



### **The Lebanese People: A Holistic Approach**

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Cultural Immersion and Social Analysis

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## INTRODUCTION

### **The Community**

The Lebanese is a group of dedicated, hard-working, and devoted people from the beloved homeland of Lebanon, located in the Middle East. Lebanon is one of the twenty-two countries that make up the Arab speaking world. Many of them have immigrated to the United States of America for many reasons: religious persecution, war, and better opportunities to name a few. Among the Lebanese we encountered, some have been here for about thirty years, and some for fifty years. They have been in our neighborhoods for decades.

The Lebanese in the New York City areas that we came across were located in various locations: Bay Ridge, Brooklyn, and Long Island City. The Lebanese hold an array of careers, but we were mostly connected to business owners who have been in these areas for a long time.

They began their businesses in their respective locations and are known for their specialties. For example, a bakery is known for homemade breads baked fresh daily, and a restaurant is not only recognized for its cuisine, but for the evening events of traditional music and belly dancing.

As we connected with the Lebanese over our time in these locations, we learned that they were just like us. They're a people group who long to be accepted, loved, and treated with respect. They are kind, warm, and hospitable people. They have a story unique to them. They are a people group who lived happily and peacefully in their beloved homeland of Lebanon, a place where they had the freedom to do what they wanted without the fear of judgement or persecution. They lived in harmony among their diverse neighbors.

But war soon disrupted and ruined their lives. It separated people groups; it brought persecution, harm, and evil. It put an end to lives, jobs, and freedom. The Lebanese were no longer safe in the place they called home. They had no choice but to escape in hopes of a better future especially for their children. Many of them came to the United States but had the vision to one day return. But it seems for most of our interviewees, the wars changed Lebanon forever and it was no longer the Lebanon they remembered.

Through our conversations and interactions, we've learned that their personal experiences in life - from those who have lived through and witnessed the war to those who were born in America - have shaped their worldviews today. This explains why we were informed that as we talk with individuals within the Lebanese community, the answers would differ from person to person<sup>1</sup>. It is important to be aware that several factors of each interviewee need to be considered in gaining insight to their worldview. Nonetheless, collectively, they take pride in who they are

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<sup>1</sup> Contact M, interviewed by Nkaug Yang, Bay Ridge, NY, March 8, 2017.

as a people group and there are three values that the Lebanese hold with high regard: family, education, and faith.

### **Family**

The Lebanese family structure is patriarchal. But there are important factors to take into consideration when talking about family. Perspectives differ from one generation to another, one family to another, and one religion to another. Family structures and roles also look differently within every family. Times have changed and families have moved from more traditional structures to less traditional, and more modern structures. The same can be said for family roles. Furthermore, we can view family in the general and broader sense, or in a specific sense within a given context.

### **Education**

Higher education becomes a prime motivating factor in how the Lebanese community does life here in the United States. For parents, it is their life calling to give their children opportunities at higher education so their children can become influential individuals in the American Society. The pursuit of the American Dream and higher education becomes the thrust of how the Lebanese-Americans define purpose and meaning here in the states. What we found intriguing was how parents placed education over faith in Christian homes. There also seems to be a trend of young adults leaving the church after they begin to attend secular colleges. The Lebanese Church in America has yet to provide a space for young adults to process their faith while receiving liberal education from a secular institution.

### **Cultural Backgrounds**

There are twenty-two Arab speaking countries within the Arab League.<sup>2</sup> As Arab speakers travel, move, and live within these different countries either for work, education, or other reasons, they intermingle and intermarry with other Arab speakers. This creates a mesh of different cultural backgrounds. As a result, children are born to have the cultural backgrounds of their parents as well as their grandparents. We saw this in the Lebanese individuals we connected with during our week in the NYC areas. We learned that each one had different cultural backgrounds and each one identified differently from the next person. In example, one's father is Lebanese while one's mother is Jordanian, but one may identify oneself as Lebanese or Lebanese-Jordanian.

### **Faith Backgrounds**

As people identify with different cultural backgrounds, they also identify with different faith backgrounds. The country of Lebanon is made up of many religious backgrounds. In fact, one of our interviewees shared there are seventy-five religions in Lebanon.<sup>3</sup> For the purpose of this paper, our concentration is the Christian Lebanese. There are different branches within Christianity that make up their identities that are worthy to note: Maronites, Catholics, Melkites, Eastern Orthodox, and Evangelicals.<sup>4</sup> Children may grow up in homes with parents whose faith backgrounds are different. For example, Contact T's father is Orthodox and his mother is Maronite. He was raised Catholic but now as an adult, he is Evangelical.<sup>5</sup>

### **Summary**

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<sup>2</sup> Jimmy Jun. Cultural Immersion and Social Analysis. Lecture on Arabic Speaking Countries and People. February 3, 2017.

<sup>3</sup> Contact C, interviewed by Melanie De Gardner, Bay Ridge, NY, March 7, 2017.

<sup>4</sup> Contact T, interviewed by Tanesha Lawrence, video conference, Long Island City, NY. March 9, 2017.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

To sum, The Lebanese Christians in the NYC areas have a history of escaping warfare in their homeland and have long established a new life for themselves and for their children in America. They have become successful with their careers and have paved the way for their children to succeed. Their identities are shaped by multiple cultural and faith backgrounds. Contact T says it best when he shared that it is hard to identify the Lebanese community because there are a lot of segments or smaller communities within the overall larger community. Nonetheless, we are blessed to have come across some of them.<sup>6</sup>

### **Thesis of Paper**

A holistic approach that addresses the emotional, social, physical, and spiritual needs of the Lebanese Christians in the NYC area opens the way for the gospel to bring the redemptive work of Christ in a real and authentic way.

### **Thesis Approach**

The holistic approach in which we propose in addressing their needs is through three avenues: a community group, a healing and counseling ministry, and a partnership with pastors who are church planting in the NYC areas. The purpose of the community group is to bring the Lebanese community together through cultural events, educational workshops, and help services. Our vision is to bring the Lebanese people together to create space to celebrate their culture, to bring awareness to important news, and to provide necessary and practical help. Next, the

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

purpose of the healing and counseling ministry is to help families work through and process their lives in a safe and Godly environment based on Biblical principles. Our vision is for families to find freedom in Christ, to offer support and guidance, and to expose them to the redemptive power of Jesus. Lastly, the purpose of partnering with pastors who are church planting in these areas is to be a part of the movement. Our vision is to work together with them to provide our insights as well as to make a positive impact in the community for God's glory.

### **Methods of Data Collection**

#### **Semi-structured Interviews**

The interviews we had with the members of the Lebanese-American community became one of the primary methods we used to document the different narratives of the community. In certain cases, we used a structured method where we had prior knowledge of who we were going to encounter. We were prepared with generic and intentional questions so we could initiate dialogue with the community. We focused on asking questions pertaining to their transmigration experience in New York. Other times, we had to play by ear and learn to mingle and interact with the community without prior preparation due to the nature of our encounter with the interviewees. For example, when we were invited to a church member's home, we had very little knowledge of who was going to be at the dinner. Rather than conducting a formal interview, we had an informal, easy going conversation that helped us to learn more about the Lebanese community. All of our interviews helped us to pursue honest qualitative research.

#### **Participant Observation**

There were several occasions where our team had opportunities to observe the Lebanese-American community in different settings. We observed multiple mosque services, participated in church services, and observed English being taught at a community center. The primary way we collected data was by taking handwritten notes or recording audio files during interviews. In some cases, it seemed inappropriate to take notes so we had to simply observe and *take in* the experience and record the data at a later time. After collecting the data, our research team archived our notes individually and then discussed our data together in order to tackle any blind spots we may have missed. The discussions between our team members at the end of the day became very important because it helped us to process the data together as a team.

## **Mapping**

Our encounters with the community was heavily concentrated in two areas: Long Island City, Queens, NY and Bay Ridge, Brooklyn, NY. Based on our research, we found that United States has third largest concentration of Lebanese Diasporic community.<sup>7</sup>

As we discovered our way around these NYC areas, one thing was clear: the Lebanese are communal people. They like to live in the same communities where there are others like them. They also like to work in the same communities. In our case, they lived in Arab Communities. While looking into the Lebanese community in the Bay Ridge area, for example, we made the connection fairly quickly when we learned that there seems to be a knowledge

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.lstatic.org/PDF/demographenglish.pdf>

among the Lebanese of where other Lebanese are located within the area. For example, all the business owners know of one another and acknowledged their respective locations which they were only a few blocks apart.

In addition, we learned that families lived in close proximities. In fact, if they don't live next door to one another, they lived in the same neighborhood. In some cases, if they didn't live in the same neighborhood, they lived in a nearby neighborhood. Travel in the case visiting one another is quickened and gatherings can occur more often.

### **Outside Background Research**

There are several methods we implemented in order to further our research .We arranged for our researchers to collect quantitative data concerning the Lebanese-American community by consulting historical, cultural, and social data of the immigrant Lebanese community in America. Historically, we analyzed what caused the Lebanese people to migrate out of their country in the 1970's. We also analyzed the Lebanese culture and also the cultural assimilation process the community goes through that is specific to them. Familial patterns and customs were also further researched in order to analyze the familial needs of the community.

### **Limitations**

#### **Transmigration Stereotype**

We needed to dispel certain notions and stereotypes of what it means to be an immigrant in America. It was difficult in doing so because most of our research team members have some form of immigrant experience, narrative, or immigrant encounter. While our research did show

some similarities in experience compared to other ethnic migration experiences, we made efforts to try listen with a blank slate so we can eliminate biases. Even with this mindset, it was still difficult trying to process their experience without trying to categorize and systematize the people's transmigration experience because of the worldview we already possessed. None of our members are Arabic speaking nor have any experience with Arabic speaking communities prior to this research project. Hence, it made it all the more difficult to avoid biases and stereotypes.

### **The Amount of Time Spent with the Community**

The given amount of time we had to integrate into the community and to collect data was very small. Out of the one week time that was given, we had about four days to initiate our contacts and expand our network of the Lebanese-American community. While the time constraints did motivate our team to act more intentionally, the team feels that more time would have aided in more accurate qualitative data collection.

### **Limited Interaction with the Non-Christian Community and the Muslim Community**

The Mosque visitation might have been intended for us to immerse, but the language barrier and the time spent at the mosque made it difficult for us to collect substantial data. We were not able to collect much data on what it means to be a practicing Lebanese Muslim in NYC. We did not have enough data to understand their worldview. We feel that the questions and answers with the Imam wasn't as informative as it could've been. Aside from the Mosque visitation, most of our immersion did occur within the Christian community making it difficult for us to see the multiplex network of Lebanese-Americans in NYC. While we did learn a lot

about the Christian Lebanese community, we did not have ample opportunities to meet non-Christian Lebanese Americans.

