Cultural Hybridity:
Arab/Latino – A Reflexive Approach

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Abstract:

The purpose of this research is to explore the ideas and experiences of being multi-ethnic and multicultural. I used the reflexive ethnographic style to give the reader a more empathic understanding of the research material and the cultural situation. For this research, I conducted interviews with 16 people of Arab and Latino heritage. I selected three of the interviews to report in this paper. These three interviews were the most candid and revealing of the self-identities of the participants. From these interviews, I gleaned five themes that affect the experience of being multi-ethnic and multicultural: (1) cultural hybridization, (2) the interaction of religion and family structure, (3) Anglicizing names, (4) the process of assimilation, and (5) the effects of the concepts of "whiteness."
Cultural Hybridity: Arab/Latino

Introduction

In anthropology, there is a style of writing ethnographies known as reflexive. This style is often used by anthropologists who feel as if an empathic approach is necessary for the audience to understand the material and the cultural situation. It allows anthropologists to reflect on themselves as researchers in and out of the field so that they may better understand how their experiences shape the way that they view the research or situation (Robertson, 2002).

A famous example is the article “Grief and a Headhunter’s Rage” by Renato Rosaldo. Rosalto studied various tribes in the Philippines from 1967-69 and 1974 (Rosalto, 1989). One particular tribe, the Ilongot, was practicing headhunting. When he asked why they headhunt, he was told that when one of their people died or was killed, a person could be so overwhelmed by grief and rage that it could compel men to headhunt. Rosalto admits that he brushed aside their one-line explanation and searched for a deeper, more layered meaning. It was not until several years later when his wife Michelle tragically fell off a cliff and died that he finally began to understand grief and rage. In Anglo-American society, grief equates to sadness; therefore, when he was first told about the grief-rage-headhunting equation, he could not conceptualize it because until his wife’s death he had never experienced such a profound loss that would evoke such emotions.

When Rosalto decided to write “Grief and a Headhunter’s Rage,” he chose to step away from the traditional anthropological, ethnographic writing style based on the scientific model (McGee and Warms, 2004) written in the third person. He chose to write it in a more conversational tone that would enable him not only to explain the cultural condition of headhunting and its relation to grief in the Ilongot people, but also how and why he eventually came to the understanding that sometimes the deeper, layered meaning is actually very simple.
I chose to use this style of writing because of the nature in which this research began. This is my first in-depth research experience involving not only a review of literature, but lengthy interviews, participant observation, and learning about the field of anthropology. I was not an anthropologist when I began this research; however, when I finished I knew that I wanted to become one. Writing in this conversational reflexive style allows the reader a view into the process of the research. In no way is it conclusive, but instead is a starting point for further research.

The Research Question

I sat at my desk, wondering how it would be possible for me to try and explain what it is like to be multi-ethnic and multicultural. This experience cannot be generalized because everyone experiences life differently, yet there are so many similarities among people that it seems absurd to say that there are no connections. The idea of ethnicity is flexible and can change from person to person. Ethnicity is also different from race: “Race is associated with physical characteristics of a particular group” while ethnicity is “…used primarily in the contexts of cultural difference, where cultural difference is associated above all with an actual or commonly perceived shared ancestry, with language markers, and with national or regional origin” (Fenton, 2003). This was going to prove to be a difficult task. I needed to narrow my focus to avoid being consumed by something much bigger than a full-time undergraduate with no research grants or field experience could handle.

Moving from the desk to the TV, I continued taking notes, struggling for ideas. Pop culture would help me. Sure enough, there it was. While watching the coverage of the 2004 presidential elections by The Daily Show with Jon Stewart, one of the correspondents, Stephen Colbert, coined a term to describe a young man of Arab and Latino ancestry: Arabtino.
Historical Background

Historically the connection between Latin-American culture and Arab culture goes back to the eighth century with the Moorish conquest of the Iberian Peninsula (Craig, 2005). For 800 years, Arab, Berber, and Islamic culture heavily influenced the Iberian Peninsula; evidence of this can still be found in the Spanish language, food, architecture, and music. In 1492, the Christians captured the last Islamic stronghold, Granada in southern Spain, during the Reconquista led by Ferdinand and Isabella, Los Reyes Católicos (The Catholic Kings) (Craig, 2005). This was the same year that Columbus sailed to the new world and opened up what would become Latin America to the Spanish and Portuguese.

