palace from Disney's *Aladdin*, which was analyzed in a previous chapter.²⁰⁸

Other images among the logos were musical instruments and a Ferris wheel, because the festival would also include a small carnival contracted out by an independent ride company. My first instinct was to select one of the images that seemed the most Orientalist, such as the one with the hookah or the dancing *dabkeh* man, in order to satisfy my thesis about the circulation and maintenance of self-Orientalist imagery within the Antiochian archdiocese. I weighed the moral and ethical obligations of this choice and decided instead to listen to the discussion around the table first, ultimately choosing one of the logos that conveyed no "Arabness" through the design or content, which is what the majority of the members favored.

The committee members discussed, or more appropriately quietly argued, the merits of each design. Some were partial to the designs with musical instruments or musical notes because the focus of the festival was to be music in addition to food. The committee planned live music, mostly Arabic, for every afternoon and evening of the four-day festival. One committee member really liked the dancing *dabkeh* man. Although the person in charge of entertainment had not yet secured a professional "*dabkeh* troupe" as one of the performances, it was pretty much a given that anywhere a group of Arab Americans were assembled near live Arabic music, an impromptu *dabkeh* would break

²⁰⁸ I have yet to determine where this image originated, but I assume it came from some sort of stock clip art package.

out.²⁰⁹ The most vocal debate was about the presence of the hookah image. The chairperson decided that it was not a good idea to have the hookah in the main festival logo because “Americans don’t know what it is.” “They will think we are all a bunch of pot heads,” another member commented. He continued, “Even though we will be smoking the hell out of those things.”²¹⁰ Each year for the festival the parish charged a local merchant a small fee to come and sell hookahs for the festival. “He made a killing last year,” the chairperson said amidst the discussion on how much to charge him again this year. I observed at the 2009 festival that many people were smoking the hookahs provided by the vendor, but some decided to bring their own from home as well.

In the end, the choice of logos was narrowed down to the few featuring a carnival scene and musical notes or instruments. I was relieved that I would not be forced into a precarious ethical situation.²¹¹ By the second meeting, I was seen only as a member of the committee, there to work on making the Sahara Fest a huge success.

Anxieties of Representation

As the meetings progressed, the discussions turned to all of the minor but important details of pulling off a large-scale festival: How much to charge for food?

²⁰⁹ Some of my interlocutors had joked one of the women on the parish council was notorious for starting *dabkeh* lines at church functions.

²¹⁰ The concern over the presence of the hookah was extended beyond the festival. When I went with the chairperson to his office to complete my task of preparing the sponsor letters, he had a large hookah sitting on his desk. He paused for a moment and said to me, “You know what that is, right? That’s just tobacco.” I assured him that I did not think he was a “huge pot head.”

²¹¹ At that first meeting I learned another lesson about my presence and how I could influence things. Two members were lightheartedly discussing politics during one of the lulls in the meeting’s agenda. I happened to be writing something down that had happened before, but the chairperson jokingly yelled out, “Matt just took notes on who you voted for.” I was caught off guard and looked up from my notebook when the member in charge of food preparation stared right at me and confidently announced, “I am Lebanese for Obama.” For future meetings, I jotted brief notes on the meeting agenda that was handed out, instead of in a notebook. But my role as someone who is paying attention was not completely overlooked, as I was given the honor of taking minutes for some of the meetings.

What kinds of tickets should be used? In which direction should the stage face? Each of these points was debated, sometimes ad nauseam, and sometimes with shouting. There were numerous times when so many different people were arguing at once that the person taking minutes (and it was sometimes me) would just smile, put their pen down, and watch.²¹² The arguments were sometimes the result of so many egos, but were frequently very intelligent discussions between knowledgeable people. Among the committee members were numerous business owners, including three people who between them owned or managed a dozen restaurants. Each person offered their expertise and experience towards the festival planning, all with the same goal of making as much money as possible. The proceeds, after all, went directly to the church.²¹³ Each member of the festival committee was a dedicated Antiochian Orthodox Christian, whether they were Arab immigrants, second generation Arab Americans, or non-Arab converts. Everyone respected Fr. George and his mission of building a community outreach center, which would be the direct recipient of the proceeds from Sahara Fest. Almost every time an argument was getting out of control, the chairperson would reel everyone back in by saying, “Hey guys. Let’s remember that we all love our church and we all want the festival to be a success.”

Probably the most interesting discussions, for my work at least, pertained to the advertising and marketing of the festival. Because the Metro Detroit area is home to such a large Arab and Arab American population, there never seemed to be any anxieties

²¹² As an amusing side note, in his reflections on the history of the parish, Fr. George writes that at early meetings the parish council was “unfamiliar with the American rules of parliamentary procedure and debate—[they] sometimes ended up shouting at each other and fighting furiously.” He then quips: “(Or maybe *that* was simply our form of uniquely Arab-American debate!)” (Shalhoub 2007, 166).

²¹³ The proceeds for the festival support the planned construction of the Mariam Center for Family and Youth Enrichment at St. Mary’s, which is envisioned as a cultural and community center for people of all ages, faiths, and cultural backgrounds.

about the larger community perceiving the Antiochians and their festival as being dangerous Arab “enemy others.”²¹⁴ This is not to say that there were not considerations of how the festival would be perceived by non-Arab members of the surrounding localities. Even though the church was located in such close proximity to Dearborn, the heart of Arab America in the region, the church grounds were still smack dab in the middle of one of the whitest Detroit suburbs. The anxieties of self-representation stemmed from not wanting to alienate a large part of the potential customer base by being too ethnic, such as offering only Arabic music and not including “American” music. The balance between appeasing “our community” and the “Americans” was a subtext for many of the decisions regarding the marketing of the festival.

One prominent example of this was the colorful festival poster that was posted and distributed throughout the surrounding localities. The poster contained no direct references to Middle Eastern or Arab culture, other than the ambiguously desert-sounding title. The poster listed “Food, Rides, and Live Music,” and not “ethnic food” or “Arabic music.” The host for the festivals was simply listed at “St. Mary’s Church.” The poster conveyed what the committee was hoping for all along: that the Sahara Fest was a fun, family-friendly summer event. That the festival was also a space for the celebration of Arabness was a given to the committee and members of the Antiochian community, who did not feel the need to broadcast this fact all of the time. Their hope was that “Americans” or “white people,” as non-Arabs were typically referred to, would come and enjoy the festival, regardless of the cultural component. However, discussions during pre- and post-festival meetings revealed that some committee members would rather play up

²¹⁴ Nadine Naber (2008) outlines the development of the discourses of an Arab/Muslim enemy. Amaney Jamal (2008) argues that Arabs and Muslim are characterized as “enemy Others,” which helps the state justify infringements on civil liberties (116–117).

the Middle Eastern or Mediterranean (historically a popular substitute among Arab Americans in the marketing of their food) themes of the festival, hoping to hone in on what has become a popular niche market in the U.S.²¹⁵ As one member proclaimed during a post-festival meeting, “People love cultural festivals!”

When the first blurb was published in a local weekly newspaper, some of the anxieties about how to represent the festival became the main topic of discussion. At a meeting one month before the festival, the entire committee read the blurb that had been published that day. The first reactions were that it was great to finally see some publicity. The chairperson, though, had one critique: “I wish she [referring to the woman at the paper that drafted the blurb] would have left out the Arabic names,” referring to the end of article which lists the nationalities represented at St. Mary’s as Jordanian, Lebanese, Palestinian, and Syrian. An older American-born member of the committee was also

²¹⁵ The majority of Antiochian-sponsored festivals are titled “Mediterranean.” Part of the reason is that many Antiochian Orthodox parishes have Greek Orthodox members as well. But this is also the result of continuing U.S. engagements with the Arab world, which positions “Mediterranean” as more desirable, and less “other,” than Arab or Middle Eastern. Deborah Lupton (1994) talks about the consumption of ethnic food as being linked to a “cosmology” of how the consumer perceives and defines the boundaries between “Self and Other” (666). But what is interesting in the case of St. Mary’s Sahara Fest, is that they eventually used “Mediterranean” to describe the food and “Middle Eastern” to describe the music in their weekly church bulletin, which is distributed only to church members. In the weeks leading up to the festival, the back page of the bulletin featured a “Festival News” alert that said the festival would “feature both Middle Eastern and American entertainment” as well as “food booths presenting the best of Mediterranean cuisine.” Additionally, Middle Eastern and Mediterranean foods have been marketed as healthful. Gabaccia (1998) speaks briefly about the rise of counterculture groups in the 1970s and the push for healthier vegan and vegetarian fare, and how this played out in ethnic festivals and cookbooks (214). This is important for Antiochian Orthodox who, because of their strict religious fasting guidelines, have a plethora of vegan and vegetarian dishes. For example, an Antiochian parish in New York recently advertised their annual “Mediterranean Festival” as offering “heart healthy food” and the proceeds from the festival were donated to a local hospital’s Heart Center. Even as far back as 1991, church-sponsored food festivals were touted as healthy. Press coverage for the 1991 St. George [Pittsburgh, PA] “Middle East Food Fair” explained that “The nutritionists’ increased emphasis on incorporating complex carbohydrates like grains and vegetable proteins like dried beans and peas into the American diet makes Middle Eastern food a good choice. For example, kibbeh combines either lamb or lean beef with bulgur, which provides fiber. Other healthy staples of the Middle Eastern diet are yogurt, or laban, which many of the St. George women make from scratch, and olive oil” (Suzanne Martinson, “Middle Eastern Food Fair Taps Diversity of Cracked Wheat,” *The Pittsburgh Press*, September 18, 1991).

concerned and thought any publicity should “leave the Middle East out” because it might turn people off. The people he was referring to were the non-Antiochians and the non-Arabs that the committee was intent on attracting in order to have a more financially successful festival.

This newspaper blurb was the impetus to continue debating the intended audience of the festival: is it “our community,” or a more general audience? “We cannot stay within our community,” asserted one of the immigrant members at a later meeting, “It will die. We are only 2000 families.” These discussions and negotiations on how to market the Sahara Fest did not take place until the weeks leading up to opening day, mostly because this was the time when they were writing advertisements and sending them to local weeklies. Between the first blurb, though, and the printing of the full-page, color ads in numerous weekly newspapers, the advertising deployed a much more direct cultural identity. The half-page newspaper ads allowed more detail and more text, which brought out the “ethnic” nature of the festival by listing the types of food that would be sold and the names of the musical performers, almost all of whom were Arab. The ad contained the same logo as the poster, but whereas the poster announced “Food, Rides, and Live music,” the newspaper ad proclaimed “Carnival Rides, Middle Eastern Food, Music & Dancing.” Under the logo the specifics of the festival were listed under the heading “Middle East Food”: “Find a delicious assortment of Middle Eastern cuisine including: Chicken Shawarma, Beef Shawarma, Falafel, Taboulie, Hummus, Zalabieh.”²¹⁶

²¹⁶ An early draft of this ad, where the wording was composed mostly by the newspaper staff based on the Arab media organization’s press release, listed “cultural foods” instead of “Middle Eastern.” At the committee meeting where we reviewed the draft of the ad I asked, “What are cultural foods?” One of the American-born members, who has been preparing food for the church’s festivals for decades said that it



Figure 5-5 Sahara Fest poster. These posters were placed on telephone poles and in local businesses throughout Livonia.

In addition, the festival was being advertised by Arab Detroit, which was run by a church member. The media organization sent a press release to major Detroit newspapers, posted an announcement for the festival on their website, and emailed announcements to its massive email list. The press release stated that the Sahara Fest “features authentic Arabic food” and quoted Fr. George as saying, “We welcome all...as we celebrate our

should read “Mediterranean or Middle Eastern.” Everyone else agreed. The newspaper’s listing of “cultural foods” on the ad in the first place sort of forced the hand of the committee to come up with their own description of the ethnic cuisine they were offering. In fact, this same meeting had a brief discussion over the proper way to spell *kibbee*, showing that the committee had not previously given much thought to the marketing of the cultural component, mostly because it was a given within the community. It was not until the committee consciously considered the non-community festival attendees that the discussions turned to the marketing of cultural identity.

heritage and culture.’’ Whether they intended to or not, the festival committee was now promoting an ethnic/cultural festival. The question was no longer whether or not to advertise the Arabness of the Sahara Festival; rather, the concern was now *how* to do it. At the meetings directly before and following the festival, the areas that received the most focus were food and music, namely, whether or not to have American music in addition to Arabic, and which types of food would sell best to both “our community” and “Americans” or “white people.”