### **DELIMITATIONS**

- a. We did not do an intensive research on Lebanese people currently residing in Lebanon
  - i. Although by birth, one may have Lebanese roots, transmigration develops new hybrid cultures that need analyzing in a context of its own. Our research focuses on the new hybrid culture that's developed in the context of America
- b. We will not be focusing on the non-Christian and Muslim community though we did have interactions with them during our immersion week, they were limited.
- c. Draw comparisons with other immigrant communities.
  - i. In order to avoid previously conceived biases and notions of what it means to be an immigrant in America, we have decided as a team not to compare other immigrant communities
- d. We will not be using Grounded theory as it is a "complex iterative process" which can take months for just the early phase and the time we had to do our research was limited. <sup>8</sup> It begins with the "raising of generative questions which help to guide the research but are not intended to be either static or confining."<sup>9</sup> As data is collected, "core theoretical concept(s) are identified and tentative linkages are developed between the theoretical core concepts and the data."<sup>10</sup> Typically, the research tends to develop toward one main category that is central and we are tackling many facets of our subjects.
- e. We will also not be taking on the full scope of participant observation as that method involves becoming one with the people group being observed and can take months and years to develop these long-standing relationships in which the goal is for the observer to be accepted as an active member of the community of the people group they are learning about and participating with. <sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> "Qualitative Methods," Research Methods Knowledge Base, accessed April 24, 2017, <https://www.socialresearchmethods.net/kb/qualmeth.php>.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> "Qualitative Methods," Research Methods Knowledge Base, accessed April 24, 2017, <https://www.socialresearchmethods.net/kb/qualmeth.php>.

## FINDINGS

### Background Analysis of Lebanon People Group

#### The Lebanese Homeland

Lebanon is located on the long side of the Mediterranean Sea. The country was named in reference to the large mountain range that runs from north to south through the middle of the nation. Lebanon shares its borders to the North with Syria, to the East with the Arab Republic and to the South with Israel, Palestine territory.<sup>12</sup> Interestingly, Lebanon is the site of ancient Phoenicia. With an area of approximately, 10,400 square kilometers it has fertile and mountainous spaces on the eastern Mediterranean side.<sup>13</sup> As of July 2016 the population of Lebanon is estimated to be around 6,237, 738, with the majority of the people living in or on the coastline of the Mediterranean and more specifically in the capital Beirut.<sup>14</sup>

Beirut, the capital, was often referred to as the “Paris” or the “Switzerland,” as well as the commercial center of the Middle East. Geographically Lebanon is cornered between the Mediterranean Sea and surrounded by nations that are a part of the Arab League with the exception of Israel. Unfortunately as a result of this geopolitical position, Lebanon has become the center of the Israeli Arab conflicts which continues to cause a lot of political and economic

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<sup>12</sup> See Figure 1.1 Appendix.

<sup>13</sup> *Gale Encyclopedia of Multicultural America*, s.v. “Lebanese Americans,” accessed April 18, 2017, <http://www.encyclopedia.com/history/united-states-and-canada/us-history/lebanese-americans>.

<sup>14</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, “The World Factbook,” accessed April 20, 2017. [https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/print\\_le.html](https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/print_le.html).

instability that region.

Yet before Lebanon became a war zone, it was a peaceful place. The Lebanese took pride in who they were: their cultures, customs, faiths, foods, and traditions. There was great joy in being Lebanese. Their lives before the war definitely reflected their sense of dignity and honor. This is a big part of who they are as a people group and they carry this with them wherever they go. We saw evidence of this through our contact during the cultural immersion week.

Contact B makes a great example. He is a Lebanese business owner of a restaurant known for their sajj bread in Bay Ridge, NY.<sup>15</sup> This is a special kind of bread only made with love and expertise. After he heard we were students learning about the Lebanese culture, he surprised us by allowing us to go into the kitchen to see how the sajj bread was made. There was a special, authentic, and rare oven used for cooking this bread. He explained that they made the best bread because of their hand-tossed dough and specialized oven.<sup>16</sup>

Furthermore, he explained a very important symbol to the Lebanese-the Lebanese flag. The Lebanese flag has three colors: white, red, and green. In addition, in the middle of the flag is the extremely symbolic green cedar tree. He explained that the color white represents the snow on the mountains that remain there for 365 days every year. His love for the land was evident when he described how it is possible to go skiing in the higher parts of the mountain and then enjoy swimming in the beaches at the base of the mountain. He clearly felt great pride in describing the topography. Additionally, red stands for the blood of the martyrs who fought in war. And finally the green cedar tree is known for its strength and longevity, representing the

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<sup>15</sup> Contact B, interviewed by Widukind Nicolas, Bay Ridge, NY, March 7, 2017.

<sup>16</sup> Appendix B

stability of the country of Lebanon.<sup>17</sup>

## **History of the People**

### **Origin**

The Lebanese trace their history back to that of the Canaanites, who eventually became known as the Phoenicians, as early as the second and first millennium BC. The Phoenicians were the first known inhabitants of Lebanon. Settling in coastal cities like Tyre, Sidon and Byblos, the Phoenicians established themselves as well-known sailors and semitic traders, whose maritime culture flourished in the Eastern Mediterranean for more than 2000 years B.C.<sup>18</sup>

### **Political and Economic Turmoil**

Over centuries, dominant ruling powers including the Persians, Greeks and Romans would come as opposing forces against the Phoenicians. However, a major root cause of Lebanon's political and economic turmoil can be traced back to the era of the Ottoman Empire in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. The Ottoman Empire rose following the fall of the Turkish Empire and subsequently became the longest lasting empire in world history. Lebanon was one of many countries that was incorporated into the Empire. The region that is now known as present day Lebanon was part of the Ottoman province of Greater Syria which constituted a larger combined area of what is now present day Lebanon and Syria.

Consequently, this is one reason why it is difficult to concretely separate ethnic Lebanese

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<sup>17</sup> Figure 1.2

<sup>18</sup> *Gale Encyclopedia of Multicultural America*, s.v. "Lebanese Americans," accessed April 18, 2017, <http://www.encyclopedia.com/history/united-states-and-canada/us-history/lebanese-americans>.

from ethnic Syrians. Syria and Lebanon did not become separate nation states until the 1920's. A second reason for the challenges seen in separating the two groups is the Ottoman rulers' management and governance of their subjects based on religious affiliation. Hence, under this system, early immigrants were identified by religious sects, not by distinct ethnic identity.<sup>19</sup> After an approximate 300 year rule starting in the early 1500's AD, the Ottoman Empire was conquered. With the collapse of the Ottoman Empire after World War I on November 11, 1918, Lebanon was mandated along with four other provinces by the League of Nations to come under French rule under the umbrella of the French protectorate.

After approximately 25 years, in 1943 Lebanon gained its independence from France and became established as the Republic of Lebanon. For the first time since the 13<sup>th</sup> century, Lebanon had an opportunity for legitimate self-governance with their own constitution, laws and governing policies. Jason Mandryk from *Operation World* reports: "Lebanon became a republic with its constitution based on a delicate balance related to the size of 18 recognized religious communities. Changing Muslim-Christian demographics and the influx of 300,000 Palestinians refugees between 1948 and 1976 upset the status quo precipitating 1975-1990 civil war."<sup>20</sup>

The Lebanese civil war then was a result of Lebanon's colonial period, changing democratic trends, and of key importance, religious strife. Falling from the exalted position as the "Switzerland" of the Middle East, factors such as long standing political inequality and economic injustice seen through inadequate care of the poor by those in power, economic

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<sup>19</sup> *Gale Encyclopedia of Multicultural America*, s.v. "Lebanese Americans," accessed April 18, 2017, <http://www.encyclopedia.com/history/united-states-and-canada/us-history/lebanese-americans>.

<sup>20</sup> Patrick J. St. G. Johnstone, Jason Mandryk and Robyn Johnstone, *Operation World* (Waynesboro: Authentic Lifestyle, 2005), 157.

schisms and an inadequately weak public sector disrupted the relatively peaceful reality the Lebanese enjoyed.<sup>21</sup> As religion was also a key factor, the 16 years of fighting between Muslims and Christians that constituted the civil war would change the landscape of Lebanon as previously known and would have lasting impacts on its people forever. A more detailed discussion of the Lebanese religious landscape and history will be discussed below. In addition to the Lebanese Civil War as mentioned previously, the country has suffered many different battles centered on Israeli, Syrian, and Palestinian conflict. It is noteworthy to mention two key invasions: the Syrians in 1978 and the Israelis in April 1982.

The first of these involving the Syrian occupation of Lebanon beginning as early as 1976 ironically did not start out as an invasion at all. Maronite leadership and conservative Muslims requested the assistance of Syrian forces to come in and restrict the Palestinian guerrilla presence in Lebanon, especially as they feared attacks by Muslim leftists and Palestinians.<sup>22</sup> Challenges developed however, when the Syrian occupancy remained continued to exert considerable control and influence in Beirut over several years. After 30 years of Syrian dominance, and triggered by what is believed to be the Syrian executed tragic assassination of Lebanon's former Prime Minister Rafic Hariri in February 2005, a massive demonstration took place in Beirut to protest against Syrian occupancy. Known as the Cedar Revolution, this peaceful revolt eventually led to Syrian withdrawal on April 26, 2005.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> *Gale Encyclopedia of Multicultural America*, s.v. "Lebanese Americans," accessed April 18, 2017, <http://www.encyclopedia.com/history/united-states-and-canada/us-history/lebanese-americans>.

<sup>22</sup> Arthur Mark Weisburd, *Use of Force: The Practice of States Since World War II* (University Park, PA: Penn State Press, 1997), 156-157.

<sup>23</sup> *Gale Encyclopedia of Multicultural America*, s.v. "Lebanese Americans," accessed April 24, 2017, <http://www.encyclopedia.com/history/united-states-and-canada/us-history/lebanese-americans>.

Overlapping with and shortly after the Syrian invasion, Israel would also invade Lebanon first in 1978 and again in April of 1982 against an increasing Palestine Liberation Organization presence. Although they would later return, the PLO were eventually expelled in 1982. In 1985, Israel mostly withdrew from Lebanon with the exception of remaining present in a small portion of the southern part of the country, in partnership with the Christian based South Lebanon Army (SLA). Consequently, in 1985 in opposition to continued Israeli occupation, the Lebanese Shia Muslim group Hezbollah forged attacks against the nation of Israel by way of intermittent border clashes over several years.

Israeli troops completely withdrew from Southern Lebanon in 2000, yet Hezbollah continued attacks against Israel because of Israeli occupation in an area called the Shebaa Farms. Disputes continued as to whether this land belonged to Israel or Lebanon.<sup>24</sup> In an attempt to gain release of Lebanese prisoners held in Israel, Hezbollah strategically captured two Israeli soldiers as leverage for their demands. The kidnapping of the two Israeli soldiers in July 2006 sparked what became known as the 2006 Lebanon War. In the wake of this conflict, 1200 Lebanese civilians were killed as Lebanon was the battleground for another bloody battle.<sup>25</sup>

After the withdrawal of the Syrian and the Israeli troops in 2005, Lebanon, for the first time in 30 years, had an opportunity to form its government without external influence and control of Syria. Significant improvements have been made in human rights but the lack of

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<sup>24</sup>Asher Kaufman, "Understanding the Sheeba Farms Dispute," *Palestine-Israel Journal* 11, no. 1 (2004): 1, accessed April 18, 2017, <http://www.pij.org/details.php?id=9>.