Thus while Latin American and Arab cultures are historically connected through the Moors in Spain, my question was how connected are these two groups today? I began by researching both cultures separately and generally, which again would prove to be an ominous task. However, in order to understand contemporary cultures, once again I had to look back on history to find the paths after 1492 that eventually led to modern societies.

The terms used, “Arab” and “Latino,” describe both cultural and ethnic groups but are not racial (Arab American Institute, 2005–2006; DiMaria, 2004). This is what makes mixed ethnicity so interesting. People who describe themselves as Arab have some sort of ancestral connection with the Middle East or Northern Africa. Latino or Latin American\(^1\) refers to a person with cultural ties to any of the countries in North (Mexico), Central, or South America. These groups individually cover a lot of territory and have very distinct traditions from region to region. Most

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\(^1\) I have also chosen to use the word Latino instead of Hispanic because it is a term more widely accepted by most people of Latin America. Hispanic is used mostly in the South and Southwest United States (Re Cruz, personal communications, class notes, 5/15/06).
of the people who were interviewed assert their ethnicity through cultural and linguistic ties to these regions (Arab American Institute, 2005–2006; DiMaria, 2004; Clemeston, 2004).

There are also religious traditions that heavily influence both groups: Christianity, in particular Catholicism, in Latin America, and Islam in the Middle East and North Africa. Although there is much religious influence in these areas, not every Arab is Muslim and not all Latinos are Catholic (Re Cruz, personal communication, class notes, 5/20/2006; Sadri, personal communication, class notes, 9/1/2005). There is great religious diversity in both groups. While the majority of people of Arab decent worldwide are Muslim, the majority of Arabs in the Americas are Christians (Arab American Institute, 2005–2006). In the United States, according to the Arab American Institute, Christians\(^2\) account for 63% of the Arab-American population, while Muslims\(^3\) account for 24%, and the rest of the 13% identify as other religions or no affiliation.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the first large wave of migration to the Americas occurred. The crumbling Ottoman Empire and the rise of the nationalistic Ottoman constitutional monarchy caused this migration from the areas of what are now Syria, Lebanon, and Israel/Palestine\(^4\) (Craig, 2005). The majority of migrants from the Syrian-Lebanese areas were Christians. In the early 1890s, these Christian groups began to flee from the Syrian-Lebanese areas after experiencing heated conflicts with their former allies against Ottoman

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2 Christian groups include Roman Catholic, Eastern Catholic Maronite, and Melkite, Eastern Orthodox (Antiochian, Syrian, Greek, and Coptic) and various Protestant groups.

3 Muslim includes Sunni, Shi'a, and Druze.

4 The area was only known as Syria during this time (1520–1920). It included areas as far south as Gaza (modern-day southern Israel), north to Antioch (in modern southwest Turkey), and east to Amman (modern central Jordan) (Shepherd 1923: The Ottoman Empire 1683–1923, 1841–1683; University of Texas Library: Ottoman Empire in Asia since 1792).
oppression, the Druze, in the beginning in the early 1860s, as well as continuing conflict with
Ottoman ruling powers.

With the massacre of Dayr al-Qamar, the violent phase of the 1860 disturbances in
Lebanon came to an end. In less than four weeks an estimated total of eleven thousand
Christians had been killed, four thousand more had perished of destitution, and nearly a
hundred thousand had become homeless fugitives. The Druzes had also lost a number of
dead, but otherwise their triumph had been amazing. Now they spoke of crossing over
into the northern Kaymakamate and invading the purely Maronite district of the
Kisrawan, and it seemed that nothing could stop them. Meanwhile in Beirut, Moslem
taunts and threats caused many Christian families to leave the city; some escaped to the
Maronite districts in the north, while those who could afford it fled by sea to Greece or
Egypt. (Salibi and Suleiman, 1965, p. 106)

At the end of the nineteenth century, the Ottoman Empire began to increase taxes in the
Syria-Lebanese area. This socially unstable area now had even more economic pressure. World
War I only magnified these economic and social conditions. The Ottoman Empire had become
allies with the German Kaiser and was subject to blockades by the Allied powers. These
blockades stopped importation of food and goods to the Syrian-Lebanese region. The food that
was being produced was used to feed the Ottoman troops first; this caused a food shortage for the
civilians of the Syrian-Lebanese region (Rowe, 1999).

A second wave of immigrants from the same area as well as from Egypt and Jordan
arrived beginning in the early 1970s through the early 1990s. This group of migrants came for
reasons ranging from the Lebanese Civil War to economic opportunities. The second migration
brought a larger Muslim community to the Americas (Nigem, 1986; Lehman, 2005).