So what does it mean for Antiochian Orthodox to hold an Arab-themed festival in the middle of the whitest “big city” in the U.S., which is a suburb of one of the blackest cities, and only minutes away from one of the largest populations of Arabs in the country? This positionality adds to an already complex Arab Christian engagement with whiteness. As Sawsan Abdulrahim (2008) argues based on her ethnographic evidence, “Arab immigrants in Detroit and Dearborn engage in different, even contradictory, racial identity formations” in relation to whiteness (136).²¹⁷ She argues that “the process through which Arab immigrants form racial identities is highly subjective,” (145) and I would add highly contextual. The location in Livonia, which is coded as white and middle-class, as opposed to the city of Detroit, which is coded as black and working class, makes the position of the parishioners of St. Mary’s quite unique.

The committee members did see a divide between their community of Arab and Arab American Antiochians and their non-Arab and non-Antiochian Orthodox neighbors. It was not that the committee saw themselves as non-white, it was just that they saw themselves as something distinct, and perhaps more specific than the white people who

²¹⁷ According to the DAAS, only two individuals, out of the more than 1,000 Arabs and Chaldeans that were interviewed, identified as black (Shryock and Lin 2009, 57).

lived all around them in the suburbs of Detroit.²¹⁸ The Arab American Christian community in greater Detroit, like Arab American Christians in general, has a complex relationship with identifying racially as white. Even though Arabs are legally white, as Lisa Majaj says, they are “popularly perceived as non-white” (2000). According to the Detroit Arab American Study (DAAS), 73% of Arab Christians in Metro Detroit identify primarily as white (Shryock and Lin 2009, 56). But in the context of the festival, as a public celebration of Arabness and a claim to cultural authenticity, the parishioners of St. Mary’s see their neighbors in Livonia as unmarked white and see themselves as Arab or Orthodox or something slightly different. To be authentic is to be “other,” especially within liberal multiculturalism that celebrates difference, but only if that difference is within the “limits of tolerance” for multiculturalism (Povinelli 2002, 12).²¹⁹ Being culturally Arab *and* Christian, as I showed in the previous two chapters, certainly falls within those limits.

The ethnographic evidence also suggests that although the parishioners of St. Mary’s are active members of the Arab American community, the general public does not always see them as Arab. Antiochians in southeastern Michigan vocalize how they blend in because of their Christian religious identity. Fr. George says that, “Don’t forget at least in general public you do not distinguish an Orthodox from an Italian, but you can distinguish a Muslim by his habit.” And a member of the festival committee asserts that

²¹⁸ Perhaps it is worth mentioning here that on numerous occasions I was referred to as a “white guy,” both in festival meetings and at the festival, highlighting my situation as both an insider (a member of the Antiochian Church with Arab heritage) and an outsider (not a member of their parish and not visibly Arab enough, especially my last name, and my position as a researcher from the University of Michigan). Rather than dwell on this fact, I only want to mention its relevance to the discussion on the marketing of the festival and the committee’s concerns with perception.

²¹⁹ In Lowe’s study of a multicultural festival in L.A., she says that the festival organizers presented “authenticity” as being things “located outside of the city, both temporally and geographically ‘other’” to the contemporary portrait of L.A. (1996, 87).

“When [people] see St. Mary’s, they think it’s a Catholic church. They don’t think of it as an Arabic church.”

It is not my aim to generalize about this complex positioning of religio-cultural in relation to whiteness, but I can assert that the public nature of the festival forces the articulation of community boundaries and identities. Consider the following exchange between some of the committee members at the meeting following the festival. During the festival there was a “casino tent” that was contracted out to a local gaming company. The church has used the company in the past for other fundraisers, and had established an agreement where the church receives a certain percentage of the casino’s take. This year, however, the casino was actually a loss and the committee blamed cheaters and suggested that some of the dealers were crooked. One of the American-born committee members said it was “white people” that were the cheaters. Another member, a Lebanese immigrant, said, “Not *white people*, we are all white people.” “O.k.,” the first member said, “Americans.” This statement yielded the same response from other members, that they, too, were Americans. “O.k.,” said the first member again, “strangers to our community.” “Strangers to our community” is what was meant by the terms “Americans” and “white people” all along. Even though in this case it seemed that the usage of “American” or “white people” was derogatory, implying that the non-Arab or non-Antiochian attendees were crooked gamblers, the usage of the terms were simply a means of differentiating the two types of consumers at the festival, in-group and out-group.

Is it an Arab *and* American festival? Negotiations of Music and Food

Highlighting one of the tensions throughout the planning and production of the festival, the director of Arab Detroit emailed the committee in the days after the festival,

offering some suggestions for improvement. The first suggestion was to have two separate tents: one for Arabic music and one for American music. This simple suggestion fed into a firestorm of discussion at the meeting following the festival. There were two camps in the committee, those who wanted to see an equal share of Arabic and American music in order to reach a larger audience, and those members that wanted the festival to mainly serve the Antiochian community. Except for some top forty-style music that was played through an iPod in between bands, and two bands that played American music (one played rock and roll and one played standards such as Frank Sinatra), the entire festival consisted of popular and traditional Arabic music. The debates surrounding the music issue reflected the anxieties around the marketing and promotion of the festival, which was inherently tied to who the committee understood to be “our community” and who they viewed as “Americans” or “white people.” The suggestions for changing the next year’s festival ranged from playing American music in between the Arabic bands (“If you have an Arabic band and then have an American DJ at the break, *al-Arab* will stick around”), to playing Arabic music at night and American music during the afternoon, to having two separate stages, and the extremes of having no American music, no Arabic music, or no music at all. The fact that a twelve person committee could cultivate this many alternatives is a testament to the importance of this issue to the life of the festival.

One of the few times where I actually spoke up during one of the meetings, was to try to come to a resolution over the type and amount of music to have at the festival. My question to the committee brought the discussion away from the details over the music, the placement of the stage, and the kinds of audiences they were hoping to attract and

forced a step back to consider what should have been a basic structuring question: what type of festival was this? I spoke up, saying that in all of the meetings and in all of the promotional material, it doesn't seem clear what kind of festival they intended to host. Earlier in the meeting one committee member suggested that there should be more of a religious element to the festivities. Was it a religious festival? Some committee members wanted only Arabic music. Was it a cultural festival? Was it even intended for non-Antiochians? The heated debate over balancing the amount of Arab music with American music demonstrated that these questions needed to be answered. I, rightly, prefaced my question to the committee by saying, "As an outsider to the church and the festival..." I was genuinely concerned that the festival would not continue to be successful until the committee first decided upon a festival theme or goal, other than to make money for the proposed youth and outreach center.

One of the lifelong members of the parish and head "griller" agreed with my question. I immediately felt vindicated, or actually relieved, because it was the only time that I threw myself into the fray. A younger but very active committee member answered my question: "We named it Sahara Fest because we didn't want it to be religious so we could have a larger audience." Still, this did not resolve the fact that a majority of the committee, including Fr. George, wanted to see more American music at the festival, which they thought would give them a larger draw.

The 2009 Sahara Fest did make almost twice as much as the previous year, but still nowhere near the amount the committee had hoped to see.²²⁰ Part of the problem,

²²⁰ Newspaper coverage of the 2008 festival was very positive. The Detroit *Free Press* published a feature article about the festival. The paper reported that there were 4,000 to 5,000 festival attendees over the three days (Alex Kellogg, "Counting on Fun: Three-Day Festival Raises Funds for St. Mary Antiochian Church in Livonia," *Detroit Free Press*, August 3, 2008).

according to one member, was that the people in the neighborhoods surrounding the church grounds, mostly middle and upper middle class white people, did not patronize the festival. His explanation for this rested on the fact that there was too much Arabic music and that it was too loud.²²¹ A member of the parish, a convert and a dedicated church office worker, said that an American DJ would help draw the “local kids,” as in non-Arab, to the festival. “I’ve been in this community since I was 15,” she spoke candidly, “and I still don’t like the music.” The negotiations surrounding music demonstrate, more than any other issue, just how diverse the committee is, as representatives of the equally diverse Antiochian Orthodox parish: recent Arab immigrants, second and third generation Arab Americans, and non-Arab converts. The music debates signal the difficulty in presenting a religio-cultural community as a monolithic collection of adherents. The debates surrounding food and its presentation were less heated but still reflective of the committee’s unsure relationship between how they see themselves, their audience, and their festival.

Although there was never any question that the food would be Middle Eastern, there were some negotiations over the types of food that would be appropriate to a summer festival and to attracting a larger non-Arab or non-Antiochian audience. One such discussion was whether or not to sell salads, such as *tabbouli* or *fattoush*. The first debate was which type of salad to sell. It was decided that non-Arabs are more familiar with *tabbouli*. But *tabbouli* is very time consuming to make. The committee assumed that

²²¹ A local police officer told him that their station received 300 hundred calls about the noise during the four-day festival, which typically blasted Arabic music until close to midnight. The entire committee collectively agreed that the noise level would have to be reduced for next year. But one wonders if there was American music reverberating throughout the neighborhoods if there would have been as many complaints. Given the sleepy, suburban setting, there probably would have been just as many, but the volume of complaints added to the anxieties that the committee already had about how the church community was perceived by outsiders.

the Ladies' Society, to which the burden of chopping the parsley and tomatoes would fall, would not be willing to take on the additional work, since they were already making *kibbee* and *zalabia*. The final argument was that salads are not good festival food. They are messy, you really can't eat them standing up, and are difficult to refrigerate. One of the members in charge of food preparation said, "In the atmosphere of the festival, salad may not be the best. Hummus is enough."²²²

The rest of the food choices were standard Middle Eastern café and restaurant fare, and would be familiar to most of the surrounding communities: *falafel*, *shawarma*, and *kafta*. The committee said that they received many compliments on the sandwiches in 2008, so they would keep that part of the menu the same. The entire menu was pretty straightforward and included items, such as *kibbee* and spinach and meat pies, that anyone who has ever eaten at a Middle Eastern restaurant would recognize. Especially because the greater Detroit area has dozens of Middle Eastern-themed restaurants, it was assumed that many of the festival attendees would be familiar with the menu. This was a big advantage that St. Mary's had over churches in other areas of the country, like Kansas or West Virginia, where there is not a sizeable Arab population. The menu did not need to have the kind of "translations" that were necessary at Antiochian festivals in the past, when Middle Eastern food became part of the ethnic food craze of the 1970s, or at festivals in areas without continual Arab immigration. For example, at church festivals in western Pennsylvania in the 1970s, at the heart of the nation's nascent fascination with

²²² One amusing and telling decision regarding food service involved the lemonade stand. The lemonade stand in previous years was operated by the teen youth group and was known for having less-than-consistent quality. It had potential to be a big money maker, though, so the committee was intent on keeping it for the 2009 festival. As long as there was better supervision of the teenagers, the committee felt that it was worth keeping. Besides, as the chairperson stated, "white people love lemonade."

exotic and ethnic cuisine, the foods had to be “translated” and explained. For the Altoona, PA, church’s *hafli* in 1971, the local newspaper reported that the “exotic menu” would offer, among other things, “kew-bee [*kibbee*], spiced baked ground meat with dried wheat” as well as “laham bil-ajeen [meat pies], meat tarts baked in butter” and “baklawa, a many layered pastry filled with nuts” for dessert.²²³ By virtue of location, the majority of this translation work was unnecessary for the St. Mary’s Sahara Fest.²²⁴

The quality and taste of the food was a major concern during and after the festival, especially the concern about how other Arab and Lebanese Christians may receive the food offerings. The committee did compare themselves to other Arab American and Lebanese festivals in the area, as far as the quality of the sandwiches served and their price. One committee member commented on the *shawarma* sandwiches served at a different church-sponsored Lebanese festival that occurred a few weeks after the Sahara Fest, saying that “the bread was dry and brittle,” even though their sandwiches were a little cheaper. Another committee member commented that their food was not as good because some of it was store bought and not handmade.

A final point about how the food and the presentation of the food at the festival was indicative of how the committee envisioned its relationship with the larger community, is the alcohol service. The festival included a well-stocked bar that served premium mixed drinks, on-tap beers, and wine. The bar is always a big money maker.

²²³ “Grand Party Plans Underway by Church Group,” *Altoona Mirror*, March 22, 1971.

²²⁴ The only item on the menu for the Sahara Fest that may have needed translation was *zalabia*. Having grown up eating Lebanese-style food, even I was unaware of what this was. I knew it was a dessert because of its categorization on the menu, but I had never been exposed to this food. I figured if I didn’t know what it was, chances are non-Antiochians and especially non-Arab festival goers would not either. Perhaps under *zalabia* on the menu, the committee could have printed “fried dough balls” or some kind of description that may have expedited their sale among non-Arab attendees. This minor point is just another example of how the committee would further need to determine the kind of festival they were hosting and the audience they attended to reach.

Not once did any committee member raise the concern that having such a prominently displayed bar (in the middle of the main tent) would alienate fellow Arab, but Muslim, festival attendees. With so much attention to what “white people” or “Americans” might think about Sahara Fest, no consideration was given to the how the very large Arab Muslim population in the area might perceive the festival. The Arab Muslims were certainly not excluded from the festival, and it was assumed that the vast array of Arabic musical performances would appeal to Arabs of all faiths, but there was never any distinct discussion about the inclusion/exclusion of Muslims.