<sup>25</sup> "Lebanon Profile-Timeline," *BBC News*, August 10, 2016, accessed April 17, 2017, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-14649284>.

government transparency has encouraged some issues of injustice as seen where freedom of speech, press, movement and assembly are restricted, as well as judicial branches are under the authority of the government. Undoubtedly, the Lebanese Civil War had lasting impacts on the Lebanese people and the course of the nation, hence why it was important to highlight this significant historical event early in the writing. The consequences of the war will be discussed repeatedly in subsequent sections of the paper .

## **Migration**

According to the Migration Policy Institute (MPI), between 600,000 and 900,000 people fled Lebanon since the civil war started between 1975 and 1990. The Lebanese diaspora around the world is estimated at 15 million people.<sup>26</sup> Findings in a report reviewed by Statistics Lebanon and given by the Lebanese Information Center read, “Lebanon has been characterized by high emigration due to the economic and the political situation. This reality is due to the Lebanese geographic location in addition to other internal and external conflicts.”<sup>27</sup> Hence political turmoil has forced the Lebanese population to look for political and economic refuge. However, from 1975 to 2011, the population of Christian refugees is decreasing while the Muslim refugees are increasing. The Migration Policy Institute further writes, “Many Lebanese migrants and refugees have been trapped between a host country where they face danger and a home country to which they are hesitant or may not be able to return.” The high emigration rates

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<sup>26</sup> Lebanese Information Center (Lebanon), “The Lebanese Demographic Reality,” January 14, 2013, 2, accessed April 15, 2017, <https://www.scribd.com/document/317693602/LIC-The-Lebanese-Demographic-Reality-pdf>.

<sup>27</sup> Lebanese Information Center (Lebanon), “The Lebanese Demographic Reality,” January 14, 2013, 2, accessed April 15, 2017, <https://www.scribd.com/document/317693602/LIC-The-Lebanese-Demographic-Reality-pdf>.

among Christians in one respect along with the high birth rates among Muslims tend to reduce the percentage of Christians in the country.<sup>28</sup>

### **Cultural Heritages and Cultural Norms**

As a result of Lebanon's religious and ethnic diversity, the country is considered as the most liberal nation in the Middle East. In addition to the religious diversity mentioned above, the population is comprised of people from all over the Middle Eastern region today and is a major part of its positive appeal. Arabic is the official language of Lebanon while French, considered the language of culture, is the second language of the nation with its linkage to its French colonial heritage. English however is becoming more prevalent in business circles.<sup>29</sup>

Lebanon hosts the oldest and most well-known cultural event in the Middle East and the Eastern Mediterranean since 1955, the Baalbeck International Festival. The national dance is the Dabkah, an energetic folk belly dance still common at weddings. Efforts are made to entertain and connect the Lebanese community in Bay Ridge together in the spirit of their old festival tradition. This reality is demonstrated in the activities of a popular Lebanese restaurant in Brooklyn. The story of the owner is representative of the life journeys of so many Lebanese that encompass turmoil in their home nation and redemption on new soil. He was among one of the hundreds of thousands who fled because of the civil war from 1975 to 1990. Moving from Lebanon in 1984 to study computer science, he was 46 years old when he opened the restaurant establishment in 2006. Like many other Lebanese he dreamed of having his own business. A

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<sup>28</sup> See Appendix B

<sup>29</sup> Mirella Hodeib, "English Assumes Greater Importance in Lebanese Linguistic Universe," *Daily Star Lebanon*, January 19th, 2007, <http://www.dailystar.com.lb//News/Lebanon-News/2007/Jan-19/45910-english-assumes-greater-importance-in-lebanese-linguistic-universe.ashx##axzz2LJ9F7y9b>.

primary aim for establishing the business was to provide a place for the Lebanese community to socialize.<sup>30</sup> In the article by the New York Times column *Neighborhood Joint*, author Michael T. Luong further elaborates by saying, “And on Saturday nights these days, the Lebanese restaurant is transformed into one of the best places in the city to see dabke, a traditional Levantine line dance.”<sup>31</sup> This type of gathering is one cultural event that keep the Lebanese community together.<sup>32</sup>

Contact B, a waiter at the well-known social spot further affirms: “Every Friday and Saturday, the place is turned into a dancing restaurant. It is a Lebanon tradition; they eat and dance until the dawn.”<sup>33</sup> Speaking to the closeness of the group, when asked how the Lebanese communicate community events, Contact B says: “we don’t use the media service provided by the city to communicate to the community; we utilize Facebook, Instagram and text messaging to reach out to the community; we use to send about 700 text messages.”<sup>34</sup>

### **Marriage in Lebanon**

Marriage in Lebanon is guided and dictated primarily by religious influence. Conservative Lebanese and Lebanese Americans still practice arranged-marriages between their ethnic and religious groups.<sup>35</sup> Traditionally in Lebanese culture, civil marriage was not common

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<sup>30</sup> Michael T Luongo, “Smoke, Dance and Sliver of Lebanon,” *New York Times*, October 25, 2012, accessed April 24, 2017, <https://mobile.nytimes.com/2012/10/28/nyregion/at-le-sajj-in-bay-ridge-a-smoky-and-joyous-tribute-to-lebanon.html>.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> See Appendix C

<sup>33</sup> Contact B, interviewed by Widukind Nicolas, Bay Ridge, NY, March 7, 2017.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> *Gale Encyclopedia of Multicultural America*, s.v. “Lebanese Americans,” accessed April 18, 2017, <http://www.encyclopedia.com/history/united-states-and-canada/us-history/lebanese-americans>.

or legal, but was recognized if it took place in a foreign country, pending it was done in a competent office or in a Lebanese embassy. It is mandatory that the marriage be performed by an appropriate religious authority. Mixed marriages are permitted, but the wife should adopt her husband's faith and both should obey the laws of the religious authority which performed the marriage. Though a male of any faith can marry a woman of any faith, a Muslim woman cannot marry a Christian or a Jewish man.<sup>36</sup> Generally, the age of capacity for marriage is determined by religious authorities. It varies from 15 to 18 years old for men and 9 to 17 years old for women. In many cases, a guardian's permission is required for any marriage under the age of 18 years old. Divorce in Lebanon is incredibly complex first because of the diversity of the multiple communities. Secondly, divorce is determined by the laws of the religious jurisdiction. As a result of these complexities, divorce for mixed marriages get caught in the corner of two contradictory religious laws.<sup>37</sup>

More recently in January 10, 2014 civil marriage has been legalized in Lebanon.<sup>38</sup> As noted in the newspaper *The Daily Star*, "In Lebanon, from a legal perspective, there is nothing to prevent Lebanese from being civilly married."<sup>39</sup> The question remains to be answered from a religious standpoint. Hence religion in marriage still remains a key ruling factor.

## **Education**

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<sup>36</sup> "Family Law," Mattar Law Firm, " [www.mattar.com](http://www.mattar.com).

<sup>37</sup> "Family Law," Mattar Law Firm, " [www.mattar.com](http://www.mattar.com).

<sup>38</sup> See Appendix D

<sup>39</sup>Rayane Abou Jaoude, "Civil Marriage Is Legal in Lebanon: Expert," *Daily Star Lebanon*, January 10, 2014, accessed April 24, 2017, <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2014/Jan-10/243642-civil-marriage-is-legal-in-lebanon-experts.ashx>.

Lebanese education has been shaped by European models and is highly emphasized in Lebanese culture. Education was supplied by British, French, Russian and American schools which also encouraged the establishment of local government schools in Lebanon. Furthermore, education was encouraged for young boys as well as young girls. As the Lebanese had similar perceptions and values regarding education as Americans, assimilation by Lebanese immigrants into the American school system was easy.<sup>40</sup> Lebanese Americans born after World War II engaged in a variety of collegiate studies including business, law, medicine and pharmacy, which fell right in line with other American youth. Socioeconomically, with a large majority of third generation Lebanese being middle-class, they tend to have a higher education level than most average Americans.<sup>41</sup>

### **Family and Community Dynamics**

***Close knit:*** Lebanese society starts with the family and they have a predominantly kinship culture. They operate as a unit and depend on each other implicitly in social, financial, and business affairs.<sup>42</sup>

***Patriarchal Structure:*** Furthermore, they have a patriarchal family system which is composed hierarchically of individuals ranked based on gender and age. As noted by Suad Joseph in the article “Conceiving Family Relationships in Post-War Lebanon,” “family structure has been predominantly patriarchal in Lebanon, and has supported what I have called, patriarchal

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<sup>40</sup> *Gale Encyclopedia of Multicultural America*, s.v. “Lebanese Americans,” accessed April 18, 2017, <http://www.encyclopedia.com/history/united-states-and-canada/us-history/lebanese-americans>.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

connective constructs of selves.”<sup>43</sup> The father is the primary decision maker and but the mother’s input is important as well. Her primary responsibility is the children and home care while traditionally, men work outside of their home. Usually, the first born son has special roles in the family. He typically brings his bride to live with his parents, raises his family in his parents household and cares for his aging parents.<sup>44</sup>

## **Observations**

In our immersion week experience of meeting the Lebanese diaspora in the Bay Ridge and Long Island City NY area in various ways such as attending churches, visiting their places of business and having interviews with individuals, we experience firsthand the dynamics of Lebanese culture.

**Family Oriented society:** By attending a Sunday worship service of a Lebanese congregation, we learned that Lebanese culture is one of a family oriented society. Church attendees included a mixture of males, females, children and people of varying ages. The people were warm, hospitable and friendly. People were dressed in modern Western type clothing and mostly casually. After worship, about 8 youth in the church came into the sanctuary with who appeared to be a female youth leader. Kids kneeled at the top of the center aisle, recited scripture from memorization and received a prayer of covering from the congregation.

At the end of the service the senior pastor gave a follow-up word as an introduction to a

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<sup>43</sup> Joseph Suad, “Conceiving Family Relationships in Post-War Lebanon,” *Comparative Family Studies* 35, no. 2 (2004): 271-93.

<sup>44</sup> *Gale Encyclopedia of Multicultural America*, s.v. “Lebanese Americans,” accessed April 18, 2017, <http://www.encyclopedia.com/history/united-states-and-canada/us-history/lebanese-americans>.

dedication to the Lord of a baby girl. The baby was held by the pastor while the family stood with them. Overall the service was in line with the format and feel of many Western Protestant churches. Even the style of the sermon with analogies and examples were very familiar to how sermons are done in the Western church. After service ended, everyone went downstairs for a post baby dedication celebration in the basement. There was food and decorations and we had the opportunity to talk to people one-on-one. There were many families gather together in celebration of this baby dedication. The women were busy facilitating the banquet and attending to the food while men mostly talked and entertained guests. The women we had the opportunity to speak with revealed that most of them were immigrated to the United States through invitations from immediate relatives such as siblings, husbands and wives. They further reported that family is the most important thing in their life.<sup>45</sup>

Our engagement with Contact C, who was the brother of the owner of a hookah lounge in Bay Ridge<sup>46</sup> also highlighted the importance of family dynamics in Lebanese culture. He went in great length talking about the importance of his parents to his life, especially his mother. “There’s no one like mama.” He feels he lost a part of himself when they passed. He explained that the mother is in charge of the affairs inside the household but the father is in charge of the affairs that are outside the household. If there is a case of mixed ethnicity, it is the father that will be claimed in terms of his ethnicity and they may mention that they are mixed with the mother’s ethnicity. Although the father is the leading figure in a family, he talked about the strength of a woman and how behind any good man you will find a good woman. For him skin

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<sup>45</sup> See Appendix for observation notes by Tanesha Lawrence, Evangelical church Bay Ridge, NY, March 5, 2017.