The initial migration brought people to several cities on the eastern cost of the Americas;
cities that would eventually become major areas of Arab and Middle Eastern populations. They
include São Palo, Brazil; Caracas, Venezuela; Veracruz, Mexico; and New York City in the
United States (Lehman, 2005).
Brazil has the largest population of people of Arab or Middle Eastern descent outside of the Middle East—approximately 10 to 12 million people. It has been said that there are more Lebanese in Brazil than in Lebanon, around 7 million. With the 2006 population of Lebanon estimated at around 3.9 million, it may very well be true (Lehman, 2005).

In the United States, of the 1.2 million people who reported Arab ancestry in the 2000 U.S. Census, more than one quarter reported two ancestries. Of that number, 3.2% reported also being “Hispanic of any race” (U.S. Census, 2005).

The Interviews

Before I began speaking to people about their heritage, I felt I needed as much background and history as I could get. The information mentioned before is only a small portion of what was available. From theories about being “Brown” to statistical data, I feared that I would not be able to do justice to either group without writing a textbook.

While conducting the background research for this project I began to reflect on my own relationships. Although I myself am not Arab/Latino, my best friends (from childhood up until now) are varying types of Middle Eastern descent. I had always felt comfortable with my friends and their families. When I visited their families, it felt like the Mexican-American households I grew up in, except the soap operas were in Arabic or Farsi.

Once I began the research, I chose to incorporate it into my other classes: linguistic studies of code switching in an Arabic-English-speaking household for my language and culture class; and visiting a local Eastern Orthodox church for a project in participant observation in my

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5 Lebanon had not conducted a national census since 1935 due to religious sensitivity. Other organizations like the U.S. State Department have estimates available for the current population.

field methods class. In order to complete my projects, I spent the weekend with Sarah, whose mother is German American, her father is Syrian, and her stepmother is Jordanian. This weekend would be different. I decided to turn my anthropologist-self on full. I was on the lookout for cultural similarities between my Latino heritage and Sarah’s Syrian/Jordanian household.

My epiphany came Sunday morning. I went to church with Sarah, her stepmother, and her stepmother’s close friend, who is from Lebanon. I had never been to an Eastern Orthodox service before, but having been raised in a devout Catholic household as well as being a history buff, I knew enough about the Eastern rites to be aware of some of the similarities and differences. However, the experience was something quite different. Even though the mass was mostly in Arabic, I eventually caught on and was in sync with the prayers and responses. Toward the end of the mass, my friend leaned over and said, “You look more Arab than I do!” It was at that point that I noticed that my Mexican heritage, which produced dark curly hair, brown eyes, and light yet olive-toned skin, did resemble quite a few people around me. Not to mention the ease in which I was able to assimilate into the service due to the similarity to the Catholic service.

The Arab/Latino connection is not found just in historical remnants; there are unique religious, familial, linguistic, and social ties that allow these two cultures to blend.

Salwa: Arab-Spanish

I met Salwa through a friend. We spoke on the phone, and she was very excited to participate. We set a date to meet at a restaurant in Plano, Texas. Salwa was the first interview I

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7 This was actually a very common occurrence my first year at North Texas. In fact, I was there so often that when I was not, Sarah’s family asked where I was. Sarah described those weekends when I was not at her father’s house as “time with my birth family.”
8 While it is difficult to learn how to turn one’s anthropologist-self “on,” once “on” it can be almost impossible to turn it “off.”
9 This is the terminology that Salwa used to describe herself.
had. I was quite nervous, to say the least. Aside from getting lost on the way to the very upscale shopping district in which this restaurant was located, when I arrived the tape recorder I had bought the day before would not play or record. I had tested it several times before and there was no problem. I closed my eyes and quietly cursed at the recorder hoping that somehow it would listen and work for me. Instead it began to "eat" the cassette tape. I told myself to remain calm, that I could interview with just a pen and paper. I looked at the clock; I had been sitting in the car for almost ten minutes fighting with the recorder and gathering my nerves. People die in Texas from sitting in parked cars during the summer. I decided to wait and finish organizing myself in the restaurant.

Even though I was still early, I walked to the restaurant and picked a table outside away from the Dallas lunch crowd, a mix of men and women in business suits and women with children meeting other women with children. These were not your average soccer moms; they had on Chanel sunglasses, various types of Louis Vuitton and Prada purses, posh strollers with trendy toddlers inside; their style very much shouted Dallas! It did not take me long to notice that aside from the waiters, and the seating host and hostess, I quite possibly could have been the only nonwhite person there. While the Dallas/Fort Worth Metroplex is relatively diverse, this is not an uncommon situation. I wondered why Salwa had chosen this place for our meeting.