But the fact that the festival attendees would be mostly Arab sparked the negotiations on which vendors to include, showing how the committee viewed its festival as part of a larger Arab American community. During one of the final meetings before the festival, the member in charge of vendors brought before the committee an offer from a local Lebanese organization to display their banner at the festival. Though they would pay as a vendor the table would not be “manned”; they would instead hang their banner from one of the ten foot tables, or place literature on the table. Though this did cause some objection, because the committee wanted the vendors’ space to be reserved for groups actually selling goods and services, the main problem the committee had was the nature of the organization. The organization had the same name as a leftist political group in Lebanon.²²⁵ The discussion became heated very quickly, especially among the Lebanese immigrant members. One member said that in Lebanon the group is associated with Hizballah. “Leave me out of this festival,” one member cautioned if the approved the display of their banner. “We will offend a lot of people,” he said, referring to

²²⁵ I cannot name the organization because the committee considered the conversation surrounding the decision to be privileged information.

Lebanon's contentious and violent political history and the fact that the Detroit area is home to one of the largest Lebanese populations in the nation. Another immigrant member then explained that since the festival represented an Arab American organization (the church), "with all that entails," the committee should really consider if it wants to be directly associated with Middle East politics. This reflects the two larger populations that St. Mary's belongs to: the greater Detroit area of mostly suburban white people and the larger Arab American community in all of its diversity. It was decided that they would not allow the banner to be displayed, and that the check should be returned to the organization. Later in the meeting the chairperson joked about the heated discussion of the "Lebanese terrorist group," but the dilemma demonstrated the precarious position the members of St. Mary find themselves in with regard to marketing themselves both as American and Arab.

For marketing and planning purposes, knowing that the festival serves both as a celebration of Antiochian Arabness and a fundraiser hoping to target as wide an audience as possible is crucial. The festival space itself reflected the difficulty in planning and executing something that is being widely marketed as a public, family-friendly summer festival, but popularly perceived as an Arab *hafli*.

Outcomes and Futures

The committee was obviously doing something right, as the four day festival grossed nearly \$50,000.²²⁶ Because of the high overhead and costs, the net amount was significantly less, and much lower than the committee was hoping. Other fundraisers that

²²⁶ Plus, measuring the success in non-monetary terms, one of the committee chairpersons said at a post-festival meeting, "Arab are complainers, so it says a lot that everyone enjoyed the festival," and offered only positive feedback.

the church holds, like the annual Ladies Society “Fashion Show,” which can net \$10,000 in one night, take less overall work. Besides the fact that Michigan’s economy was particularly bad in 2009, and that the weather was not exactly summer-like for the majority of the festival, both contributing to smaller than expected crowds, the committee and Fr. George know that they have more work to do for future festivals and are not going to give up. Even if the money never gets staggeringly high, they understand that the festival is about fellowship and opening the doors to the community, or, in other words, about “visibility” and “viability” (Mannur 2007). “We are doing this [festival] to grow for the future,” commented a member of the committee as well as a member of the Ladies Society. One of the main food preparers said that the festival was worth it because “it’s not just money—it’s fellowship,” and the co-chairperson said, rallying the troops after the long four-day weekend, “The festival takes so much [effort], but it gives so much.” What the festival gives is a public, playful space where church members can celebrate their religious and cultural identity through food and music and make a little bit of money at the same time. As uncritical as this analysis may seem, Fr. George’s long history of politicized action on behalf of Arabs supports my claim that Antiochians selectively participate in multiculturalism by separating their politicized action from the culturally essentialist claims to authenticity.

Fr. George tirelessly supports the role of the festival in the life of the church, and not only as a fundraiser. He says, “I think the festival can reach out to others. It is really a ministry to others. As noisy as we are, as unorganized as we are, but we invite the neighbors here.” Fr. George then says that the festival is a great “cultural awareness” because “that’s the only way you can be known in any community.” Being known and

being visible is certainly a main function of an ethnic festival within liberal multiculturalism. But for Fr. George, celebrating with and around food is also a vital part of the religious life of Antiochian Orthodox Christians. He eloquently says that food “links people together. Throughout the Gospel, it was centered around food. And when they didn’t have food, Jesus would ask them to bring what they have, and he multiplied it. Because that is the essence of fellowship...around the meal. In Arabic, it says when you share your bread and salt with someone, you begin to share their life. You cement a relationship.”²²⁷ The Sahara Fest is called upon to perform many different tasks: food, fellowship, fundraising, and faith.

At the series of meetings following the festival to discuss what went right and what could be fixed for the next year, one major issue concerned the timing of the festival and its connection to the Orthodox religion. One of the main food preparers on the committee brought up the idea of having the festival during the same weekend as one of the major “Feast Days” of the Orthodox Church, the Feast of the Holy Dormition of the Mother of God, in mid-August. This is the feast day of the patron saint of the parish, St. Mary. This committee member wanted to incorporate the religious aspect into the festival. At the 2009 festival, there was really no religious element, other than the fact that Fr. George presided over a few prayers and blessings throughout the festival. There were no formal tours of the impressive church building because there were weddings on each weekend night, and there was no distribution of literature about the church or the

²²⁷ During a June 2009 phone interview with Fr. Anthony Sabbagh of St. George in Allentown, PA, he made the same point about the festival being a connection to a “Christian ethic,” since Christ celebrated over food with his disciples.

faith, except for the sponsorship letters that detailed the youth and community center that was to be funded in part with the proceeds from the festival.²²⁸

As with every other detail about the festival, a discussion ensued about the date for the festival, and whether the celebration should incorporate the faith. The two counter arguments to including the feast day were both financially based. First, a later summer date of August instead of July would mean less attendees, because there would have been too many festivals by then and the novelty of a summer festival would have worn off. Further, one committee member was adamant that the religious element be left out in order to secure a larger audience. The member who proposed including a religious aspect seemed to be in the minority opinion, until two weeks later when the festival committee received an e-mail from the priest. It begins with hopeful praise for the committee:

Greetings and best wishes. Words cannot express the gratitude of our parish and my personal appreciation for your tireless effort during our annual festival. Every year we are improving on the previous year which says there is a great potential for growth. What makes this festival unique is that it celebrates the joy we have received from our culture and our faith as Orthodox Christians in the midst of this diverse community.

Fr. George then offers his own suggestion regarding the timing of next year's festival and the incorporation of a religious element:

I would like to ask, if it is at all possible, that the festival be held on an annual basis during the Feast of the Holy Dormition of the Mother of God. Next year it would fall, if we went 4 days, exactly from Aug. 12th–Aug. 15th. By doing this, it

²²⁸ At most Orthodox church-sponsored ethnic festivals that I have attended (both Greek and Antiochian) there are almost always guided tours of the sanctuary, or at least an open house. This is an important part of the festival for many of these churches, because besides making money, the purpose of the festival is to showcase their faith and culture, which is especially important in an Arab Orthodox context, because not only is the Arab culture typically mis-understood, but the Orthodox Christian faith is also tends to be mis-understood in the U.S. St. Mary's had opened up the church to the public during previous festivals, but could not give tours during the 2009 Sahara Fest because of weddings and other services that were occurring simultaneously.

is not only the fellowship we enjoy, but a reinforcement of what we treasure—faith and culture.²²⁹

Fr. George's proposal was debated at length for months following the 2009 Sahara Fest. Ultimately the committee decided to have the 2010 festival over the feast day weekend. One of the major deciding factors is that because the feast day falls during a "fast period" in the church, that there would be no weddings to interfere with church tours or parking for the festival, because the Orthodox Church prohibits weddings during fast periods. The committee sees no apparent contradiction with holding a festival during a time of fasting in the religious life of the church. It seems that individual members can still uphold the fast in the manner that they choose, even if they do it while servings hundreds of *shawarma* sandwiches to the Metro Detroit communities.

The debate about the religious element shows that, above all else, the parishioners of St. Mary's Antiochian Orthodox Basilica are concerned with their religious faith. I end this dissertation with an investigation of the main purpose of the space of the church for Antiochian Orthodox: to serve as the site of the spiritual and doctrinal engagement. The final chapter takes up the questions of how this spiritual engagement intersects with the themes of Holy Land and homeland, and how Antiochian parishioners envision themselves religiously as authentic Christians.

²²⁹ The kind of festival that Fr. George is proposing would be similar to the "Festa Italiana" that Anthony Rauche (1998) explores in his essay, because of the possibility of incorporating liturgical services into the festival calendar. The 2009 Sahara Festival did not incorporate, or even allow time off for, liturgical services. The festival ran all evening Saturday (during the traditional Vespers time slot) and all Sunday morning. Sunday Divine Liturgy was still held, but festival workers could not attend both the festival and liturgy. Another note about the "faith and culture" line is that Fr. George said almost the same thing during an interview at the 2008 festival that was put onto a DVD, showcasing the 2008 festival and distributed to sponsors to show them how their support was utilized.

CHAPTER 6

A “New Antioch”: The Holy Land and Authentic Christianity

The biblical verse from Acts 11:26, which states that Antioch is where followers of Christ were first called Christians, gets deployed by Antiochian Orthodox as evidence of their connection to the Holy Land and a claim to the one, true, unchanging Christian Church. The verse from Acts 11:26 appears on the official letterhead for the archdiocese, as well as the front page of the weekly bulletin at St. Mary’s Basilica in Livonia, where it is written in both English and Arabic script (Figure 6-1). This verse, and the tradition and heritage that has been created around the Antiochian provenance, is vitally important to the religious identity of the parishioners.

What is crucial about this connection to the Holy Land, and the labeling of the archdiocese as the New Antioch, is that it is constant.²³⁰ The cultural identity or the language use of the parishioners may fade or adapt to new contexts, especially in light of the growing number of non-Arab converts to the faith. But the claims to an authentic Christianity have not and will not change. The politicized and humanitarian support for the homeland, namely Lebanon and Palestine, has changed throughout the years as well. Even though the archdiocese and its members continually contribute to the causes of social justice in the Middle East through their voices, their actions, and their donations, the evolving makeup of the archdiocese has spread the loyalties of the membership to

²³⁰ The idea of the archdiocese in the U.S. as being the “New Antioch” was really solidified with the visit of Patriarch Elias IV from Syria in 1977, which I detailed in chapter 2.

causes in other parts of the world. I believe that Palestine and Lebanon will always be at the heart of the archdiocese, though, not only because of the strong familial ties to the region, but because the religious anchor—the Holy Land— will always be in the Middle East regardless of where the members and their ancestors are from.

Further, there is an ongoing transnational affiliation with the Holy Land that continually connects the parishioners in the U.S. with the hierarchs in Damascus, Syria (the current See of Antioch). It is more than a spiritual connection to some abstract Holy Land. The Metropolitan, bishops, and select priests regularly travel to the Middle East to meet with the Patriarch and the Holy Synod to weigh in on decisions that affect the faith and the Church in the U.S. As part of its Task Force to the Holy Land, the Church in the U.S. has also been actively involved in protecting and building the Arab Orthodox faith in Palestine and Jordan, often against, in the case of Palestine, what the Church labels as Zionist encroachment.²³¹ Finally, priests that are trained at the Balamand Orthodox Theological Seminary in Lebanon continue to arrive in the U.S. and serve Antiochian parishes. The religious connections to the Holy Land keep the spirit of the biblical Antioch alive, but, unlike most U.S. Christian imaginings of the Holy Land (as I will discuss below), they are also grounded in the current social, political, and religious realities of the contemporary Middle East.

²³¹ Especially in the late 1990s, the archdiocese in the U.S. was very vocal against the dominance of the Greek Orthodox Church within the Patriarchate of Jerusalem. Some of the complaints against the Greeks included the sale of Church land to Israel and the “ethnic exclusionary policies and practices” of the Greek hierarchs against Arab Orthodox Christians (Schmemmann 1998 and Boullata 1998, 13). As a result of the Holy Land Task Force (also known as the Jerusalem Task Force), the Antiochian Archdiocese was able to help open the first Arab Orthodox Church (as independent to Greek Orthodox Patriarch) in Amman, Jordan in 2001 (Boullata 2001).