<sup>46</sup> See Appendix E

has no color or ethnicity regarding love. His wife is Moroccan.<sup>47</sup>

Contact C further elaborates on family dynamics when discussing his siblings. He reports having two brothers who live in the US. One brother is the owner of the hookah lounge mentioned above and the other owns a car dealership. He reports a close relationship to his brothers and that family overall is important. He states, “In the US family value doesn’t exist. That is because the way mother and father raise the kids; you cannot find Lebanese fathers divorcing and leaving their kid.”<sup>48</sup> The father provides for the house.

In yet a third interaction, we experienced family values as it relates to raising children into morally responsible citizens during a visit to a bakery in Bay Ridge<sup>49</sup> where the owner expresses the same sentiments as contact C. She shared her experience in being in Bay Ridge, stating, “ I lived in this neighborhood for 47 years. It used to be so nice. Now everything has changed.” When asked if the change is for good or bad she responded, “the change is for bad. It is the way the parents raise the children. They don’t raise them well.”

Finally Contact N shares that family, and extended family are very important to later Lebanese generations and remains the focal point and what holds them all together. Last names do not usually represent class or anything like that. What matters more in Lebanon is who your father is, who your father's father is, etc. In Lebanon, a lot of people will use their father's name as their last name or middle name to show their lineage/family roots.<sup>50</sup>

During the cultural immersion week, we not only saw examples of general family

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<sup>47</sup> Contact C, interviewed by Melanie De Gardnuer, Bay Ridge, NY, March 7, 2017.

<sup>48</sup> Contact C, interviewed by Melanie De Gardnuer, Bay Ridge, NY, March 7, 2017. See Appendix for full interview notes.

<sup>49</sup> See Appendix F

<sup>50</sup> Contact N, interviewed by Melanie De Gardnuer, Through email, March 10, 2017. See Appenix for full interview.

dynamics, but concrete examples of a still present patriarchal family system as well.

***Patriarchal family system*** : An interviewee, a congregant named Contact T shared his story that exemplifies the patriarchal system in Lebanese culture. T is a fellow in his 30's, who migrated from Lebanon. He works in marketing, advertising and started his own business. He was friendly, warm, obviously well-spoken and well educated. In our conversing with him he shared that he was engaged and his fiancée is an EP cardiologist. She received a profitable job offer in a town two hours outside of Pittsburgh that paid very well. They would be moving to that new town because of the benefit of the job opportunity. He shared his struggle with having his wife earn a higher salary than him in this new position, especially coming from a patriarchal society where the norm is that the male is the breadwinner.<sup>51</sup>

Yet a further example of Lebanese patriarchal family system observed in the experience we had was being hosted for dinner by a Jordanian/ Lebanese Christian family in Bay Ridge.<sup>52</sup> The wife, Contact G is from Jordan and her husband is from Lebanon.<sup>53</sup> During the visitation, she was only the person greeting and facilitating visitors, not the husband. Besides a brief greeting, the husband was mainly quietly watching TV and didn't engage with the group much until the end when we took pictures. He didn't even eat at the table with us. In our immersion experiences, Contact T's struggle with having his wife earn a higher salary and the limited interactions of the Lebanese husband demonstrates structures of patriarchy, patriarchal connectivity and relational right through maintaining household chores.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Contact T, interviewed by Tanesha Lawrence, video conference, Long Island City, NY, March 9, 2017. See Appendix for full interview.

<sup>52</sup> See Appendix G

<sup>53</sup> Contact G, interviewed by Nkaug Yang, Bay Ridge, NY, March 7, 2017.

<sup>54</sup> Contact T, interviewed by Tanesha Lawrence, video conference, Long Island City, NY, March 9, 2017.

***Immigration challenges:*** During our dinner visit with the Jordanian/Lebanese family in Bay Ridge, we met a female friend of the host who migrated from Lebanon but was currently single, never married and without children. Her younger brother also later joined us for dinner and shared his story. He explained that he only recently came from Lebanon to visit within the past few months but now has hopes of staying in America. They are praying he obtains legal immigration status in the US.

## **The Effects of the War on the Lebanese**

### **Role Changes in the Family System**

One of the most significant impacts of the Lebanese Civil War was that of family dynamics and the traditional patriarchal structure. Based on findings from the immersion week interviews and background research about the Lebanese family composition, the role changes in the aftermath of war are evident. These changes include more equal independence between husband and wife due to financial necessity and siblings being raised to take care of each other, protect each other, and be economic, social, and political resources for one another. An article written by Suad Joseph, "Conceiving Family Relationships in Post-War Lebanon," talks about how family relationships are conceived and have changed after the war in various ways. Joseph goes on to say, "As the family relationship is crucial to social institutions in most Middle Eastern countries, shifts within family relationships have repercussions throughout society due to long term violence which is a trigger for change in the gendered and aged relationships within patriarchal families."<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Joseph Suad, "Conceiving Family Relationships in Post-War Lebanon," *Comparative Family Studies* 35, no. 2 (2004): 271-93.

The previously mentioned interviewee Contact T in reference to struggles with his fiancée earning more money and the decision to move to a new location based on the benefits of her profession, demonstrates that she is no longer under the submission of her husband as is the norm in traditional Lebanese culture.<sup>56</sup> In other words, there is an apparent increased independence between husband and wife due to financial necessity.

Furthermore, Contact S who shares ownership of a Lebanese restaurant with her husband in Long Island City notes: “My husband and I have the same responsibility to do decision making.”<sup>57</sup> This business arrangement and the interviewee’s statement directly speaks to the impact of family role changes between married couples from the civil war. In reference to this phenomenon, Joseph goes on to say, “... women came to have more rights as a result of the war. In the seventeen to twenty years since the beginning of the war the changes allowed women to do what men do. Women can become lawyers, officers in the army, etc.”<sup>58</sup> Additionally, “Before the war, the husband controlled the wife. Now there is more awareness. The husband helps the wife in the house.”<sup>59</sup> Hence, in this new postwar scheme, women now have more freedom to do what they want to according to their comfort.

Moreover, Contact N is the oldest cousin and sibling in her family, so her role is often the "role model". It carries huge responsibility and can be challenging, but she’s learned to embrace it and allow herself to learn from her younger family members. The decision makers in her family are her mother and father together. Extended family decisions are made by her aunts and

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<sup>56</sup> Contact T, interviewed by Tanesha Williams, Brooklyn, NY, March 5, 2017.

<sup>57</sup> Contact S, interviewed by Heesun Jung, Long Island City, NY, March 9, 2017.

<sup>58</sup> Joseph Suad, “Conceiving Family Relationships in Post-War Lebanon,” *Comparative Family Studies* 35, no. 2 (2004): 271-93.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 280

uncles collectively. She says her parents are both very liberal and accepting of her and her sisters' lifestyles and decisions, as long as they are not harmful to themselves or anyone else. She is open with both of her parents and consider them like friends at this point. They do not have expectations on her sisters and her in terms of their role in the society or because they are women. She is aware that this is not the norm in other Lebanese and Middle Eastern families.<sup>60</sup>

In other family structures, as we noticed from the interview with Contact M, siblings are raised to take care of each other so there is a strong bond relationship between them. This new sibling dynamic was also an impact from the civil war.<sup>61</sup> In Contact M's case, she is single, unmarried, and lives with her siblings who are also unmarried. This is evidence of the change in family systems after the war. Suad in this regard mentions:

“Before the war, the brother was dominating the sister. This is less now. Brothers and sisters are now confidants and friends. The sister could not do without the brother and the brother without the sister. There was a lot of awareness of changes in relationship. And it was also a common pattern for parents to build an apartment building for their married sons to live in the same building.”<sup>62</sup>

Contact G's close living arrangement with her Lebanese in-laws living next to one another in 2-3 consecutive houses further demonstrates Joseph's point. We saw that the Lebanese are very communal people. They intentionally live in close proximities.

### **Social and Psychological Repercussions of War**

In addition to family dynamic, the Lebanese Civil War caused significant psychosocial repercussions as well. The effects of war on individuals, especially children and young people

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<sup>60</sup> Contact N, interviewed by Melanie De Gardnuer through email, March 10, 2017.

<sup>61</sup> Contact M, interviewed by Heesun Jung, Bay Ridge, NY, March 6, 2017.

<sup>62</sup> Joseph Suad, "Conceiving Family Relationships in Post-War Lebanon," *Comparative Family Studies* 35, no. 2 (2004): 271-93.

worldwide who are exposed to armed conflict are devastating. They are confronted with physical harm, violence, danger, exploitation, fear, and loss. Many children are forced to flee. Some witness the death of loved ones. Some are forced to pull the trigger themselves. Communities are ripped apart and can no longer provide a secure environment for children. Adults are busy surviving, parents have little time for their children. One article demonstrates how the war had negative social and psychological impacts on the people of Lebanon by stating the following, “Lebanon is considered as a symbol of a country devastated by the war that started on 12 April 1975 and ended on 1989 by the Taef agreement. The number of deaths reached 150 thousand and 200 thousand others were wounded, mostly children and women.”<sup>63</sup> It further goes on to say that there was mass migration of close to 517 thousand people from Lebanon to other countries between the years of 1975 and 1991. The psychological effects of the war affected many, especially children.<sup>64</sup> The devastating effects of the war on the mental health of the Lebanese citizens is best depicted in this detailed statement:

The psychological effects resulted from the war surpassed those of materialistic destruction of economy and towns. These effects were revealed through psychological and neurotic diseases, through physical and psychological twists perversions and disabilities, through a moral and behavioral deterioration, through regression, anxiety, asthenia, amnesia, phobia, perversion, depression cases, and through schizophrenia and mental disorders; In short, all pathological symptoms of behavioral disorders. Here we must mention that addiction of alcohol and drugs, and suicide rates increased among the Lebanese population. The war was more devastating for the weakest and most vulnerable people in society such as children, women, elders, and patients.<sup>65</sup>

From the findings we have concluded that Lebanese immigrants in the United States are still having difficulties as mentioned above with social and psychological effects resulting from

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<sup>63</sup> Dr. Kamel Muhanna, “No Place for Children During the War Lebanon Case” (Place, Amman, Jordan, November 18-19, 2008), accessed April 24, 2017, <http://www.amel.org.lb/aaimages/pdf/childrenhavenoplacereinwar.pdf>

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 2

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 4

the Lebanese war. Especially in reference to psychological effects, people suffer from the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Most people who experienced tragic events during the war suffer from mid and high level symptoms of PTSD in their life. Furthermore, a moderate rate of people suffer from symptoms of anxiety, which includes anxiety, fear, tension, and nervousness as clearly observed from our previously mentioned interview with Contact M.