After almost half an hour of waiting I called Salwa, who had completely forgotten about the meeting. She apologized and told me that she had taken off from work for a doctor's appointment and would be on her way. Forty-five minutes after I arrived, Salwa walked in to the restaurant. She noticed me first, probably because I had a binder with a Lebanese flag stuck on the front on top of the table and I was scribbling away in a journal.
She was wearing a pair of white Capri pants with a white spaghetti strap shirt, a pair of large sunglasses, and strappy white high heels. Her long, caramel-highlighted, dark brown hair was pulled back in a tight ponytail. She stuck out her hand and introduced herself. She apologized again for being late and asked how I was doing. A waiter in a neat, white shirt and black pants asked what she wanted to drink. My 45-minute water and chip extravaganza had probably annoyed him. Salwa turned to me and asked, “Do you mind if I have a drink?” My automatic reply was that I did not mind, but it took me a few seconds to process that her question referred to alcohol.

She ordered a frozen margarita and added that the restaurant we were at has the best fruit-flavored margaritas, thus the reason she chose to come here. She then asked how our mutual friend Frank was doing. I told her that he was well and that was funny to hear her call him “Frank” because I know him as Ferhan. She laughed at the idea of him using his “real name.” I asked her about being called “Sue,” the name Ferhan used when referring to her. The first time I contacted her I asked to speak to “Sue;” she sent me an e-mail response to the message I had left her, expressing her interest in the research and signed it “Salwa.” I asked in a response e-mail which name she preferred to be called. She responded with “Salwa is best that is my real name and in high school ppl [people] cld [called] me Sue how annoying was that!!!”

She explained to me that when she was in high school it was just easier to take an Anglicized version of her name than hear people butcher it all day. She added that many of her Middle Eastern friends did the same thing, “like Frank.” By having an Anglicized nickname one could easily “fit in.” When she explained this to me I suddenly became aware of some of the names of people I knew. Ferhan was “Frank,” Sarah’s father Bassam was “Sam,” another friend of mine who I knew as Alex was “Ali” at home, my brother is Stephen James when we speak
English but "Esteban" is what we say in Spanish conversation. Even myself, Danyel is the name I use in English but in Spanish with my family it is always "Daniela." The people I mentioned, including myself, introduce themselves to English speakers with English names and to people of Spanish or Arabic speaking backgrounds with their "real names." Fitting in soon became a theme in our conversation.

Salwa’s father is from Damascus, Syria, and her mother is from Madrid, Spain. They met in Houston, Texas, where Salwa was born. Soon after Salwa’s birth her family moved to Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, for her father’s work. Arabic was her first language. They lived in a compound like most Westerners who live and work in Saudi Arabia. She learned English in the compound but spoke Arabic at school and speaks some Spanish with her mother. While living in Saudi she adapted to the conservative Muslim life that her father enforced. Her mother converted to Islam but was not as strict with her children. This religious difference, according to Salwa, led to conflict between her parents and eventually to their divorce a year after they moved back to Texas, as well as her mother’s choice to revert to Catholicism.

Her experiences in school in both countries seemed to be tumultuous. She compared the Saudi girls to New Yorkers, very Park Avenue. They always dressed in the most expensive clothes and were quick to point out when someone else was not. She often got into fights with her classmates and even other girls in the compound. She said that she was often made fun of because she did not look Arab to them. Her mixed facial features were an obvious sign of her being an outsider. She would retaliate, and often her father would get phone calls because Salwa had gotten in another fight.

Not much changed when she moved to Texas, except it was a different group of girls who she had problems with because she was different. Besides the culture shock of moving back to
the United States, she had to deal with her family issues and her internal struggle of being
different. She had been taught to be a devout Muslim by her father and made the pilgrimage to
Mecca three times. However, she was close to her mother and preferred the liberal lifestyle of
Spanish and American culture.

The distance between Salwa and her father’s traditional life came to a crisis point when
she became pregnant. She was not married and the young man was not Muslim. She asked her
mother what she should do. Her mother told her that the decision to keep the baby was hers and
hers alone, but she would always provide for Salwa and would help her. With her mother’s
support she decided to keep the baby. However, when she told her father, he was furious. To
him, her baby was a sin. He stopped speaking to her, even after her daughter was born he refused
to speak or see her or the baby until almost a year later. Even though she had trouble with her
father and with the baby’s father, she said having Chloë was the best decision she had made.