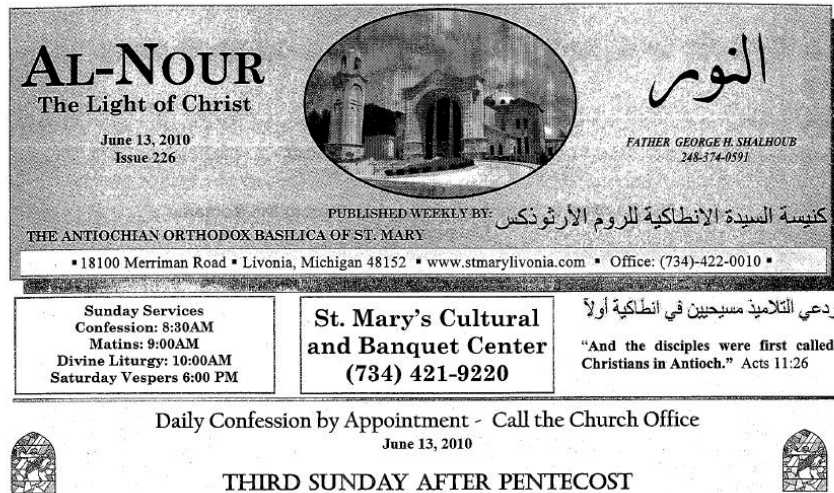


Figure 6-1 Front page from *Al-Nour*, the weekly bulletin at St. Mary's in Livonia. Notice use of Arabic and English.

The reason that I ended this dissertation with the religious constructions of Arabness is because the shared spiritual connection of the members of the Antiochian faith creates the strongest bond. Even if speaking Arabic, supporting Palestine, and eating *hummus* and *kibbee* are actions shared by the vast majority of the members (both Arab and non-Arab), and even though the festivals and the politicized action take place within the space of the church, it is the parishioners' shared connection to the divine that makes the other actions meaningful. The space of the church houses many diverse expressions of Arabness, but the religious annunciations of Arabness, especially through the constructs of ancient Antioch and the Holy Land, are the most potent. Further, the religious Arabness, more than a politicized or cultural Arabness, allows the growing number of non-Arab converts a more central place in the faith; the traditions, with a lower case 't', may be more meaningful to those with a shared ethnic heritage, but the Traditions, with a capital 'T', are the most meaningful to those with a shared faith. As a subdeacon at St. Mary's explains, "A tradition with a big 'T' is something like a dogma

of the church; the Trinity, the Virgin...things like that. Traditions with a little 't' are things like dyeing [Easter] eggs red, speaking a language in church and such things. So it's o.k. to lose the little 't's, but we can never lose the big 'T's." The connection to the Holy Land is a grounded Tradition that is not bound by a cultural identity, but envelops it.²³²

Since religion can trump constructions of cultural identity in the Antiochian archdiocese, even the non-Arab converts can be part of this heritage, especially as some parishes are majority non-Arab. Even if non-Arab converts and those non-Arabs born into the faith cannot claim an Arab cultural identity as a connection to the Holy Land, their membership in this authentic Christian faith is a direct connection to it. Consider the words of a non-Arab member of the clergy at St. Mary's in Livonia: "What I love about the Antiochian churches, and I'm so thankful that this is the church that my [dad] was ordained in, is because again it's scriptural [...] where were people first called Christians? In Antioch. I love this. This connection to Christianity, and there was a church established there at that time and now we have a patriarchate there. So I love that." But perhaps a female Arab immigrant parishioner stated it most succinctly: "As far as 'Holy Land'...people use it as bragging rights. We come from the holiest place in the world, where Jesus was born."

There is an entire cosmology of the faith in the U.S. that is constructed around the inherent Holy Land connections. The continued liturgical use of Arabic is one such connection. Even though Arabic was not the language of the Bible, it is the current language of the Middle Eastern Holy Land, and parishioners and clergy speak of its use

²³² This idea of tradition is popular in the Orthodox faith, and has also been similarly explained to me by Fr. Donald Shadid of St. Mary's in Johnstown, PA.

in these terms. The ordination of the patriarchs, bishops, and priests of the Antiochian archdiocese, a self-described apostolic faith, is also literally traced back to the Apostle Peter, who ordained Christianities first clergy in Antioch. Finally, the majority of members of the church, as I have shown in other parts of this dissertation, have ancestral connections to the contemporary Middle East, where Jesus, his Apostles, and the early “desert fathers” of the church lived and walked. All of these connections, namely the use of Arabic in church services, the line of succession of the faith’s hierarchy, the biblical provenance of the Book of Acts, and continued ancestral connection to the contemporary Middle East, form the basis of the claims to an authentic Christianity that serves to differentiate their faith within the crowded U.S. “religious marketplace” (Emerson and Smith 2000). This claim to an authentic Christianity is the heart of this chapter.

Antiochians and Their Holy Land

References to the Holy Land as the birthplace of the Orthodox faith are prevalent in Church publications, such as annual convention programs, *The Word* magazine, parish-produced commemorative booklets, and biographies of Metropolitan Philip Saliba. Even though discussions about, histories of, and references to the Christian Holy Land are probably found in any Christian denomination in the U.S., the Antiochian case is constructed as unique.²³³ The Holy Land figures prominently in historical accounts of the faith, such as narratives about the “desert fathers,” pictorials about the land of the Bible, or histories of the Patriarchs of the faith. What makes the Antiochian positioning of the

²³³ Although my work focuses on the Antiochian Orthodox, other groups of Christians from the Middle East tell similar stories and make similar claims to an authentic Christianity. These include Maronite and Melkite Catholics from Lebanon, Armenian Orthodox, Chaldeans from Iraq, and Coptic Catholics and Coptic Orthodox from Egypt. See Naber, Stiffler, Tayyen, and Said (2009) for an in-depth look at the claim to Christian authenticity in both the Antiochian Church and the Maronite Church in the U.S.

Holy Land different is that these histories are often told alongside, or as part of, histories of the migration of the faith and its adherents to the U.S. In a sense, the histories and stories of the Holy Land read almost like extended family histories, where the parishioners trace their ancestral roots to the Middle East, which inherently overlap with the development and history of the Christian faith. Sometimes deliberate, other times implied, this overlapping of family/religious history is usually found in the context of the retellings of the story of Antioch, as in the biblical city, and the development of Antiochian, as in the faith of the mostly Arab parishioners. Consider the following story told by a non-Arab member of St. Mary's in Livonia about the parishioners' connection to the Holy Land:

Well, I think to me that it plays out at Easter time, for Orthodox people because [...] during those services during [Holy Week] there is a service everyday leading up to the resurrection. There are some awfully emotional services and I think people really empathize with being there, with really being there with the string of people that were there. So I think there's a lot of emotion in this church and faith unlike some of the more western, distant traditions from the Holy land. [...] I think they view themselves as being relatives of the apostles [laughs], literally. [Father George] probably thinks he is closer to Christ than I am because of where he came from [laughs].²³⁴

I have already written about the rhetoric surrounding the first Antiochian Holy Year in 1977, when an Antiochian Patriarch visited the U.S. for the first time ever. Coming off the American Bicentennial celebration, this Holy Year celebrated the contributions to American Christianity that the Antiochian faithful had made and highlighted their continued authentic connections to the Holy Land. In 1985, the new Patriarch Ignatius IV made his first trip to North America, prompting the second Antiochian Holy Year. Much like 1977, the rhetoric was a mix of ethnic pride and a sense of renewed religious conviction as the “Chief Shepherd” of Eastern Orthodoxy made his

²³⁴ Interview conducted by Nadine Naber. See Naber, Stiffler, Tayyen, and Said (2009).

way from parish to parish across the continent, meeting with his “North American flock.”

²³⁵ Metropolitan Philip Saliba’s letter to the archdiocese on this momentous occasion emphasized the parishioners’ “precious inheritance, as spiritual descendants of those early believers” in Antioch, and how the Patriarch is the representative of those first Christians as “the one hundred sixty-fifth successor to the Antiochian Throne of the Holy Apostle Peter.” (I will discuss further the implications of this apostolic succession below).

The May 1985 issue of *The Word* was dedicated to the Antiochian Holy Year and includes histories of the Antiochian archdiocese in the U.S., biographies of the current bishops in the Middle East and Patriarch Ignatius IV, a brief biblical history of Antioch, and a list of the 165 Patriarchs of the faith since St. Peter. The rest of the issue includes the typical politicized and humanitarian engagements with the Middle Eastern homeland, such as a lengthy article in English and Arabic about the Standing Conference of American Middle East Christian and Muslim Leaders (see my chapter 2) and their recommendations about the war in Lebanon. The May 1985 issue also contained the typical maintenance of an Arab American cultural identity, such as a book review of Alixa Naff’s *Becoming American* (1985), and an announcement for the upcoming parish life convention, which would feature a “Grand Hafli” and a concert entitled “Echoes from the Middle East.” Though none of this is out of the ordinary, what is so fascinating is how all of these things are blended so seamlessly with the rhetoric of Antiochian Holy Year and the archdiocese’s role as a New Antioch.

²³⁵ These references are from Metropolitan Philip’s opening letter to the May 1985 issue of *The Word*, which also featured a stately photo of Patriarch Ignatius IV on the cover.

The idea of the Church in America as the establishment of a “new Antioch” fits the overlapping of religious and ancestral history that Antiochian leaders and parishioners emphasized. As Antioch was the birthplace of “Christians,” the Antiochian Archdiocese in the U.S. serves as the hub of the spiritual ancestors of these first Christians, but also serves as the archdiocese of a people who can trace their family heritage back for centuries to Syria, Jordan, Palestine, and Lebanon (which are places in the contemporary Middle East as well as ancient Christian hot spots). One of the more prominent examples of this melding of religion and ancestry is found in a poem written by Khalil Gibran, the famed Lebanese poet who has been adopted by the Antiochian Orthodox Church as an unofficial spokesman.²³⁶ His poem, titled “Young Americans of Syrian Origin, I Believe in You,” was reprinted, among other places, in the front of the 1968 archdiocese convention program book.²³⁷ The poem speaks at length about the contributions that Syrians (and Lebanese by default) have made to civilization in general (“I am a descendent of a people that builded [sic.] Damascus and Byblos, and Tyre and Sydon in Antioch”) and to Christianity specifically (“you should be proud that your mothers and fathers came from a land upon which God laid His gracious hand and raised His messengers”). Similar to my discussion of a cultural Arabness that developed within the context of liberal multiculturalism, the poem couches the connection to the Holy Land in terms of the U.S. context. Gibran references the role of the “young Syrians” in America

²³⁶ Quotes and poems by Gibran have appeared frequently in Church publications since the early decades of the twentieth century. Further, the Archdiocese’s museum at the Heritage and Learning Center in Bolivar, PA, has exhibited original letters and works by Gibran. St. Mary’s in Livonia reprinted this poem in 2002 in the front of the book that they produced for “Recognition Sunday,” during which they honor the graduates in the parish as well as those parishioners that have won awards or achieved milestones in their careers.

²³⁷ “A New Era: A Flame Rekindled.” 23rd Annual Convention of the Syrian Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese, Pittsburgh, PA. 1968. Heritage and Learning Center Archives, Antiochian Village, Bolivar, PA. This poem originally appeared in the first issue of *The Syrian World* in 1926.

on numerous occasions: “I believe that you are contributors to this new civilization” and that the young Syrians can “proudly lay as a gift upon the lap of America” the “ancient dream” of their “forefathers.”

The faith in America positions itself as the continuation of the faith of the “forefathers” or the “spiritual fathers,” which refers to both the actual immigrants that came to the U.S. in the late nineteenth century, as well as the early theologians, leaders, and writers that developed and maintained the faith in the Middle East. When the oldest Antiochian parishes tell the history of the founding their church in the U.S., these histories almost always begin with the names of the villages in Lebanon or Palestine that the earliest members came from, and often say something like “and they brought the ancient faith of their forefathers.” Histories of the archdiocese as a whole also begin with stories about the immigrants and the early Christians of the Holy Land, and both groups of people are seen as intricate to the progression of the faith. For example, in the authorized biography of Metropolitan Philip, Peter Gillquist, convert priest, historian, and prolific writer on issues of Orthodox Christianity, begins the book with the story of “the Church at Antioch.” After walking the reader through the history of Antioch as told in the Book of Acts, Gillquist writes that the Antiochian Patriarch is “represented in America” by the Antiochian Archdiocese, and that “[t]o this day, the Church of Antioch marches at the front of the column of Orthodox progress in seeking to bring America face to face with the changeless treasure of New Testament Christianity” (1991, 12–13). This “column of Orthodox progress” is most visibly represented by the priests and bishops in the new world who, by way of the line of succession of ordination, provide a living link to the ancient Holy Land.

Apostolic Succession and *abouna*

The spiritual fathers. The desert fathers. These are phrases that come up often in conversations with parishioners and in Church publications. The phrases refer to the early Christian theologians and religious leaders from the Middle East. For Arab Antiochian Christians the Middle East is not only the birthplace of Jesus, but the birthplace of their Orthodox Church as well as the birthplace of their ancestors. Most importantly, because of the documented “laying on of hands” by St. Peter and subsequent bishops, the leadership of the Church (patriarchs, bishops, priests, and deacons) is seen as literal and figurative descendants of Christ’s apostles and living connections to the homeland/ Holy Land.²³⁸ This authenticity of the priesthood plays out in the ways in which the priest is imbued with much of the authority of the Church.