Contact M as earlier stated, lived through the Lebanese Civil War. She explains the turmoil that took place in that terrifying time. Although she never personally experienced it, she recalls how protocols were put in place for random bus stops to check identification. Each card identifies an individual as either a Christian or a Muslim. For those who identified as Christians, they were beheaded right at that moment. In addition to this, she had a horrific encounter at the bank at which she worked. She found a dead body of someone who had been killed at her workplace.<sup>66</sup>

It was a very traumatic experience and time in her life to recall. During the interview with her, we observed that she appeared anxious, insecure, and hesitant in answering some of our questions and overall appeared uncomfortable. She repeatedly admonished us not to put any identifying information about her on the interview. We recognized that her behavior was due to traumatized mental reactions due to tragic experiences from the war. In addition, we recognized that as a result of her experience living through the war, it completely affected her relations with Muslims. “I don’t hate them, I just don’t like.”<sup>67</sup>

The aforementioned interview Contact T also shared experiences related to the

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<sup>66</sup> Contact M, interviewed by Tanesha Lawrence, Bay Ridge, NY, March 6, 2017.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.,

psychological trauma of war, having suffered through the Lebanese Civil War and other traumatic experiences. He recalls hard times of living in an underground shelter with no food. He recounts the constant fear of thinking every time his father left the shelter to go to work, he may not come home alive.

### **History of Lebanese Contact with Christianity**

Lebanon has long been a hub of religious diversity. Stemming from the time of Phoenicians, the ancestral people of the Lebanese, many pagan religious sects established strongholds in the Lebanese mountaintop regions.<sup>68</sup> Yet it is a common belief that based on scripture that it is probable that Christianity intersected and impacted Lebanese culture very early in its history. Before the official spread and establishment of Christianity, the Bible records Jesus as having traveled to the southern parts of present day Lebanon, near Tyre and Sidon where at the insistent request of a Canaanite mother, he cured her demon-possessed daughter (Matt. 15:21-28, NIV).<sup>69</sup>

Further support of early Christian influence in Lebanon, although not definitive, reports the possibility that Saint Peter himself personally evangelized the Phoenicians whom he affiliated to the ancient patriarchate of Antioch.<sup>70</sup>

Finally, it is recorded in scripture that Paul may have preached in Lebanon, as evidenced where the Bible describes how during his voyage to Rome, Paul was given the courtesy by a

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<sup>68</sup> Gale Encyclopedia of Multicultural America, s.v. "Lebanese Americans," accessed April 18, 2017, <http://www.encyclopedia.com/history/united-states-and-canada/us-history/lebanese-americans>.

<sup>69</sup> Sue Edwards, Kelly Mathews and Henry J. Rojers, *Mixed Ministry: Working Together as Brothers and Sisters in an Oversexed Society* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2008), 261. Also Frank J. Matera, *Strategies for Preaching Paul* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2001), 186.

<sup>70</sup> Aziz Suryal Atiya, *A History of Eastern Christianity* (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2010), 396.

Roman centurion to go to friends during a stop in Sidon to receive care.<sup>71</sup> Despite the assumptions made from the biblical record, it is known definitively that Christians came to the area of Lebanon during the time of the Byzantine Empire in 325 C.E. Saint Maron whose influence as the founder and father of the Christian Maronite faith and the spread of the faith by his followers in the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> century CE also attest to early Christian influences in Lebanon. The Maronite faith would go on to become the most dominant Christian faith in Lebanese culture even today.<sup>72</sup> In addition to the strongholds of pagan religious sects, the rise of Islam in the 7<sup>th</sup> century CE also stood as an opposing force against Christianity. Muslim-Christian tensions continue to be a longstanding problem in Lebanese history.

After the establishment of the Lebanese state, the historical identity of the Lebanese was contested among Muslims and Christians. Christians chose to adopt the country's Phoenician heritage while Muslims claimed adoption of a Syrian heritage as a great Arab nation. Both sides looked for moral, economic and military support from foreign countries to support their claims of Lebanon. Following Lebanese independence in 1943, an agreement called the National Pact, which helped to shape Lebanon as a multiconfessional state, was created between leaders of Shia, Sunni and Maronite faiths to ensure fair representation of these groups in the political system. The agreement includes a number of defined points with some important ones being the following: Christians and Muslims should have equal-opportunity to serve the country; the position of president should be held by a Maronite, the prime minister a Sunni Muslim and the speaker of the parliament a Shia Muslim; parliament seats are distributed according to sect and

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<sup>71</sup> John Brown, *A Dictionary of the Holy Bible* (London:William Tegg and Co , 1824), 523.

<sup>72</sup> "The World Factbook," Central Intelligence Agency, accessed April 20, 2017, [https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/print\\_le.html](https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/print_le.html).

religion in a ratio of 6:5 in favor of a Christian majority. Despite the right intentions of the terms, the National Pact agreement favored more political power of Christians compared to Muslims in the Lebanese government. This disproportionate balance of power and the questionable moral actions of those wielding it that led to increasing disagreements between Muslims and Christians and the eventual onset of the Lebanese Civil War.<sup>73</sup>

### **Religious Makeup of Lebanon Today**

Today, Lebanon has the largest Christian population in the Middle East. Christians represent 40% of the population: Maronite represent 22%, Eastern Orthodox 10%, Melkites (Greek Catholics) 6%, and protestants 2.5% on one hand. On the other hand; Shia Muslims represent 35%, Sunni Muslim 23%, and Druze 6% of the population respectively. The highest emigration rates among Christians on one hand, and the high birth rates among Muslims tend to reduce the percentage of Christians in the country. Of note, Buddhist, Hindus, and other religious groups round out the 18 religious sects that make up the Lebanese religious landscape.

### **Descriptions of Religious Beliefs, Practices and Community**

#### **Protestant Evangelical Worship Service in Brooklyn led by Lebanese Pastor**

It was a blessing for our team to take part in this worship service. We were able to witness first-hand, and participate with this christian community. There are a few observations worthy to note. First, females held important roles in leading the service. The worship leader was

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<sup>73</sup> *Encyclopedia of the Modern Middle East and North Africa*, s.v. "National Pact (Lebanon)," accessed April 24, 2017, <http://www.encyclopedia.com/humanities/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/national-pact-lebanon>

female and she cultivated the atmosphere well by giving glory to God and inviting the Spirit to come into their worship space. She was encouraging, lively, and prayed with confidence. In addition, the pastor's wife led the children in Bible memorization during their segment as part of the service. Furthermore, during a baby dedication, a woman from the audience prayed over the parents. We can conclude that this church honors women and children as importance in kingdom work.

Second, the sermon was very Biblically sound. It was centered on what to do during the hard trials and circumstances in one's life. The main points made were that Jesus reminds us in this life that we will have hardships. It is through them that we are shaped as we learn to hear the Word of God. Despite hard circumstances, God works through them and wants us to grow in them. God does not want relationships to be broken, but made stronger. The sermon points came from Isaiah 30:1-6. Isaiah 30:4 was used to demonstrate that on the worst day of your life, you must first deal with your feelings and emotions. Don't repress the feelings—let them out and cry. The illustration given to support this was of David and Jesus crying in hard times. We saw how this directly applies to the hardships endured by the Lebanese.

Third, not only does this church worship together, they also fellowship together. Every Sunday after their service, they have a time of gathering to share a meal together. Following the baby dedication at the end of this service, they held a celebration. By being immersed in this community, we saw how they served one another through their words and actions. As we walked by people or sat with them during the meal, we heard words of encouragement spoken, playful jokes made between friends, prayers said over those who needed it, and much laughter and good spirits in the air. It was a great time of fellowship that illustrated their genuine love for each

other.

### **Lutheran Church with Lebanese Members**

This church specifically caters to the needs of the Arabic speaking community of the Bay Ridge area in Brooklyn. Many people have different faith heritages and faith traditions in this church and yet they continue to gather together because of the binding force of language. The faith traditions that are represented in this specific church are Greek Orthodox, Melkite, Maronite, Catholic, and Lutheran. Although many Arabic speaking individuals represent the community, there aren't many churches that are able to reach out to all the individuals represented exclusively. Language plays a key role in this church community.

The lead pastor of the Arabic speaking church is ordained in the Lutheran church and yet the physical worship setting itself had many icons throughout the sanctuary. We interviewed a Syrian church member and learned that initially, the church didn't have any icons because it is Lutheran church.<sup>74</sup> However as the congregation began to grow and more individuals of the non-Lutheran traditions were becoming part of the community, the presence of icons became a need in the worship experience. While the need for icons in worship were for those with non-Lutheran traditions of faith, many of the Lutheran congregation members donated parts of the icons represented in the sanctuary for the sake of communal solidarity. These acts of giving represents the desire of the congregation members wanting to stick together despite the difference in faith background.

### **Maronite Church**

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<sup>74</sup> Contact G, interviewed by author, Bay Ridge, NY, March 7, 2017.

A few of our Lebanese contacts were from the Maronite church. Some facts about the Maronite church according to a historian that we interviewed include the following: The Maronite Catholic Church was established in New York when St. Joseph's Church was founded in Manhattan. In the past, the Church community was constituted of 60% American born but, now its constituted of 60% Lebanon native-born.<sup>75</sup> Their liturgy is different from the Roman Catholics. It is hard to find music for their liturgy because it is historically word of mouth, oral faith and tradition. They have their rules but they are still under the authority of the pope. The Lord's prayer is always said in Jesus' language, Aramaic. It's a very demanding faith in terms of their practice. People do not want to give up their tradition because their faith is attached to their ethnicity and tradition.<sup>76</sup>

We were able to see how faith played an important role in the life of a Lebanese Maronite. When asked what she values other than family, Contact N shares that she values her religion. She states that her religion plays a role in her decision-making particularly in the areas of her life and career. Furthermore, she acknowledges that her religion influences her decisions in a positive and ethical way. Additionally, she speaks about her church in a passionate way:

“Our Lebanese Maronite Church has always been an important and strong facet of our lives and we have made so many connections through it on the spiritual and community levels. I made lifelong friends. Our experiences together as teenagers on youth retreats and planning fundraising even created a bond that will carry on forever and hopefully be passed on to our children.”<sup>77</sup>

### **The Lebanese Americans**

Before diving into the grid and group analysis, we feel that it is also important to review

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<sup>75</sup> Contact D, interviewed by Samuel Lee in Bay Ridge, NY, March 9, 2017.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>77</sup> Contact N, interviewed by Melanie De Gardnuer, through Email, March 10, 2017.

and zone in on the Lebanese Americans as to have a well-rounded understanding of the Lebanese community with respect to those who migrated here as well as those who are born here.

### **Location**

According to the Arab American Institute,<sup>78</sup> Arab Americans are located in every state, but more than two thirds of them live in just ten states; California, Michigan, New York, Texas, New Jersey, Illinois, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Virginia. Lebanese Americans constitute a greater part of the total number of Arab Americans residing in most states. Detroit has the largest concentrations of Lebanese in America. Lebanese Christians specifically were the first Arabic-speaking people who migrated in large numbers to America. Their earliest migration began in the late 1970's with subsequent settlements all over the United States. They were peddlers who mostly traveled across New England and upstate New York communities. They opened stores and important communities in Utica, New York and in more than sixteen states.. They were considered exotic because of their baggy pants and fezzes which made them stand out even among other immigrants. Yet despite the challenges of migrating to a new nation, they persevered and established themselves successfully in their new homeland.