As she told me this story, a white SUV pulled up to the curb and a blond man shouted out
“Sue! Hey, Sue!” She waived uncomfortably and the SUV drove off. She adjusted herself in her
seat and said that the man who called out to her was Chloë’s father. She then said, “I don’t go out
with American guys anymore. They just don’t understand, no more close-minded American
guys.” While she seems adjusted to American culture, she speaks of the dominant American
WASP (white Anglo-Saxon Protestant) culture with a bit of disdain. I asked about Chloë. She
said that she is proud of her little girl because she speaks all three of her family’s languages well.
She also said that she is going to be strict with her daughter because she does not want her to
grow up to be a bad kid.
Marian: Arab American with Tex-Mex Flavor

Marian Haddad is a writer and poet teaching international literature and composition classes at St. Mary's University. The youngest of nine children born to Syrian immigrants and the first one in her family to be born in the United States, Marian has an interesting and unique cultural identity. I met Marian through one of my academic advisors at the University of North Texas. Marian was very happy to help me with my research and put me in contact with members of the Radius of Arab-American Writers.

Cultural infusion is a term that Marian uses to describe the way that she writes. Marian often talks about how being raised in El Paso has given her the wonderful experience of being a part of many cultures. She is Texan, Syrian, American, Christian, and Mexican. While she has "not one drop of Mexican blood," her experience of growing up five minutes away from the U.S.-Mexico border and in a city with a population that is 76% Hispanic or Latino (U.S. Census, 2003) gave her a strong connection to the culture that surrounded her.

El Paso is the second largest city on the United States-Mexico border. El Paso shares its borders with Las Cruces, New Mexico, and Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, \(^{10}\) separated by the Rio Grande (Rio Bravo) River. In February of 1848, the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo was signed by the United States and Mexico to end the Mexican-American War; it created the modern border and included territory acquired by United States that would become the states of Texas, California, Nevada, Utah, most of New Mexico and Arizona, and parts of Colorado and Wyoming (Library of Congress, 2005). The settlement of El Paso del Norte (modern El Paso-Juarez) was split in two. Those on the northern bank of the river were now part of the United States, those on the south shore, Mexico (El Paso County). El Paso's unique Mexican-American

\(^{10}\) The city of El Paso's official website describes this area as the "Borderplex."
history created the diverse cultural environment in which Marian Haddad was able to develop her cultural identity.

While Marian is not multi-ethnic, she is very much a cultural hybrid. She includes Mexican and American culture with aspects of her Arab culture. Her cultural identity encompasses the cultures that she was exposed to her whole life. Her process of enculturation\(^\text{11}\) includes both Syrian-American and Mexican-American cultures, therefore creating her Syrian-Mexican-American cultural hybridity.

Her most recent book *Somewhere between Mexico and a Place Called Home* is a distinct call to all of her cultural influences and a picture of her self-identity. She describes the title as revealing itself to her rather than it being created by her. That is who she is, where she is from: somewhere between Mexico and a place that she calls home, which is El Paso, San Antonio, Texas, the United States, and the Middle East. Even though she has never been to the Middle East she feels equally strong connections to the homeland of her parents as she does to the place of her birth (Haddad, 10/18/2005; Haddad, N.d.).

She displays this cultural connection in the words of her poems.

**Transmountain Drive**

*El Paso, Texas*

*Three moons and five suns ago, I stood on your desert mountain, purple skin sheathing the night. I gazed downward on the multilights of my city, quivering like the souls of Don Juan de Onate’s dead and the Twelve Travelers. I lay in your seven laps of light, three companies of angels brushing me with breeze, cool on my skin.*

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\(^{11}\) Enculturation is the process in which culture is passed on between generations through members of the family and outside society. It begins at birth with the development of self-awareness, which allows for one to assume responsibility for one’s behavior, to learn how to react toward others, and to assume roles within society (Haviland et al. 2005:399).
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Like a holy man, I sat looking down on your colored clutter of stucco and brick, crows swooping deep into your core and out of you. I will come back to you, bulwark from which I sprang. I will wrap my arms around your houses, I will grind myself against your walls, stain myself in the juice of your berries. I remember your nights, when sky came down slowly to meet the summit of you, came down like a sheet of muslin tucking your natives in for the night, muslin that converged colors, color that poured out of sky like a pallet of peacock, until all citizens within your bastion and all those across your river in their blue and pink houses lay under a cincture of orange. Like a fire, fervid and flashing, sun skimmed our rooftops. Like a god, it dropped down, stamped its name on our dry land. I will come back to three moons and five suns ago, sleep in and on your belly, ten million stars flickering like Aztec tears in your skies.