The authority of the priest in the Orthodox faith is three fold. In the Orthodox Church he is canonically the only person that can preside over a Divine Liturgy, other than a bishop. Without the priest, the congregation is severely limited in the types of worship services that can be conducted. A deacon can lead some services in the absence of the priest, but may not preside over the consecration of the Eucharist, the most important element of the liturgy. As a young Orthodox congregant quipped, “Like having church on Sunday without Father George, that would never happen.” Second, the priest in the Orthodox Church is charged with maintaining the succession of ordination handed down from St. Peter. Finally, since the Divine Liturgy is inherently scriptural, the priest is seen as the bearer of the Word of God to the people. As Fr. George says of priests, “we

²³⁸ Antiochian historian and theologian Michel Najim writes that “Orthodox Churches...have the right to proclaim they belong to the Ancient Church founded by Jesus Christ, and to claim by a clear historical evidence that their Apostolic succession comes directly from the Apostles” (1995, 103).

live the scripture, because when I stand up on Sunday and I will preach my homily, I base it on the scripture. So it is a living dynamic within the model of the church.” The priests, as well as other clergy and hierarchs, perform their role as “living scripture” with the biblical and historical mandate to serve their congregations as a living representative of Christ through the apostles.

An occasional component of convention program books is a chronological listing of the ordination of all of the Patriarchs of Antioch traced through time back to St. Peter. For the 1972 convention program book, the list of the patriarchs was prefaced with the claim: “Many churches boast of their Apostolic foundations, but none more rightly than the Church of Antioch.”²³⁹ Since all of the priests in the archdiocese are still ordained through the laying on of hands by a bishop, who in turn can trace his ordination back to the patriarch, priests and bishops become part of this same biblical and apostolic provenance. Further, since Orthodox priests are able to marry, and the overwhelming majority does, their family indirectly becomes a part of this apostolic succession. Finally, the priest’s parishioners, who often view him as part of their family, also become part of this succession from St. Peter. The priest’s title is in fact, “father,” but in Arabic there is another dimension. Antiochian parishioners refer to their priest (or any priest for that matter) as *abouna* [our father]. One Orthodox parishioner at St. Mary’s sees Fr. George not only as a connection to the Word of God, but to the homeland and ancient Christianity. “O yes,” he says of Fr. George’s role, “it has more importance here because

²³⁹ It is important to note that all of the early Patriarchs of Antioch were Greek; it was not until 1899, with the election of Meletios II that a “native” Syrian became Patriarch. For the last hundred or so years all of the Patriarchs of Antioch have been either Syrian or Lebanese. See “Arab Patriarchs of Antioch” by Archbishop Michael Shaheen in the 1977 convention program book. Heritage and Learning Center Archives, Antiochian Village, Bolivar, PA. A version of the line of succession was also printed in the May 1985 issue of *The Word*.

we are far away from the Holy Land and the greatest thing that we have with us is Father George.” This claim to the Holy Land shapes the identity of the parishioners as authentic Christians and gives the archdiocese a distinguishing feature in the ever-crowded “religious marketplace” in America (Emerson and Smith 2000).

Besides the confluence of priest as spiritual father and extended family member, the language used to describe the faithful in the U.S. typically utilizes kinship terminology. When the Patriarch sends letters to the archdiocese in the U.S. or addresses the faithful during patriarchal visits, the phrase “spiritual children,” or some form of it, is often used to refer to the Antiochian parishioners in the U.S. It is also no coincidence that the term “cradle Orthodox” is used to describe someone who was born into the faith, as opposed to someone who has converted. The parishioners take seriously this charge that they are responsible for the lineage of Christianity in the U.S., much like the clergy maintains their lineage to St. Peter. In the prologue to the history of their parish, the members of St. John of Damascus Church in Dedham, MA, write that “As members of the Antiochian Orthodox Church, we became part of a direct line of believers who have struggled and sacrificed, from Antioch to America, to preserve, nourish, and pass on the true Word of God.”²⁴⁰

Another example of the connection of family history or ancestry with Christian authenticity can be found in the rhetoric surrounding the long-serving Metropolitan Philip Saliba. A full-page ad placed in the 1981 convention program book proclaims at the top

²⁴⁰ See page 3 of “Our History: Antiochian Orthodox Church of St. John of Damascus, 1907–1992.” Heritage and Learning Center Archives, Antiochian Village, Bolivar, PA. The language in this example, as with many of the other examples, allows room for the growing number of non-Arab converts to also be part of this “line of believers,” which is important because as much as there is an ever-present Arabness in the religious identity of the Antiochian Church, the shared belief in the faith is the most important element for membership.

of the page “A True Heritage” and details the Saliba family name’s connection to ancient Christianity. The ad reads in part:

Authentic history tells us the first people to have adopted the Christian faith at the time of Christ were the “SALIBAENS” (Protectors of the Cross).

Btegrin, Lebanon, is home is the home town from which Salibas throughout the world today take roots. For many past years, by tradition, a majority of the male natives enter the ministry of the Eastern Orthodox Church.

This historical account of a famous Orthodox family’s connection to the ancient Christian faith ties in directly to the listing of the Patriarchs that appear periodically in the convention program books and in *The Word* magazine. By connecting Metropolitan Philip Saliba to this provenance, the entire archdiocese becomes, because Metropolitan Philip is after all their collective “father,” a part of this “True Heritage.” Similarly, at the front of the definitive biography of Saliba is an illustrated map of Lebanon and Syria, with major cities (both ancient and contemporary) plotted on it. Among these major cities, though, is “Abou Mizan” in Lebanon, which in parentheses says “Birthplace of Metropolitan Philip Saliba” (Gillquist 1991). The map also features “Antioch of Syria” and Damascus. Saliba is literally mapped on to both the history of Christianity and the geography of the Holy Land.

A final example of the deployment of kinship terminology in the context of establishing a connection to an authentic Christianity through the Holy Land, comes from an old “anthem” that members of the SOYO (originally the Syrian Orthodox Youth Organization), sang at yearly archdiocese conventions.²⁴¹ The anthem was originally written in Arabic, but was translated into English. The first stanza declares, “Everyone asks about us—what people we are, what religion we have. We were born in glory, for

²⁴¹ SOYO was changed to the Society of Orthodox Youth Organizations in 1970 one year after “Syrian” was dropped from the archdiocese’s title.

illustrious truth.” Part of that glory stems from the fact that, according to the anthem, “History registered for us glory to the whole world; Prophets of faith came from us, and the lights of all religion.” In reference to these “Prophets of faith,” the anthem ends, “they are in spirit with us and we shall always be their good children.”²⁴² This anthem from one of the oldest and most active archdiocesan organizations highlights all of the themes of my investigation of the cache that the idea of and rhetoric of the Holy Land can have in the Antiochian context. The anthem claims a primary connection to the creation of Christianity, and refers to the current parishioners’ role in the continuation of the faith in familial terms (as children). The only thing missing in this anthem is a stanza about the contributions of Arabs or Orthodox to the building of America as a great nation, as much of literature produced in a festival context includes, but the references to “History” having granted them “glory,” and the fact that this anthem was written for and was being sung in the American context, seems to imply that very idea.

The Rhetorical Holy Land

Whereas references to the Middle East in the marketing of a festival are playful and are mostly drawn from U.S. popular culture and the legacy of Islamic imagery in *Arabian Nights*, the references to the Middle Eastern Holy Land in the religious context are grounded in the Bible, and are thus more serious than playful. But both instances make claims to an authenticity and both occur in a U.S. context and function as representational practices. As I have shown, the marketing of an cultural Arabness through food and music plays *to* the expectations of an American public familiar with the

²⁴² “Compiled Publications of the North American Council Society of Orthodox Youth Organizations, Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese.” Prepared by John Roman, July 1977. Heritage and Learning Center Archives, Antiochian Village, Bolivar, PA.

deployment of and commodification of cultural identity in multiculturalism. In the specific case of Arab identity, the marketing had to be drawn from recognizable and stereotypical images of Arabs and the Middle East in order to be successful. In the case of the deployment of a religious Arabness though, one that makes claims to an authentic Holy Land Christianity, Antiochians are playing *up* the expectations of popular American discourses. In other words for Arab Christians to not only proclaim a Christian identity, which in itself goes against the grain of popular expectations of Arabs, but to make claims to the one, true Christian Church descendent from the Apostles in the city of Antioch, flies directly in the face of popular discourses that see Arabs as Muslim only. Moreover, Antiochian claims to a true Christian lineage disrupt popular constructions of the European settlers in the U.S. as the “continuation of the ‘universal’ (Christian) principles” of the Middle Eastern Holy Land (Greenburg 1991). The deployment of this religious Arabness is a representational practice that attempts to “privilege” in the minds of Americans (Hall 1997) the idea that Arabs can be Christians and in fact can be true and authentic Christians.²⁴³

The U.S. fascination with the Holy Land in a religious context arose hand in hand with the popularity of the peoples and cultures of the Middle East in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. Melani McAlister has argued that the Middle East, as a land of religious origins, has become a “powerful site of affiliation not only for Jews and Arabs but also for others—African American Muslims, fundamentalist Christians,

²⁴³ Amira Jarmakani (2008) lists that “constructions in U.S. popular imagination” have figured the Middle East in various ways, “at times characterized as a backward, primitive region full of squabbling peoples and tribes, at times heralded as the cradle of (western) civilization, or the geographical home of the Christian Holy Land, and at times remembered for its mysterious and fantastical tales filled with genies, concubines, and despotic intrigue, as recounted in *Arabian Nights*” (11). As I have shown here and in my chapters discussion the marketing of a cultural Arabness in the context of food festivals, Antiochians attempt to privilege the “Holy Land” and the images of the *Arabian Nights* through their self-representational practices.

and amateur Egyptologists, among them—who have claimed the spaces and histories of the Middle East as their own” (2005, 3). I would argue that, in the realm of Christianity, Antiochian Orthodox believe they have the most valid claim to the Middle East as Holy Land. But McAlister shows that in the twentieth century, fundamental Christianity’s growing infatuation with the role of Israel in the Holy Land and their belief in Bible prophecies, which are predicated on the creation of the state of Israel, had real consequences not only for the Palestinians, but for all Arabs in the U.S. (McAlister 2005, 169–174). The Antiochian Church, with its large Arab and Palestinian membership are able to claim the Holy Land as its own, disrupting the narrative that fundamental Christians were trying to construct that naturalized the state of Israel’s role in biblical prophecy as well as the contemporary Holy Land.²⁴⁴ Even though McAlister leaves Arab Christians out of the list of those who “are presumed to have a ‘natural’ interest in the Middle East” (33), Antiochian intervention into this discourse, a discourse that McAlister shows was rampant in popular culture and media representations of the Middle East for the majority of the twentieth century, was a representational practice that attempted to privilege Arab Christians within U.S. constructions of the Holy Land.

Burke O. Long argues that the “*idea* of the Holy Land...was a flexible and powerful cultural myth” in the U.S. since the 1700s (2003, 1; emphasis in original). Throughout American’s varied engagements with the Holy Land, it shifted from an idealized, “utopian space” to a “fantasized reality on the ground” (2). From stereoscopic

²⁴⁴ In the theology of the Orthodox Church, the establishment of the state of Israel is not a necessary condition for the return of Christ, as many Evangelical Churches believe. The Orthodox believe that the birth of Jesus Christ fulfilled the Old Testament prophecy of a new kingdom on earth, and that the Jews’ return to Israel was no longer a necessary pre-condition. Because of this, the parishioners of the Antiochian faith are less likely to confuse biblical mentions of Israel with the political state of Israel that was founded in 1948. The leaders of the faith in the U.S. are also staunchly anti-Zionist, which puts them at odds with much of the U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East.

images, travel writings and traveling lectures, to scaled reconstructions of Holy Land geography in upstate New York, the U.S., beginning in the late nineteenth century, was fascinated with the Holy land and U.S. Christianity's relation to it. But in all cases, even in the records of actual travel to the Holy Land, the social realities of the contemporary inhabitants of, for instance, Jerusalem, were ignored or "scrubbed-up" in favor of preserving a biblical, "culturally stagnant," Orient (B. Long 2003, 204, 22).²⁴⁵ In other words, it was easier to graft the U.S. Christian experience onto biblical history if the Holy Land and its inhabitants remained in the past, as Western Christianity has long envisioned the land of North America in terms of the new Zion or the new Promised Land (Jarmakani 2008, n. 22; Greenburg 1991).

In the last hundred years, the mostly Protestant claims to the Holy Land have envisioned it as a "decidedly Orientalist" Christian space, free from the messiness of geopolitics and the social realities of the people who currently inhabit it (McAlister 2005, 14; B. Long 2003). For instance, the stereoscopes tried to hide the presence of the contemporary inhabitants of Jerusalem and other holy sites. As "American Christianity" was trying to envision the Holy Land as a space stuck in biblical time, and as they professed that Americans were "literal inheritors of God's favor" (McAlister 2005, 13), Arab Christians disrupted this discourse of the Holy Land.²⁴⁶ The parishioners at St.