### **Integration and Assimilation**

The Lebanese were very strategic concerning the assimilation into the American culture. Rapidly, they befriended other Americans in order to absorb the language. Those who had made

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<sup>78</sup> Arab American Institute, [www.aaiusa.org](http://www.aaiusa.org).

it to America during World War I had engaged in the armed forces and their women worked in war-related business during World War II to accelerate their assimilation into the American culture. Despite some negative stereotypes and anti-Arab sentiment in American politics, they, quickly, became successful in America.

The American Lebanese family dynamics has been challenged by the American culture. They have adopted the American nuclear families; the line between gender lines has been blurred. Fathers spend more time with the children and mothers frequently represent families more in public. For instance, this can be seen in school meetings. They adopt the independent household norm of the American culture. Instead of older brothers, sisters share the responsibility of their aging parents as well.

Divorces among Lebanese American are less common in arranged-marriages than in non-arranged marriages. In the Lebanese families, boys are coddled and expected to be strong and independent. On the other hand, girls are restrained and expected to be taught to work within social patterns and trained to be dependable and interdependent. They assume many of the household responsibilities and in charge of their younger siblings. Each family and religious community is expected to care for their own members. They inherited the millet system (community self-governing laws) from the Ottomans Empire. It created boundaries among different sects.

In her opinion, contact N states that the Lebanese culture is different and unique due to its acceptance and willingness to assimilate into other cultures and to adopt and accept other ways of life. She notes that this does not apply to everyone, but speaking broadly, she's never been

met with harsh resistance culturally to accepting and embracing other cultures. Also, she share that the Lebanese people love to travel to other places and use their entrepreneurial and social skills to build a new life and achieve success in business. She's met fellow Lebanese people in almost every new country or state that she visited.<sup>79</sup>

In regards to family, she says the following:

“Just like in America, traditional gender roles have changed dramatically both in Lebanon and among the Lebanese in America in recent years. What was ‘normal’ in my grandparents generation is now much different in my generation and it differs from person to person and family to family. Women in general are expected to provide and nurture, but among my cousins for example, we all help each other and there are no expectations. I haven't been to Lebanon in a while, but I know these roles and expectations have been loosened and relaxed. Being single at my age (33), would not have been accepted in my grandparents generation and that spilled over into my parents generation a bit, but things began to change in the 70s and 80s as lives were torn apart by the civil war in Lebanon and people began moving out of the central ‘village’ lifestyle. My grandmother, in her own way, puts light pressure on all of us to speed up the marriage process and have children, but I think that is more because she wants to see and enjoy her great grandchildren while she is still alive. She is unable to read and write herself, so has always emphasized the importance of education and success in our academic and professional lives. She is proud of our accomplishments and expresses that regularly.”<sup>80</sup>

In another example, Contact S's husband first came over to the U.S. from Lebanon to establish the business and start a life for his family in New York and then 2 years later, she and the children came over. Her daughter, Contact A, now studies at a well known college in the major of International studies.<sup>81</sup> She explained that it is all about how you treat people, that is the whole religion, not this or that.<sup>82</sup> By her kind words and manner, I believe that she meant what

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<sup>79</sup> Contact N, interviewed by Melanie De Gardnuer, through email, March 10, 2017.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

Hojar, Paula, and J. Sydney Jones. "Lebanese Americans." *Countries and Their Cultures*. N.p., n.d. Web. 23 Apr. 2017.

<sup>81</sup> Contact A, interviewed by Melanie De Gardnuer, Phone Interview, March 14, 2017.

<sup>82</sup> Contact S, interviewed by Heesun Jung, Long Island City, NY, March 9, 2017.

she said.

Contact A is Contact S's older daughter. From our conversation I learned the following about the Lebanese culture from her second generation perspective. She wrote an article about her decision to go away for college and the relevance of that in the Lebanese culture. Education is important, specifically for her family, her parents put pressure on her to go to college and finish because neither of them had finished their college degree so she will be the first in their family to do so.<sup>83</sup> She personally states that religion is each person's decision to either practice in public or private but that it should not be forced on anyone, but rather their own decision. Many people at her school are Islama-phobic (according to her) and show hatred toward Islam. We know from her mother that she does not wear the hijab as her own personal decision.<sup>84</sup>

According to Contact A, in regards to Lebanese people being entrepreneurial is somewhat true. Out of her father's friends, one out of ten are probably business owners and for her mother, maybe three out of five are business owners. But she said that it is not always the case for all Lebanese families to want to be business owners. Her father just became a business owner about six months ago, but was not previously one. He did tell her that it is best to be your own boss.<sup>85</sup>

### **Social Analysis of the Lebanese Americans in Brooklyn, New York**

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<sup>83</sup> Contact A, interviewed by Melanie De Gardner, Phone Interview, March 14, 2017.

<sup>84</sup> Contact A, interviewed by Melanie De Gardner, Phone Interview, March 14, 2017.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

## Grid and Group Analysis

Grid and Group Theory are not linear in Lebanon. It varies from one religious jurisdiction to another. Intern of Cosmology, Lebanon is an egalitarian society where we observe low grid and high group patterns in their culture. They are a very proud people group who carry a sense of pride. This is evident in their speech: the emphasis by parents on children about the importance of education, the emphasis on their roots tracing back to Christianity, their expression of their uniqueness through the fact that they are willing to try new things, and in their celebration for their cuisine. Even as we learned about the symbolic meaning of the cedar tree, illustrates the long-lasting strength of Lebanon and its people. The way in which they speak about themselves and the illustrations of the greatness that encompasses what it means to be Lebanese demonstrates a world that is centered on them.

Their lives are not significantly shaped by externally imposed roles. Though, social classes and inequality are evident, people can chose to move from one social class to another through personal efforts. Yet, the hierarchy and gender role in the family structure is strongly evident. The high group theory is existent in within the family and churches especially in the Maronite church. The members are very intentional about protecting their boundaries by keeping their traditions. Mark, the historian from the Maronite church says: “The liturgy of the church is different from the Roman Catholic and the members want to keep it different. The collectivity input is significantly allowed in the family structure because of the low age of capacity a guardian is supposed to give their consent.”<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Mark, interviewed by Samuel Lee, Brooklyn, NY, March 9, 2017

## Worldview Themes

It is difficult to define a general worldview for the larger Lebanese culture because of the existence and complexities of different subgroups, more specifically religious subgroups, which exist in the culture. Yet despite the presence of a variety of religious sects, there are some general themes that can be seen among Christian and Muslim Lebanese as the two largest religious groups. Both groups like many Lebanese in general exhibit a high degree of patriotism towards Lebanon. There is a fierce love and loyalty to the home country. Secondly, morality is highly emphasized, although the definition and the view of what is considered moral may differ between groups. Additionally, education as a means to achieving success is highly prized and both want equal opportunity in the country. Finally there is high value placed on the two most common languages of the culture, French and Arabic.

A key factor to consider in the shaping of most Lebanese worldviews is the longstanding recurrence of political turmoil and bloody conflicts throughout the history of the country as previously mentioned. With a focus more specifically on first generation Lebanese Christians in Bay Ridge and Long Island City, the people group of our study, important dates and events to mention that have likely shaped their worldview include: 1043 CE the end of the French and British colonial period, Lebanese Civil War in 1975-1990, and the September 11 World Trade Center attacks in the United States. These conflicts are relevant to the animosity we observed first hand by Lebanese Christians against Muslims during our cultural immersion week. Concepts for reflection in relation to war-related crisis that the Lebanese has experienced include: violation of their geographical territory, lost time that foreign occupation and war have stolen from the potential development of the country and compromise of education, economics

and religious view.

The experience of conflict, especially in regard to the Lebanese Civil War has generated suffering, hatred and has further propagated religious bias of Lebanese Christians against Muslims as expressed throughout our interviews. Feelings of abuse and betrayal on many levels due to the occurrences in their home country offers insight into why first generation Lebanese Christians are resistant to sharing their environment or streets, even in the United States, with Arab Muslims of any ethnicity. Hence aspects of the worldview of first generation Lebanese Christians in Bay Ridge and Long Island City, New York are result of a conglomerate of three main influences: common Lebanese perspectives pre-Lebanese civil war, the occurrence of the Lebanese Civil War and other conflicts and influences of Western culture.

Missiologist Paul Hiebert's insight is helpful in further delineating some aspects of the Lebanese Christian worldview. According to Hiebert, worldview assumptions can be grouped into three main areas: cognitive, affective and evaluative worldview dimensions. Below is a discussion of the Lebanese worldview in relation to these themes.<sup>87</sup>

The cognitive dimension of worldview deals with assumptions about how reality is perceived in a group. It includes such categories as self or group/other, time, space, causality and categories of reality.<sup>88</sup> The idea of self /other or group/other is one that has shifted slightly with the migration of Lebanese Christians in America. Lebanese Christians in America still primarily view themselves in relation to their connection to Lebanese culture or community as a

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<sup>87</sup> Paul Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews: An Anthropological Understanding of How People Change* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 50.

<sup>88</sup> Paul Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews*, 50.

whole or to familial connections. Strong patriotism toward Lebanon as discussed earlier is a common theme. In regards to religion however, as discussed in more detail prior, there is an us and them mentality as it relates to Arab Muslims where biases exist. Lastly, despite strong group loyalties, with assimilation into Western American culture, some shifts to a more individualist mindset is becoming more prominent.

Secondly, in reference to causality Lebanese Christians have primarily a Christian worldview. God is sovereign and is the ultimate source of authority and power. Blessings, good things and miracles come from him. The evil of the world is primarily due to the Satanic kingdom. Yet Lebanese Christians revere and trust God and believe in faith that He will sustain them in all situations. A better life free of sin, pain and sorrow is promised through salvation in Jesus Christ and eternity in heaven.

The affective dimension of worldview addresses assumptions or views regarding feelings or emotions in a culture. It addresses areas of awe, fear, worship, joy, how people feel about themselves and one another.<sup>89</sup> Among the major Lebanese Christian groups represented as Maronites, Melkites, Greek Orthodox and Protestants there are difference in worship to God. Maronites, Melkites and Greek Orthodox engage in worship involving rituals, chants, candles, asceticism and a more sober or subdued worship of God. Protestants depending on denomination in contrast may engage in acts of worship through hymns, testimonies, preaching, meditation, spirited singing and dancing in praise and varying intensities of praise.

Lebanese Christians seem to have an overall high esteem of themselves and strong

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<sup>89</sup> Paul Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews: An Anthropological Understanding of How People Change* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 59.

culture pride. Yet, because of all of the conflict and pain in their political history, perhaps the Lebanese see the world through the lens of suffering. Furthermore, post war Christian Lebanese view outsiders, especially Muslims with fear, suspicion and mistrust. This is paradoxical in that Lebanese in general view themselves as extremely culturally tolerant and open minded to other people groups. Yet they do not exercise that religious openness with their own Muslim countrymen. There is a pervading feeling of sorrow and lament over the glorious Lebanon of the past and the condition of devastation that it has become. Yet the emotional ramifications of the wars are not openly discussed and in spite of the post-traumatic effects, the people press on. Their faith and resiliency leads to the conclusion that they view the world as a battle field where, although God is with them, they must also do their part to fight for peaceful lives and success. These facts can be related to the pride and the resilience we have witnessed in the Lebanese during the immersion week. Contact T's life story is a testament to this reality. Observation of the relativistic culture and the migration rates among Lebanese Christians reveals a somewhat easier integration of this people group into Christian Western culture in comparison to the rest of the Arab world.

The evaluative dimension has to do with moral and social order in a culture and considers such areas as virtue, manners and accepted practices.<sup>90</sup> A key area among Lebanese in general and Lebanese Christians by extension is hospitality and accommodation. This was an area we experienced firsthand in our experience of being hosted for dinner by a Lebanese-Jordanian family. Secondly, as education is seen as important, those achieving high educational

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<sup>90</sup> Paul Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews: An Anthropological Understanding of How People Change* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 60-61.

achievements are highly valued. Furthermore, success is ascribed through hard work, education and ambition, not automatically through birth. Lastly, traditionally Lebanese endorse emotional restraint in public and frown upon open emotional expression especially in reference to sadness or sorrow.

### **Cultural Appreciation**

The Lebanese family dynamic and how they care for their elderly is appreciated. The Bible is bold about that aspect of the culture. Their food is great, especially their French style of baking. Their sense of community, festival dance for instance, was discussed at the restaurant<sup>91</sup> is admired. One group member has visited a Lebanese Cultural Festival and got to witness their style of community dancing and it is exciting and fun to participate in. Their sense of community is important and they are a very hospitable people. Outside of hesitation to share because of the political tension that is going on in our country or traumatic experiences in war, all of our Lebanese contacts were welcoming and willing to share personal stories and stories about their culture and country. There was a sense of pride regarding the Lebanese culture and each one would say they were proud to be Lebanese. If they did not communicate it verbatim, they did communicate with the way they spoke about their heritage.

### **Jesus' Footprints Among the Lebanese**

Lebanon is referenced about 80 times in Bible.<sup>92</sup> Psalm 104:16 says, "The trees of the

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<sup>91</sup> See Appendix H, I, J

<sup>92</sup> Open Bible. Lebanon References. <https://www.openbible.info/topics/lebanon>. Accessed April 22, 2017.

LORD are watered abundantly, the cedars of Lebanon that He planted.” Even King Solomon built his house out of the “Forest of Lebanon” 1 Kings 7:2-5. This could explain the pride that the Lebanese people have for their country and the symbolism of the cedar tree on the Lebanese flag. We’ve heard it from more than one interviewee about the strength of Lebanon memorialized in the representation of the cedar tree on their flag and as we can see it is mentioned all throughout the Bible. The Lord has been amongst these people since the beginning of time. As we have learned at the Alliance Theological Seminary, the Lord is working in every people long before any missionaries come along. Jesus can be evidenced in the warmth of their hospitality, the joy, smiling and dancing of their people, and their love for family and community.

Psalm 92:1-5 says, “It is good to give thanks to the LORD, to sing praises to your name, O Most High; to declare your steadfast love in the morning, and your faithfulness by night, to the music of the lute and the harp, to the melody of the lyre. For you, O LORD, have made me glad by your work; at the works of your hands I sing for joy. How great are your works, O LORD! Your thoughts are very deep!” This Psalm is definitely exemplified by the Lebanese people. We have heard and witnessed through worship services at church, hookah lounges and restaurants the vibrancy of the Lebanese people when they sing and dance with joy- some for the Lord and some for enjoyment and entertainment. We have been welcomed into homes, businesses, and the personal lives of each person we have interviewed. The joy of the Lord was witnessed in each interaction that took place. Their care for family and ability to make outsiders feel like family is definitely a witness to the Lord. Jesus has been with these people through trials and tribulations and great victories and successes. His long-suffering and endurance has remained with the Lebanese people throughout all generations.

## CONCLUSION

### The Gospel

Central to Christianity is the belief that through the sin of Adam and Eve against God, creation fell, entered into a curse of destruction and death and was essentially relegated to a state of eternal separation from God. In His love, grace and mercy, God sent His own son, Jesus Christ as a willing sacrifice to die for the repayment of the required debt of human sin, release humanity from bondage and reconcile us back to right standing with God Almighty. Despite Christ's sacrifice, we still live in a world of sin and darkness that are a consequence of the Fall that will remain until Christ's return to abolish the satanic kingdom once and for all, bringing judgment and full restoration to the earth. Despite this reality, by the power of the Holy Spirit we can still live in victory over sin and darkness despite our current earthly surroundings. In Christ we have victory over the powers of Satan and his kingdom to live victorious not only in this life, but we are guaranteed the promise of eternal life and blessings in heaven as citizens of God's kingdom.

Unfortunately, although many Christians receive salvation and are marked for eternal life, they still live in bondage. The grace of God has not been fully embraced in their lives to set them free from all bondage, they have not completely yielded to the transformative work of the Holy Spirit and they have not appropriated the victory of Christ to which they are entitled or to which they access totally into their lives. Opposition in the form of the world system, the flesh and the Satanic kingdom war against the souls and beings of Christians and non-Christians alike.

The Lebanese Christian, like all other people groups, are no exception.

Lebanese culture then in all its diversity, vibrancy and uniqueness embodies the beauty of the Lord Jesus Christ. Yet similarly, as in all cultures, the gospel as a purifying agent comes to affirm, challenge and transform the Lebanese culture as well. In our honing in on Lebanese Christians in Bay Ridge and Long Island City, Queens New York, our experience is unique in that we do not approach these treasured people as a harvest to whom we have the task of sharing the gospel in the strictest sense for the first time. We recognize they have already accepted, acknowledged and claimed Jesus Christ as Lord and should be respectfully seen as they view themselves—saved and adopted into the family of God as co-heirs in Christ. As such we humbly approach them with the best intention of allowing the gospel to affirm, challenge and transform them within the context of their culture, even as they already know Christ and no differently than the need for the gospel to accomplish this feat in our own respective cultures, both Christian and non-Christian segments around the world.

We hope to share the Gospel in a way that brings transformation as we recognize the presence of spiritual, emotional, physical, and social challenges of the Lebanese Christian diaspora living as immigrants in the USA. To address these four areas of needs, we define our approach as holistic because our focus is the aspects of their whole-being. The entirety of their being is sacred to God and we must see them through these lens. We propose three avenues which we believe will help our Lebanese brothers and sisters in Christ to live transformed lives in the areas of the physical, social, emotional, and spiritual.

***Lebanese Community Group***

We first propose the development of a Lebanese Christian community group. The group would be comprised of Lebanese Melkite, Maronite, Greek Orthodox and evangelical faiths as these comprise the majority of Christians in Bay Ridge, Long Island City, and Brooklyn. The Lebanese Christian community group would be an avenue for Lebanese Christians regardless of denomination to come together in a way to promote community, fellowship, healing and empowerment. We exercise caution in presenting this intervention in not approaching as an authoritative etic influence, but as allies who would work collaboratively with leaders and those with an emic position within the Lebanese Christian community to develop this program.

In the hypothetical development of the Lebanese community group project and all other proposed interventions, the most important step is to first bring the idea before the Lord. As the Bible states, “Many are the plans in a person's heart, but it is the LORD's purpose that prevails,” (Prov. 19:21, NIV). We would want to seek God’s approval and His will for this project. Therefore, we would undergo a designated time of increased prayer, fasting, studying God’s Word, meditation and contemplation to discern God’s leading in the community group endeavor.

Secondly, would be the development of a proposal for the community group. Ideally, we envision a group that would meet periodically in time increments no less than once per month and in some cases more often as required for specific areas of need to promote cultural unity, community and healing. Below see proposed suggestions for the community club:

- January = “Remembering Lebanon,”: An event highlighting the history of Lebanon, the great aspects of the country and culture. A space also provided for people to share their thoughts and process the devastating effects of the Lebanese war.

- February = A showcase of Lebanese art and culture (i.e. performance by Lebanese

musicians, Lebanese play, Lebanese visual art, etc.)

- March = Lebanese health fair= free health screening for hypertension, diabetes, dental care. Workshops on disease processes that are prevalent in the Lebanese community. Additional health and wellness workshops can be conducted more frequently throughout the year.

- Development of a Lebanese sports and activity club. Activities include a weekly walking group; neighborhood sports teams in popular Lebanese sports like basketball and soccer that play against one another for recreation and exercise.

- April = Lebanese culinary fair or gathering showcasing native Lebanese food.

- May = "Young and Lebanese in America:" Forum for youth to discuss their difficulties in balancing the pressures of adhering to expected Lebanese cultural norms within an opposing Western culture. Additional activities can be developed throughout the year with a focus on youth.

- June = "Adjusting to a New Way:" Similar forum for adults to share difficulties of being immigrants of Lebanese descent and the challenges of assimilation

- July = multi-denominational worship: service where aspects of the Lebanese Christian denominations can be incorporated into worship to show the beauty in the diversity of worship and trust that God will manifest His presence. Several of these particular types of services can be conducted throughout the year or similarly different denominations can lead a special worship service showing their style of worship as well.

- August = Fundraising event to raise money for designated charities back in Lebanon or to be invested in the improvement of the group's current community

- September and several times throughout the year = Free immigration and legal services

workshop

Contained in the above outline are just some proposed examples for the community group. The next step would be to present our proposal to key representatives. For example, ministerial leaders and even some chosen lay persons of the different Lebanese Christian denominations for their feedback and input. We've gained some insight firsthand into the importance and the validity of this step by briefly presenting this hypothetical community group idea to one of our Lebanese Christian resources identified during the cultural immersion study week. The idea was met with enthusiastic approval and optimism from this individual.<sup>93</sup> Our prayer is although we as missionaries may be initiating the project early on, that the Lebanese would embrace the group as their own by intentionally shaping, developing and leading it by the guidance of the Holy Spirit in a way that most effectively ministers to their community.

In consideration of cost effectiveness, a distinct separate community center would not be needed. Instead many of these activities can be carried out in already established church buildings, in outdoor spaces (i.e. parks) and even in Lebanese business establishments such as restaurants and lounges. Given the apparent small area that holds the majority of the Lebanese Christian community and the familiarity in the community of most churches and businesses, the accessibility for the participants would be easy by walking, car or public transportation.

As Lebanese culture is one that is more heavily egalitarian with apparent high group - low grid interactions, a Lebanese community group would be a naturally accepted and beneficial avenue where the gospel would be effective in working in Lebanese Christians and by

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<sup>93</sup> Contact N, interviewed by Melanie De Gardnuer over the phone. March 30, 2017.

extension through Lebanese culture. In line with the prevalent Lebanese worldview of life being lived not from an individualistic perspective, but in respect to community and most specifically with an undeniable thread of cultural and ethnic pride in both non-Christian and Christian Lebanese alike, we believe that the community group concept would be embraced by Lebanese Christians.