²⁴⁵ Shohat and Stam (1994) argue the same thing about Hollywood's representations of the Holy Land, saying that there is a "structural absence" "of portrayals of the contemporary or colonized *Arab* orient and its nationalist struggles" (145; emphasis in original).

²⁴⁶ I use the term American Christianity to refer to the popular construction of Christianity in the U.S. as a particular Protestant Christianity, into which other "immigrant" brands of Christianity, such as Catholicism and Orthodoxy, were seen as outside of the "American Christian heritage" that stretched back to the colonial past (Knoll 1992, 287). In contemporary popular discourses, American Christianity includes Catholicism and Orthodoxy, in addition to other evangelical and Protestant denominations, but can still be deployed as emerging from a mostly white, Anglo-American past in service to both right-wing (Kintz 1997) and white supremacist nationalist agendas (Burlein 2002).

Mary's Basilica in Livonia disrupted this discourse of U.S. Christianity by "constructing" themselves as living connections to the Holy Land and the contemporary Middle East.

A Basilica for the Future: Arabness and Christian Authenticity in Livonia

The congregation of St. Mary's in Livonia was built into the archdiocese's long religious Tradition (with a capital 'T') of biblical provenance. Especially since Fr. George, the founding and long-serving priest was born and theologically trained in the Holy Land, he serves as a direct linkage to the long line of priests, bishops, and patriarchs that were ordained in succession from St. Peter in the city of Antioch. But the parishioners of St. Mary's envision themselves as descendants of the first Christians of the Holy Land in numerous ways, the most visible being their copper-domed basilica. After nearly three decades in southeastern Michigan, this congregation completed construction on their landmark church building, and it is only fitting that the building itself carried on the Holy Land connection.

This dissertation so far has examined the construction and maintenance of an Arab cultural identity within the space of the church, broadly conceived. But in the context of a religious Arabness, the church building itself is an important aspect, especially for the members of St. Mary's Basilica and their connection to the Holy Land. The church building was designated as a basilica by Metropolitan Philip Saliba, because its architecture reflects an "old world" church construction, having been modeled after an ancient church in Syria, Fr. George's homeland and the current site of the Antiochian Patriarchate. A reporter for the *Detroit Free Press* wrote about the then planned 36,000 square foot church. The reporter writes that the basilica was being built to "prepare for the third millennium of Christianity," and quoted Fr. George as saying, "It's designed as

a Byzantine basilica to represent the beauty of our homeland in stone” (Crumm, July 16, 1999).²⁴⁷ After the church’s completion, the same reporter paraphrased Fr. George: “Perhaps the church, whose copper dome soars 125 feet and gleams in the morning sun above the tallest trees in an older section of Livonia, will serve as the congregation's symbol of the best in 2,000 years of Arab-Christian culture” (*Detroit Free Press*, May 4, 2002).

The rhetoric of the impressive basilica as a connection to homeland/Holy Land was most evident during the consecration of the church building in 2002. As all Antiochian Orthodox parishes do for all of their momentous occasions and milestones, the members of St. Mary’s published a booklet as part of the consecration festivities. Although the church building had been in use since Easter of that year, the church was not consecrated (an Orthodox religious dedication of the church) until Sept. 2002, incidentally just in time to host a national day of prayer on the first anniversary of 9/11. The booklet, titled “The Family of St. Mary: A New Church for a New Century,” contains the requisite letters from bishops and local dignitaries, including the Mayor of Livonia, a history of the parish and the construction of the church, and advertisements from parishioners and local businesses, such as a full-page ad from ACCESS and an ad for Comerica bank in both English and Arabic.

The letters that comprise the front matter of the booklet reflect what Fr. George wrote in his book about the history of the parish, that the basilica was intended to serve as a replica of the ancient church buildings in the Middle East and thus a connection between the Antiochian parishioners in Michigan and the Holy Land. A letter from a non-

²⁴⁷ Fr. George was also quoted in *The Word* as saying, “By emulating their architecture, we are honoring our forefathers and their early contributions to Orthodoxy” (“St. Mary of Livonia Proclaimed a Basilica” 2003). The new basilica was also featured on the cover of *The Word* in January 2003.

Arab Antiochian priest in Grand Rapids, MI, writes: “Obsessed by the endowments of his religious heritage, Father George shaped St. Mary’s [in] the style of the 5th century architecture in Magna Syria. He even paved the ‘Holy of Holies’ [the altar] with stones, called holy land stones, carved in Damascus and shipped to Livonia.” This priest then connects the cultural identity of St. Mary’s parishioners with their religious heritage and the building in which they worship: “St. Mary’s is Syrian in the outside and Syrian in the inside.”

At the front of the booklet, Fr. George and the parish council chairman write about the design, construction, and consecration of the church: “We have brought to you the joy, the beauty, and the great legacy of how our people built churches in the 4th and 5th century, AD. Salvation is indeed beautiful.” The reference to “our people” and the description of the church and the people that built it and worship in it as carrying on a “legacy” fits neatly within the rhetoric of how the Antiochian Archdiocese as a whole views itself in relation to the Holy Land. But the most blatant statement of how the parishioners envisioned the new church building came from the parish council president who was quoted as saying. ““Our goal was to bring the Holy Land to the Heartland of America”” (“St. Mary of Livonia Proclaimed a Basilica” 2003).

Decorative elements inside of the basilica also connect the parishioners to their Holy Land homeland. In the basement, in the same large room where coffee hour is held after each Sunday liturgy, there are framed black and white photos that line the curved wall on the south side of the building (Figure 6-2). A plaque at the center of the wall reads “Historical Photos of the Holy Land in the 1880’s” and lists the names of the parishioners who donated the photos to the church in memoriam. The photos, over 30 of

them, depict historical locations from the Bible, such as Lazarus’s tomb, as well as landscapes and the interiors of churches. The pictures are similar to the types of “Holy Land” photographs and stereographs that were circulating widely in the U.S. in the late nineteenth century.²⁴⁸

But in the context of an Antiochian Orthodox parish, especially one that is heavily immigrant and majority Palestinian, the photos take on a different meaning and a different function than, say, the famous nineteenth-century *Palestine through the Stereoscope* series that Burke Long explores in his monograph. As Long argues, the *Palestine through the Stereoscope* experience “erased or modified” images of the Holy



Figure 6-2 “Holy Land” photographs in basement of basilica. Photo by the author.

²⁴⁸ Melani McAlister writes that “Holy Land images were the most popular subject for the more than five million stereographs produced in the United States” at the end of the nineteenth century (2005, 17).

Land in order for the viewer to “imagine a biblical landscape peopled with familiar figures drawn from the Bible text” and not the then contemporary Ottoman-ruled Palestinian subjects (B. Long 2003, 103). The photos on the wall of St. Mary’s Basilica were not meant to erase the historical reality of the Palestinians of the Holy Land, but instead serve to assert their lived realities. For the family that purchased the pictures and donated them to the church, the pictorial forms an ancestral connection between the Palestinian immigrants in Livonia, MI, their ancestors of the 1880s, and by association the inhabitants of the Holy Land in biblical times. Among the myriad claims to Christian authenticity of the Antiochian Church, the framed 8x10 “Historical Photos of the Holy Land” produce a family album effect and solidify the continuity of the faith as well as the Palestinian people.

Arabic in Church: Cultural Identity and Authenticity

I have written elsewhere that the Maronite Catholics’ continued use of the Syriac language gets deployed as evidence of their Christian authenticity, as they capitalize on the fact that Syriac was a version of the language that Jesus spoke.²⁴⁹ Antiochians view their liturgical use of Arabic in similar ways. Although Syriac has a much closer affiliation to Christian origins, Arabic is also a Semitic language and is currently the language used throughout the Middle East. Further, Antiochian historians argue, “With the Islamic invasion of Syria and the Middle East, and North Africa, the Arabic language started to replace all the native languages and laid the solid foundation of Arab Christianity, Arabic theology and Arabic Christian literature” (Najim 1995, 102). The Antiochians in the U.S., then, linguistically graft themselves on to the history of

²⁴⁹ See the section “Christians from Arabic Speaking Nations,” in Naber, Stiffler, Tayyen, and Said 2009.

Christianity, further enhancing their authenticity claims. Parishioners at St. Mary's in Livonia speak of the liturgical use of Arabic in these terms, but also as a continued connection to a cultural identity and an ancestral connection to the Middle East. As the Arabic language makes up a major part of their cultural identity, and since their cultural identity is largely formed in the space of the church, the liturgical use of Arabic carries a dual function and becomes an important topic for discussion and debate in the archdiocese.

Although Arabic is not the original language of the Jesus, which was Aramaic, or was not the original language of the written Bible, which was Greek, Fr. George is adamant that Arabic still offers something more than English:

Don't forget when you read scripture in its original language Greek, and translated to Arabic, there is this ethos of chanting. And when you chant in Arabic or Greek, it sounds more alive than chanting in English, because English is not really a prayerful language. It is a business language. But we have beautiful choirs that sing in English. We're learning. We're adapting to write music, hymns that are in Byzantine tunes instead of western notation or western style.

Many of the parishioners agree and want to see Arabic remain a vital part of the liturgy, even if a growing number of the parishioners do not speak or understand Arabic. One parish council member, who was born in the U.S. and grew up bilingual, says that "the prayers mean more" and "hit home more when they are sung in Arabic." A second-generation Arab American who does not speak Arabic is still adamant that the language be kept. He explains, "I don't speak Arabic but I still prefer more of it in Arabic than not. Thank God 90% of our people are Arabic. My grandparents spoke it, my parents spoke it, and I didn't pick it up. Maybe my kids will pick it up [from the church]." Finally, he says he "would be pissed" if a priest were brought in to St. Mary's that wanted to stop using Arabic all together. A third generation female parishioners, who identifies as Lebanese-

American, similarly sees the church as a space to preserve her heritage, and a major part of that is the Arabic language. She says, “People want [the church] to open up and be more diverse...get more people in, and if you keep doing Arabic you won’t get more people in—but I also don’t want to lose my heritage. This is where I get it. I’m married now. I don’t have it at home. I’ve got a few camel statues, but what’s that going to do?”

In the 1950s the archdiocese decided that English would be the official language, though English translations of service and prayer books had been available since the early 1940s (Shadid 1984, 48). Even though the archdiocese was adamant on retaining their connection to an Arab heritage through politics, culture, language, and religion, as Metropolitan Philip has said on multiple occasions, you can’t become firmly planted in a nation and expect to make a difference there if your church does not speak the language of that land. Metropolitan Philip was simply following in the footsteps of his predecessor, Metropolitan Anthony Bashir, who decided that English should be adopted throughout the archdiocese. Bashir’s reasoning is recorded in his address to the archdiocese convention in 1961, where he stressed that if the Orthodox were to be a witness to America, they must use English. He says of the Antiochians’ push to use English, which was the first branch of Orthodoxy to do so, “We translated our books into English, our music, our Sunday School literature, our theological doctrine and dogma, and today we are proud that we started a way for the celebration of the Orthodox faith in this country to convince our brothers of other national groups [Greek, Russian, Romanian, etc.] that English should be used if Orthodoxy is to live in this land.” He concludes, as if to preempt any criticism about losing the Antiochian heritage if Arabic is nixed, “I must

repeat that we are spiritually under the Church of Antioch and that spiritual relation shall remain forever with us” (Shadid 1984, Appendix L).

Nearly two decades later, after the archdiocese had been using English as the primary liturgical language for two decades, and a few years after dropping “Syrian” from its official title, Metropolitan Philip was still defending the use of English as a way to minister to his flock in the U.S., but stressed the maintenance of the connection to the Holy Land. In one of his oft-quoted speeches, Saliba argues that the Antiochian faith and its parishioners “have much to offer America” and that by using English they “can offer American two thousand years of spirituality in a language which America understands” (P. Saliba 1987, 83). But as Fr. George says, Arabic has never been completely phased out of the archdiocese, and emphasizes, “Matter of fact, Metropolitan Philip never attended a church service or presided over a liturgy but used one-third of his service in the Arabic. I think he encouraged it. He is the man who believed that Orthodoxy can be of help and can be of light to America but never to give up truth.” The archdiocese has always struggled with this balance: how do they minister to American born and non-Arab converts while still retaining the “truth,” which is rooted in the Middle Eastern Holy Land?