***Healing and Counseling Ministry: Provide Mental Health Counseling***

As Lebanese culture is one of low emotional output, traditional counseling at the outset may not be readily acceptable. Regarding this issue, there is hope. Firstly, post-Lebanese civil war, although there is still a stigma attached to receiving mental health services, there has been an increasing awareness about the existence and importance of mental health interventions when needed.<sup>94</sup> We can then speculate that the Lebanese Christians in New York, especially now being in Western culture, may be more amenable to counseling now or in the future. Furthermore, in discussing our interventions with one of our immersion week resources who has an emic insider perspective, she gave the additional insight that people, although not open to individual counseling initially, may be willing to share their thoughts and feelings about the war, migration, challenges, and so forth in a low key social atmosphere like some of the events proposed for the Lebanese Christian community club. With this information in mind as an eventual outgrowth of the Lebanese community club and as people become more comfortable, we propose the

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<sup>94</sup>Heiko Fabian Konigstein, "The Influence of Mental Health On Reconciliation in Post-War Lebanon," *IFHV Working Paper* 3, no. 2 (October 2013): 30, [http://www.ruhr-uni-bochum.de/ifhv/documents/workingpapers/wp3\\_2.pdf](http://www.ruhr-uni-bochum.de/ifhv/documents/workingpapers/wp3_2.pdf).

development of a mental health counseling program and freedom ministry.

***Mental Health Counseling Program:*** Developed as a program for mental health services to the Lebanese community. General counseling and diagnosis and treatment would be offered for such issues as depression, stress reaction, grief and general anxiety disorder. A major service would be the diagnosis and treatment of Post Traumatic-Stress Disorder (PTSD) which is often due to exposure to traumatic events that directly happen to an individual or to someone in close relation or connection to the individual. Furthermore, PTSD usually involves an event that involves experiencing or witnessing actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence that has the potential to be traumatic.

As Lebanese have experienced the tragic events of the civil war, the exposure can be a traumatic experience either as a civilian or as part of military operations. Traumatic events are emotionally distressing and almost everyone who experiences trauma will be emotionally affected. Furthermore, there are a variety of different ways in which people will respond. While most people will recover on their own, for some the experience can lead to the diagnosis of worsening mental health issue as mentioned above. Most people will recover quite quickly but without the help of family and friends the effects can be long-lasting. Our Contact M is an example of a person who has neglected her emotional needs due to apparent lack of a strong support system and lack of receiving any type of mental health counseling services.

Within the mental health program, we will provide individual counseling with volunteered specialized therapists for PTSD. Furthermore, as women are more susceptible, we would provide a special therapy group for treating Lebanese women with posttraumatic stress

disorder (PTSD) and suggests some useful treatment procedures. Essential therapy components include (1) analysis in the context of war with recovery of dissociated memories and affects; (2) the teaching of techniques that allow strong emotions to be tolerated without resorting to neurotic escape; and (3) the discovery of "acceptable" meanings for the war experience. Finally, a fourth component is the realization that trauma is as much a process as a disorder and as a process, it is comprehensible, manageable, and compatible with leading a relatively normal life.

### *Healing/Counseling Ministry*

Isaiah 53:4-5, "Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed." Based on this scripture and life experience, we know that all of human nature has sustained wounds within the soul in some capacity that has resulted in adverse effects. For the Lebanese diaspora, pastoral counseling with the power of the Holy Spirit will allow them to see that only Jesus alone can heal their soul wounds. It is important for them to believe that God can redeem the pain in their lives and can further use that pain to make them more like Jesus as expressed in Romans 8:28-29: "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son" (NIV).

In reference to the soul care and healing ministry for example, we would enlist the help of the Holy Spirit to surface key memories that will release healing. God knows how to heal the wounds of our soul by having the person become aware of the Presence of Jesus in the wounded

memory. In every instance of our wounding, Jesus was always present with us whether we know it or not. Prayer intercessors would be present interceding in prayer for the one in need of healing to see Jesus and guiding them on how to watch and listen for his presence. If we can revisit the memory and access Jesus' presence at the time of difficulty, healing can flow. The key is to let the Holy Spirit lead as He knows best how to minister to all of our needs.

### ***Church Planting in a Lebanese Community Context: Partnering with Pastors***

Within the Lebanese Christian community in Bay Ridge and Long Island City, there is a small percentage of evangelical churches present. Whereas the more prominent Lebanese denominations including Maronite, Greek Orthodox and Melkite faiths are not intentional about evangelizing to Muslims or other non-believers, Protestant evangelicals can be instrumental in providing church plants that encourage evangelism, discipleship, spiritual transformation and missions. Hence, our third proposed intervention is to partner with already established church plants or pastors with the vision for church planting to help develop solid spiritual homes that will reach the lost in the community.

One of the first immediate needs is to have a relationship with the church leaders of the Lebanese American community. This is crucial because partnerships happen through friendships and building relationships. This paves the way for open and honest dialogue and conversations about church vitality, church sustainability, and the next generation ministry.

The vitality of the church relies heavily on the willingness of the church to share the gospel. In order for the church to sustain, discipleship needs to be reproduced and multiplied. What we realized in our research is that the Christian Lebanese community does not actively

share their faith. We want to empower the Lebanese American church to become a mobile body of Christ.

## **How The Gospel Will Be Ministered In the Context of Intervention Through the Worldview of Lebanese Christians**

### **Worldview Cultural Pride, Lebanese Patriotism and Strong Community and Family Ties**

The Lebanese worldview, inclusive of Lebanese Christians, is one that puts a high value on cultural pride and the individual's association with Lebanese culture. Praise for Lebanon as a country and adoration for Lebanese culture among the Lebanese themselves resurfaced as a recurrent theme. Life is viewed and lived through the perspective of one's commitment to country, community, and family. The gospel actually affirms a healthy cultural pride in that all cultures reflect the beauty of God.

Secondly, as Christianity is a faith that promotes community, the Gospel further promotes the idea of community. Consequently, the gospel in the context of a Lebanese community group can effectively bear witness to its members because a Lebanese community group is in line with the Lebanese worldview of strong community ties and patriotism and hence, would be more likely embraced in this culture promoting context. Yet simultaneously, the gospel would need to challenge the excess cultural pride that the Lebanese display in that it reaches to the point of arrogance and idolatry.

Finally the gospel's transformative power would need to shift the Lebanese people group's faulty egotistical perception of Lebanese culture as a superior culture to one that broadly and equally values the beauty in all cultures and embraces a love for global community. That global

community must include love and forgiveness of their Muslim brothers and sisters to which they have animosity.

### **Suffering**

All three interventions including the Lebanese cultural group, mental health counseling/freedom ministry and collaboration for church planting offers an environment for the Gospel to be sympathetic to the turmoil of Lebanese history and affirm the theology of suffering and hope in faith. Yet the gospel would also be afforded the opportunity to challenge the persistence of brokenness as a consequence of suffering as it relates to the turmoil of Lebanese history. Healing, deliverance and removal from bondage would be the outcome of the gospel's transforming power in the context of these interventions, with the understanding that God can use the redemption of our suffering for our overall benefit and well-being.

### **Causality**

In line with the Lebanese worldview of God as the loving sovereign Creator of all things and the Satanic kingdom as spiritual beings who oppose the work of God and manifest evil on the earth, again all three interventions afford the opportunity to allow the Gospel to affirm the reality of the Trinity, the Kingdom of God, the Satanic realm, salvation through Jesus Christ and other key themes of Christian faith. Yet simultaneously the Good News comes to challenge the Lebanese Christian failure to live in the full victory Jesus died for us to have and in it's transforming power bring freedom and bring guidance in how to remain in victory over all the

work of Satan.

### **Time and Space**

Lebanese culture is one that is more event-oriented in that many define their history or life based on the Lebanese Civil War. Furthermore, although there has been a slight shift in the views of Lebanese who have migrated and assimilated into American culture, traditionally they don't live as people who are restricted or controlled by time obligations, but rather value quality and quantity time together. In the arena of space, the Lebanese people group value hospitality, fellowship in the same space and close familial living arrangements. Additionally, a high value on the geographical space of Lebanon is often placed.

Therefore, the Lebanese community group in particular is an adequate avenue for the gospel to affirm the beauty of hospitality and close fellowship in family and community, to do so within the framework of less time restrictive gatherings that is typical of Western culture and to affirm the beauty of Lebanon as a part of God's miraculous and glorious creation. Yet the Gospel must also challenge the Lebanese idolization of the geographical space and unhealthy preoccupation with forming one's identity or defining life solely on the impact of the Lebanese Civil War.

And finally the Good News of salvation must be transformational for the Lebanese in the primary acceptance and assurance of their identity in Christ, not in their culture or historical past, while also directing them in putting Christ as the only God in their lives, not the false idols of a geographical space, cultural ethnicity or any other false gods.

## **Concluding Thoughts**

The Lebanese have endured a complex history colored with a dichotomy of once being one of the most stable countries in the Middle East, even given the title of the the “Switzerland” of the region to suffering the devastating ravages of war from which they have not fully recovered. Yet the witness of God is evident in the tapestry of the culture in their traditions, norms and values; the hand of God is upon them as seen in their resiliency and tenacity. Our hope is that the gospel is allowed to transform the Lebanese Christians of the Bay Ridge, Brooklyn, and Long Island City, New York in a holistic way and that the grace of God touches every area of their lives healing past hurts, disappointments and wounds in both individuals and community, that they will stand as rightful worthy ambassadors of the Kingdom of God, being the salt and light in the dark places. We believe that their hearts will be softened to not only forgive the past ills of their Muslim brothers and sisters, but to intentionally evangelize and bring the Good News to followers of Islam and all other non-believers alike. May their hearts be stirred with a love for all humanity and a burden to see lost souls brought to salvation, with the same passion and fervor to which they devote to their beloved Lebanon.

## **Remaining Questions**

- 1) How can we make sure that the Gospel will be preached to those participants of the community group?
- 2) How can the members of the non-Christian Lebanese society be reached for Christ as our

model focuses on Christians?

3) How can we make sure that our efforts in partnering with those who are already planting churches is effective and makes a difference in the communities where they exist?

4) How will the volunteers for the healing ministry experience deliverance and freedom in their own lives while providing this type of service for others?

5) How can we go deeper in our understanding of the Lebanese culture to provide a more contextually appropriate impact on the communities we will serve?

## **Appendix**



Figure 1.1



Map of Lebanon (State.gov)

Figure 1.2



Lebanese Flag (Cia.gov)

### Appendix B

<b>Periods</b>	<b>Rates</b>	<b>Populations of refugees</b>
1975 – 1984		506,416
Christians	78%	395,004
Muslims	22%	111,412
1985 – 1990		385,000
Christians	17%	65,450
Muslims	83%	319,550
1992 – 2007		422,019
Christians	39.40%	183,611

Muslims	60, 60%	282,408
2008 – 2011		200,000
Christians	42%	82,000
Muslims	59%	118,000

The report provides a statistic of Emigration by sects.



#### Appendix D



Recently in January 10, 2014 Civil Marriage has been legalized in Lebanon (Lebanon News Jn. 10, 2014)

Appendix E



Baklava and tea at a Hookah Lounge in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn, NY.



Lebanese Bakery in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn, NY.



Dinner with Contact G in Brooklyn, NY. (Group shot not posted to secure identity).



Fish platter at Lebanese Restaurant in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn, NY.



Mural at Lebanese Restaurant in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn, NY.



Map of Lebanon mural at Lebanese restaurant in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn, NY.

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