The archdiocese has maintained the use of some Arabic in its publications (though almost always with an English translation) and individual parishes have been left to decide just how much Arabic to use, if any. In some of the older parishes, where only half of the membership has any Arab ancestry and where almost nobody speaks Arabic fluently, some of the hymns are sung in Arabic and congregational responses to prayers, such as *ya rabburhum* [Lord have mercy], may be used. Much like Randa Kayyali (2006)

argues that many “multi-generational Arab Americans” only speak “kitchen Arabic,” “meaning they only know the Arabic words for dishes cooked by their family in the home” (84), I argue that a large percentage of multi-generational Antiochian Orthodox parishioners only speak church Arabic. I see church Arabic as a basic knowledge of the Arabic terms and phrases that occur in a religious setting, such as saying *al-maseeh qam* [Christ is risen] and the response *haqqan qam* [indeed He is risen] during Easter; addressing a bishop as *sayidna*; addressing the priest as *abouna* and his wife as *khouria*; knowing that *allah* is not only a Muslim term; and even being able to recite the Lord’s Prayer in Arabic. I would also argue that church Arabic includes “kitchen Arabic,” because the church, for many Antiochian parishioners, is the space where they are exposed to Arabic cooking and food.²⁵⁰ Church Arabic is also spoken by members of the archdiocese that do not have any Arab ancestry, as many converts wholly accept the Arab/Middle Eastern heritage of the faith. A convert deacon at St. Mary’s is actively trying to learn the Arabic versions of some of the crucial prayers of the Divine Liturgy. For this deacon, as well as much of the membership of the archdiocese, the Arabic language serves as one more tie to the authentic Christianity of the Middle East.

Although the official ecclesiastical language of the ancient Orthodox Church was Greek, the Antiochians have celebrated their liturgies in Arabic for centuries and tend to define their cultural and religious identities through the use of language. Like most parishes where the majority of the members are immigrants or second-generation Arab American, the Divine Liturgy at St. Mary’s in Livonia is in both Arabic and English, though mostly in English. The Epistle and Gospel are read in both English and Arabic.

²⁵⁰ Warren David, an Antiochian Orthodox Christian and director of an Arab American media organization in Detroit, often jokes about the rhyming words that all Arab American know: *wallah*, *yallah*, *ismallah*, *humdillah*, *inshallah*.

The Nicene Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the communion prayers are recited in both languages. Many of the hymns are sung in Arabic and the chanting at the Orthros service before Liturgy is almost completely in Arabic. There are bi-lingual service books in the backs of every pew for those that would like to follow along in Arabic, and there are laminated cards with the Lord's Prayer in English and phonetic Arabic, for those parishioners who can't read Arabic script but would like to recite the prayer in Arabic. St. Mary's, like many Antiochian parishes across the country, especially those with immigrant populations, also offers classes in its ancient liturgical language.²⁵¹ The weekly bulletin is printed in about 90% English, though the title of the bulletin, *Al-nour* [The Light of Christ], some of the weekly prayers, and inserts about special events are in English and Arabic.

Fr. George recognizes that there needs to be a balance between Arabic and English. Although the services are mostly in English, he says that "from day one, I introduced Arabic as not part of faith, but part of the tradition of the community. Because everybody comes from somewhere. So we do not have 100% [Arabic language service], but we have special hymns that mean something to us." Even as his flock expands and grows generationally, and may not speak fluent Arabic, he is opposed to throwing all Arabic out. He doesn't think that maintaining Arabic in services will turn anybody off: "I did not find that people do not come to church because of ethnicity, or because of language, people don't come because of their attitude." In conversation he eloquently riffs on how Orthodoxy has always been born into a culture (whether it is Middle Eastern or Greek or Russian) and that since the U.S. itself is a blend of cultures, that there is no need to ignore the fact that Antiochian Orthodox is part of a tradition that is much older

²⁵¹ In 2008, the Arabic school had over 100 children enrolled.

than the U.S. Fr. George says, “In America, [some members] are trying to separate tradition from faith—tradition from worship. And you can’t, because everybody has tradition. You cannot walk naked. You need to put on some clothes. And your clothes become your tradition, which is immersed in faith.”

There is disagreement at St. Mary’s, like many other parishes, over the amount of Arabic to use. Converts and cradle Orthodox may disagree, and American born and immigrant parishioners may not see eye to eye, but there is a consensus that the Arabic language is part of the tradition (with a lower case ‘t’) of their faith community. A young second-generation Palestinian American and active youth group member says, “I really don’t understand Arabic too much. I can read and write but I don’t really speak it that much. So if I were to just stay in church and they just did it in Arabic, I probably wouldn’t go.” But she has no problem with some of it being in Arabic. Fr. George has said, on multiple occasions, that when he does weddings, the bride and groom always ask, “*Abouna* [our Father], please do the service in Arabic,” even though neither the bride nor the groom speak Arabic. “It’s a way to connect,” he says, and “they feel even though they did not understand it, it’s part of that spirituality that will enhance your life.”²⁵² The use of Arabic in church can also be a link to the homeland for both recent immigrants and second and third generation Arab Americans who may have never been to the Middle East. But it’s also more than part of their ancestral or homeland identity: it’s what sets

²⁵² I observed a potent example of the Arabic language’s power as a liturgical language in the Antiochian Orthodox Church in America. At one Divine Liturgy, there was an older Arab gentleman with a cane seated in the pew in front of me. Mostly everyone in the church was standing, as is customary, during the deacon’s reading of the Gospel in English, except for the elderly man in front of me, obviously not physically comfortable standing for long periods of time. As soon as the deacon finished reading, Fr. George entered through the Great Doors and announced the Gospel reading in Arabic. The elderly gentleman stood right up, as if the sound of the scriptures in Arabic snapped him to attention. He stood for almost the entire reading. He remained seated for much of the rest of the service, even though in a typical Antiochian Orthodox service there is more standing than sitting.

them apart from other Christian denominations. A Lebanese immigrant member sees the Arabic language as a distinguishing factor from other churches, like a niche. He asks, if there is no Arabic why would he go to St. Mary's instead of the Greek Church? "Same thing for the Maronite Catholics. If there was no Arabic, why drive to St. Sharbel when they could just go to the Catholic Church around the corner."

As much as any of the comments about language are tinged with cultural identity, all of the conversations I have had with Antiochian parishioners eventually come back to the faith and their relation to it. The space of the church is a main site for the maintenance and creation of an Arab American Christian cultural identity and a main site for politicized action on behalf of the homeland, but it is first and foremost a space shared by members of the Orthodox faith who worship together as spiritual descendants of Christianity's first adherents. For the members of St. Mary's of Livonia, their connections to the Holy Land and authentic Christianity is maintained through Fr. George and his ordination lineage, the parishioners' liturgical use of Arabic, and their church building which stands as a replica of the ancient Christian churches of Syria.

CHAPTER 7

Epilogue: The Camel as Church Mascot

As is evident from my analysis of Antiochian food festivals, the camel has a special place in the hearts of Antiochian Orthodox Christians. It is fitting that the camel, that noble beast that carried the Three Wiseman to the baby Jesus and remains a staple of transportation and diet in many parts of the Middle East, serves as an unofficial mascot of the Antiochian Archdiocese in North America. Since a majority of the membership trace their heritage and ancestry to the Middle East, and since in American popular culture the camel has served, for better or for worse, as a ubiquitous symbol of life in the Arab world, it is not surprising that camels make their appearance in all kinds of places in the lives of the Antiochian faithful, from live camel rides at festivals to gold camel pins for sale alongside icons in a parish display case. But much like the function of other forms of self-Orientalism, the camel as church mascot is complex, as it is both an in-group tongue-in-cheek celebration of a constructed Arab cultural identity and a great example of a “thin” marker of publicly deployed identity, mostly in the context of food and the festival.

Showing just how tongue-in-cheek self-Orientalism can be, especially in a food context, the ladies society of St. George in Bridgeville, PA, included an amusing recipe in

their 1984 “Feast from the East Mid East Cookbook.”²⁵³ The recipe is for “Camel Stew” and reads:

Camel Stew
1- Camel
Brown Gravy
2- Rabbits (optional)
Salt and Pepper

Cut camel into bite-size pieces. This should take you about 2 months. Cover with brown gravy. Cook over kerosene fire about 4 weeks at 465 degrees. This will serve 3,800 people. If more are expected, 2 rabbits may be added, but do this only if necessary. Most people do not like to find a hare in their stew!

Because this camel recipe is printed among dozens of other “real” recipes in an ethnic cookbook, it functions as a multiculturalism-approved playful self-representation of an Arab cultural identity. The recipe would function much differently if it were for a real recipe that called for camel meat. As food can be a salient way of perceiving the other (L. Long 2004), food that is seen as too foreign can also contribute to othering discourses.²⁵⁴ For example, Povinelli (2002) argues that there are “limits of tolerance” in multiculturalism and that some cultural markers, like the eating of camel, could provoke “an experience of fundamental alterity” (12), which is why the recipe is presented jocularly.

The camel stew recipe is obviously intended to be a joke, but its presence in a cookbook that was sold to the public by members of an Arab Christian church demonstrates the fine line between self-Orientalism and comedy on one side, and self-Orientalism and Orientalism proper on the other. Out of context, this recipe, and the other

²⁵³ The recipe was also reprinted in the weekly bulletin, “The Scroll,” of St. Mary’s in Wichita, KS, in 1985, showing how this rhetoric circulates through the space of the church.

²⁵⁴ Lucy Long’s (2004) argues for an “exotic” continuum that places foods along a scale of strangeness in relation to the consumer’s “socially constructed universe” (32). Eating camel would certainly fall on the more exotic side of the spectrum within U.S. constructions of Arabs as other.

instances of self-Orientalism that I have analyzed, could be used to “other” Arabs. Even though camel is eaten regularly in parts of the Middle East, the image of the camel is also a source of stereotypes against Arabs and other Middle Easterners, such as the racial slur of “camel jockey” as well as U.S. media’s depiction of camel-riding Arabs as part of a trope of backwardness or pre-modernity (Shaheen 2001; Shohat and Stam 1994).²⁵⁵ The camel as representative of something Arab, and usually negative, in media is evident in Jackie Salloum’s short film *Planet of the Arabs* (2003), in which the viewer is assaulted with clips and images from Hollywood productions, covering more than fifty years. In the film, the images of the camel and Arabs riding camels are some of the most often repeated, other than gun-toting “terrorists.”

But the camel is also a source of pride for Arab Christians, serving as an unofficial mascot of the Antiochian Orthodox Church in the U.S. Camels are a common occurrence at food festivals, which makes sense because of the playful Arabness and self-Orientalism that is the hallmark of many Antiochian-sponsored food festivals. The advertising for festivals can frequently draw upon the imagery of the camel or something closely related to it, like deserts and oases. From the appearance of “Habibi the Camel,” the “two-humped plushy wonder” (or a person in a camel costume) that delighted crowds at the 1982 Mediterranean Festival in Houston (Tannous 1983, 28), to the live camels on display and available for rides at Antiochian Orthodox food festivals across the country, the image of or presence of the camel at festivals is almost expected.

²⁵⁵ As I was drafting this chapter, a Pat Oliphant political cartoon was published that speaks to my point. The cartoon, from January 6, 2010, depicts two Arab-looking men on camelback looking at the new Burj Dubai tower in the United Arab Emirates. The caption at the bottom reads, “21st century building, 7th century people.”



Figure 7-1 Flyer for West St. Paul (MN) “Middle Eastern Festival.” Flyer from http://www.saintgeorge-church.org/documents/festival_2009.pdf.

For instance, St. Mary’s choice of “Sahara Fest” can conjure the image of desert-dwelling Arabs on camelback. “Cleo the Classy Camel” was the mascot of the preparations for the 1979 food fair at St. George in Pittsburgh, and a camel is featured on the flyer for the 2009 Middle Eastern Festival at St. George in West St. Paul, MN (Figure 7-1). Parishes from Phoenix, AZ, to Austin, TX, to West St. Paul, MN, have had live camels at their festival in recent years. St. Mary’s in Livonia offered camel rides at one of their festivals in the early 2000s. The parish of St. George in Toledo, OH, offered camel rides multiple years at their Family Fest (Figure 7-2). One parishioner at the Toledo church, who helped with the festival for decades, tells me that she put a Santa hat on the

camel and took a picture of herself in front of it, turning the photo into her Christmas card. In an interview with a local newspaper reporter, an organizer for the same festival said, in reference to booking live camels for the festival, “I’m a camel-holic.”²⁵⁶

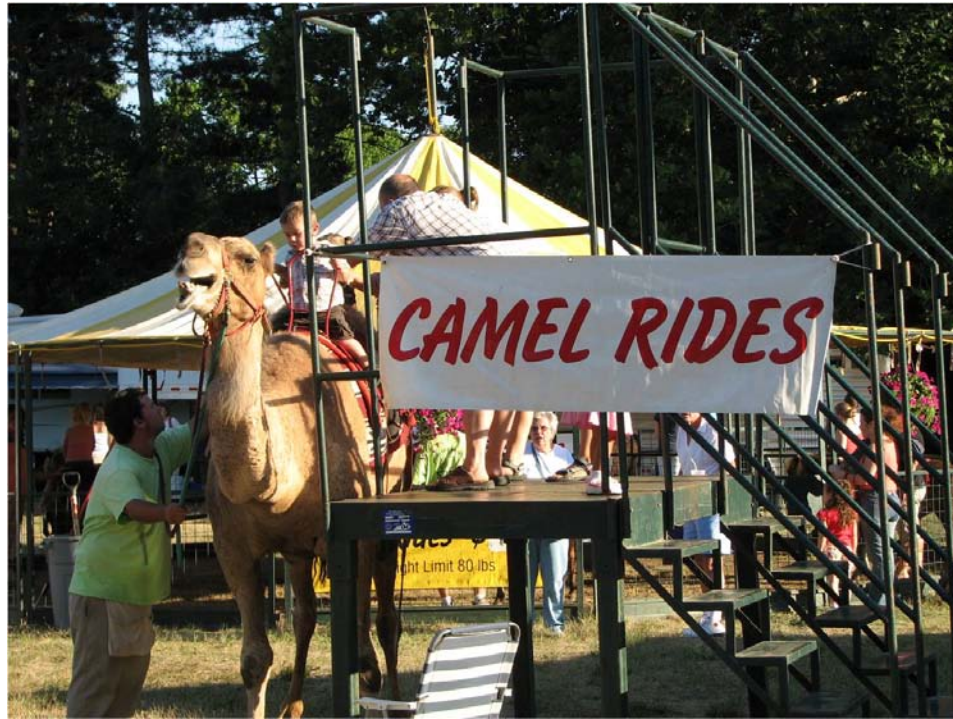


Figure 7-2 Camel rides at the 2007 St. George (Toledo, OH) Summerfest. Photo courtesy of Nathan Crook.

Stuffed camels, camel statues, and camels carved from “olive wood” from the Holy Land are sold by vendors at festivals.²⁵⁷ The olive wood carved camels have also been for sale at archdiocese conventions, bridging the cultural and religious presentations of camels within the space of the church.

The image of the camel is also found outside of the festival environment, in more in-group settings. An email forward from the early 2000s, which was circulated among Antiochian Orthodox Christians, put it best when it listed as one of the top reasons that

²⁵⁶ Tony Gonzalez, “St. George Festival celebrates 30 years,” *Toledo [OH] Free Press*, July 26, 2006, <http://www.toledofreepress.com/2006/07/26/st-george-festival-celebrates-30-years>.

²⁵⁷ Even the Arab American National Museum in Dearborn, MI, has stuffed camels for sale in its gift shop.

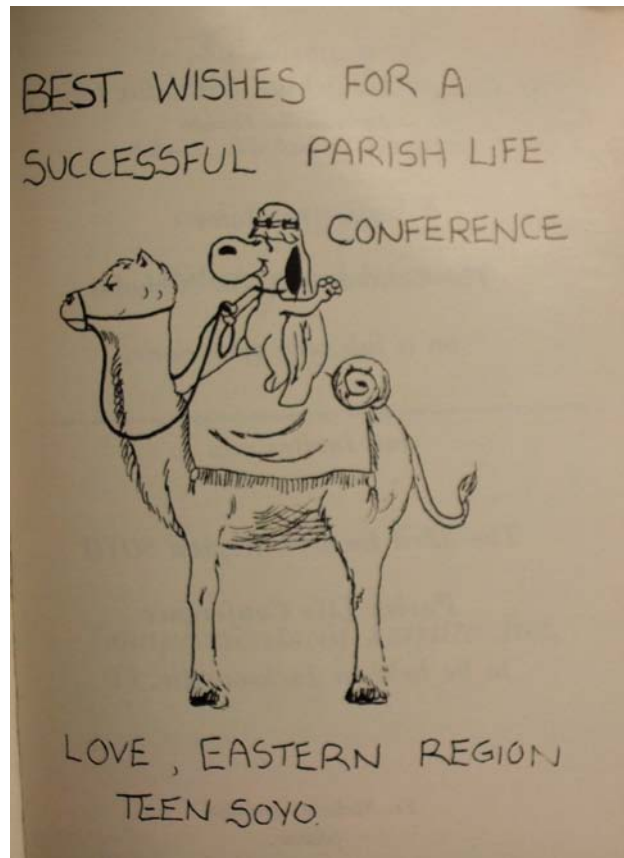


Figure 7-3 Snoopy on camelback. From the 1982 eastern regional convention program book. Heritage and Learning Center Archives, Antiochian Village, Bolivar, PA.

you know you are Lebanese, as “you have at least 1 picture/object resembling a camel in your house (even though there are no camels in Lebanon).” Browsing through the program books from regional and national archdiocese conventions, I have come across many images of camels. Sometimes camels are used to advertise restaurants, as I presented in chapter 3, and sometimes the use of the camel is meant to speak to an Antiochian audience.

An example of this use of camel imagery within the space of the church is a 1985 ad for Rita’s Artwork, in which a member of the Antiochian Orthodox parish in Charleston, WV, was advertising her services to fellow parishioners by way of the

convention program book. It is not coincidental that the ad prominently features a cartoonish camel. The designer knows that Antiochian parishioners, by and large, love camels and are fascinated by them. One of my favorite instances of the camel as church mascot comes from a regional convention program book in the 1980s, and depicts Snoopy, clad in traditional Arab headdress, riding a camel (Figure 7-3). The full-page illustration included the text, “Best Wishes for a Successful Parish Life Conference,” and was placed by the hosts for the convention. The image has nothing to do with the convention or the Antiochian faith, but is just another instance of the deployment of the camel in the playful context of the construction of an in-group cultural identity.



Figure 7-4 “Ya Habeebee” tote bag from St. Mary’s in Johnstown, PA. Photo courtesy of Bob and Helene Stiffler.

At the parish where I grew up, St. Mary’s in Johnstown, PA, the parishioners made and sold aprons, shirts, and tote bags featuring a drawing of a camel and the phrases “*ya habeebe*” (a friendly Arabic greeting) and “cuddle up to a camel” on them.

They were sold as fundraising items and proudly listed “St. Mary’s Antiochian Orthodox Christian Church” underneath the image of the camel (Figure 7-4).²⁵⁸ This same church has sold, as far back as I can remember, gold camel pins and pendants, as well as olive wood camel statues in a display case alongside ethnic cookbooks, Byzantine-style icons, and other religious paraphernalia. This display case, (Figure 7-5), is a microcosm for the role of Arabness within the space of the church, and is no accident that the image of the camel is portrayed as both a religious and a cultural emblem.

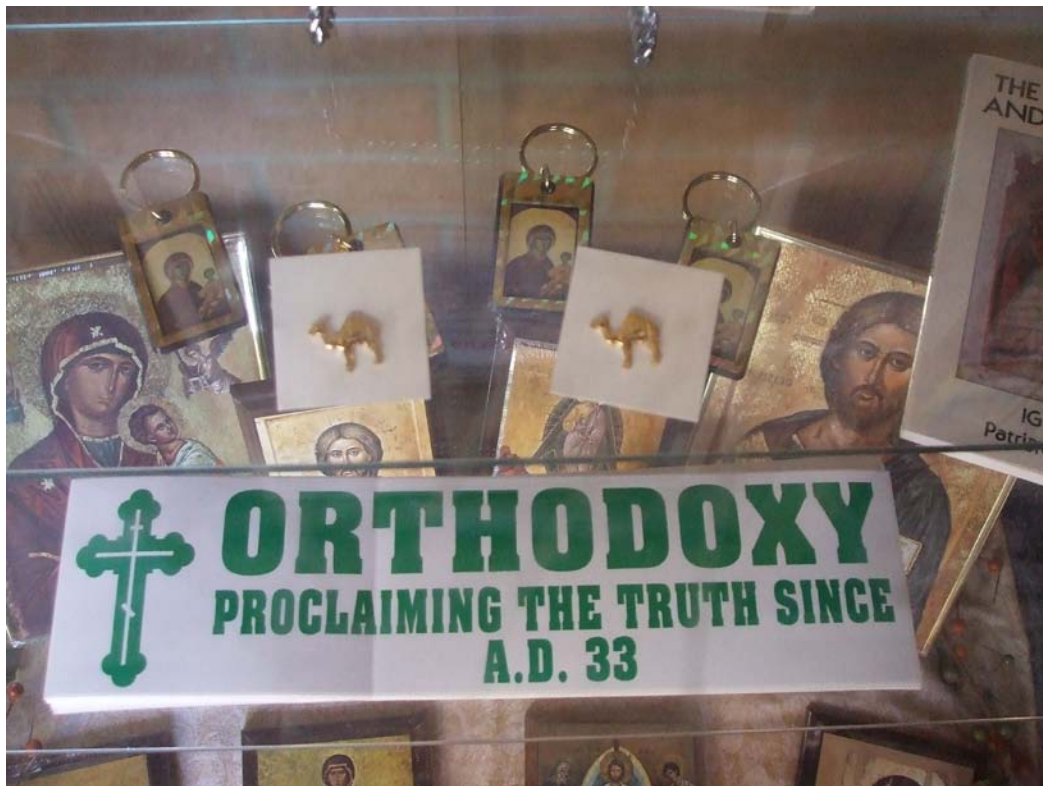


Figure 7-5 Display case at St. Mary’s (Johnstown, PA), showing icons and gold camel pins for sale. Photo by the author.

The camel is both a religious figure, carrying the Magi to Bethlehem, and a constructed cultural symbol drawn more from U.S. popular culture representations of the

²⁵⁸ I have seen other versions of the “cuddle up to a camel” shirt from the 1980s or 1990s. On it the camel design is registered to an “H Corey,” which is a common Arab American Christian last name. The tote bag and aprons from St. Mary’s in Johnstown were designed by a parishioner of third generation Lebanese heritage.

Middle East, than from any lived experience of the majority of the Antiochian parishioners.²⁵⁹ I make this claim based on the fact that many of the parishioners were born in the U.S., and the majority of those that were born in the Middle East come from places where camels are not an everyday occurrence, like Lebanon. But as I mentioned above, the camel has been used to “other” Arabs and Arab Americans as exotic, backwards and/or pre-modern, and even inherently warlike.²⁶⁰ This is also why I would argue that the use of the camel within the space of the church is an ultimate self-Orientalist representational practice (Hall 1997). As Arab Christians deploy the image of the camel in a religious setting, even if that religious setting is a church-sponsored food festival, it presents the camel as a playful part of an authentic Christian identity. The camel imagery works, in the multiculturalism sense, because it offers an acceptable degree of difference, or is within the “limits of tolerance” (Povinelli 2002), as most Christians in the U.S. (and not only Arab Christians) own or have seen a nativity scene that features at least one camel. The presence of the camel in the space of the Antiochian

²⁵⁹ As I have argued earlier, the camel is a “real” part of life in many areas of the Middle East. But I would bet that the majority of the Antiochian Orthodox in the 1970s and later had never actually seen a camel in its “natural” setting in the Middle East. Thus, the deployment of the camel as a mascot comes from an intermingling of biblical history, family history and folklore, and American popular culture.

²⁶⁰ In the last hundred years of American popular culture the image of the camel specifically and the trope of the desert fantasy in general has been used to exoticize Arabs and the Middle East and have undergirded imperial and Orientalist ventures in the region. Amira Jarmakani (2008) uses *Camel* brand cigarettes and their related marketing, introduced in 1913, as one example of this exotification. Shohat and Stam (1994) present the various “tropes of empire” that are evident in Hollywood films over the last century, some of which involve the exotic sexualization of the desert or the “animalization” of colonized peoples, which I use to read the popular culture discourses that equate Arabs with camel use in order to represent the Orient as backwards or pre/anti-modern. Jack Shaheen (1984 and 2001) argues that camels are an essential part of TV and Hollywood producers’ “Instant Ali Baba Kits,” and also points out the glaring presence of the slur “camel jockey” in many motion pictures, which connects the use of camels-as-transportation with an idea of pre-modernity, and, hence, outside of constructed “Western” values. Finally, Ronald Stockton (1994) examines political cartoons and comic depictions of Arabs in the late twentieth century and argues that images of Arabs on camelback were often equated with “a people wedded to desert-style warfare,” particularly during the first Gulf War (135), which is also evident in Jackie Salloum’s (2003) montage of Hollywood constructions of Arabs. The image of the camel in American popular culture is of course only one part of the total discourse about the Middle East and it has been used for comic effect in a number of Hollywood films as well as for the gamut of “othering” effects.

church can have the effect of privileging the representation of camels in an Arab or Middle Eastern context and can possibly re-contextualize it as a Christian image, instead of simply a popular culture marker of a perceived Arab/Muslim pre-modernity

Coupled with the claims to an authenticated Arabness in the context of the food festival, and the claims to an authentic Christianity in the context of the religious Holy Land, the camel is just one more dimension of a multi-faceted Arabness. But it is also a figure that Antiochian Orthodox can use to help set them apart from other Christian denominations and to highlight both their ties to the Holy Land and the playful constructions of cultural identity within the space of the church.

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