(Haddad, 2004, p. 83)

Fluent in Arabic, with some knowledge of Spanish, Marian is quite aware of the connections between the two languages. There are many words in Spanish that are historically connected to Arabic (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Spanish Words with Arabic Roots

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ARABIC</th>
<th>MEANING</th>
<th>SPANISH</th>
<th>MEANING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IN-SHAA’ALLAH</td>
<td>GOD WILLING</td>
<td>OJALA</td>
<td>HOPEFULLY/I WISH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BARRAA</td>
<td>OUTSIDE</td>
<td>BARRIO</td>
<td>NEIGHBORHOOD</td>
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<tr>
<td>MAAT</td>
<td>TO KILL</td>
<td>MATAR</td>
<td>TO KILL</td>
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<tr>
<td>AD-DINAR</td>
<td>MONEY</td>
<td>DINERO</td>
<td>MONEY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AN-NARANJ</td>
<td>ORANGE (FRUIT)</td>
<td>LA NARANJA</td>
<td>ORANGE (FRUIT)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AL-QU'TUN</td>
<td>COTTON</td>
<td>EL ALGODON</td>
<td>COTTON$^{12}$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$^{12}$ Examples taken from research conducted during the National Endowment for the Humanities' National Arabic Language and Culture Institute at The Ohio State University during the summers of 1994 and 1995 are found on St. Ignatius High School’s website: http://www2.ignatius.edu/faculty/turner/arabicspanish.htm
Although Marian and I have only been able to communicate via e-mail, her words have had a profound impact on the way I approached this project. While I was so busy trying to focus and narrow my topic to quantifiable bits of data mixed with qualitative interviews, I lost my way. Her poems and her bright, friendly e-mails reminded me that while this project was my first experience with real research and learning how to jump through the hoops of writing in an academic setting, it was also an expression of humanity and a starting point for the development of more research that will enable people to have a better understanding of their fellow man.

Jaime: Mexican American with an Arabic Last Name

Jaime’s family moved from the Veracruz area of Mexico to work the migrant farm routes in the United States. In fact, when I spoke to him we learned that he worked in the same town and quite possibly some of the same cotton fields that my mother’s family did. Jamie is a professor and filmmaker. He told me that the only tie that he has to his Middle Eastern ancestors is his last name. His grandfather came to Mexico in 1919 from Lebanon during the first wave of migration from the Middle East to the Americas.

Once in Mexico, assimilation was fairly complete within a few generations. Aside from enjoying various Lebanese dishes, he is completely culturally Mexican American. He has pride in the history of his last name; it speaks of the great diversity that makes up Latin Americans. He is very knowledgeable about the history of Arabs in Mexico. Yet his awareness of his Arab background does not, for him, create a cultural connection. He is much more connected to his Mexican culture. I believe that this comes from his experiences as a migrant farm worker. I myself come from families who were migrant laborers so I feel I understand where he is coming from. When one grows up in an environment where you are constantly being reminded of your
particular situation, in this case "Mexican laborer," it becomes a large part of your cultural and self-identity. While I was speaking to him, he had just as many questions for me as I did for him. Where was I from? What was my background? Why did I choose to study this? Is this the type of study I would like to continue? He invited me to visit him at his university to continue with a longer interview. However, I was not able to visit because of time and budget constraints.

Conclusion

Out of the research and interviews I have come across five themes on which there could be further research.

*Cultural Hybridity*

The concept of cultural hybridity in anthropology is discussed in terms of postcolonial cultural identities as well as linguistic studies (Perez-Torres, 1998; Young 1995; Kapchan and Strong, 1999). Cultural hybridity is not a new occurrence; cultures have always borrowed and mixed with each other. However, the term "cultural hybrid" or "cultural hybridization" is found mostly in research on postcolonialism.

In the postcolonial United States, there is a complex and sometimes conflicting hybridization of American culture and other cultures brought by migrants (Perez-Torres, 1998). There are many people whose life experiences are influenced by the unique blend of cultures. How does a person who is not multi-ethnic become multicultural beyond the dual culture that is acquired in the process of assimilation, that is, Irish American, Chinese American, and so on? Marian is proof that one's self-identity can include cultures that are not familial (Marian's Syrian family) or national (Marian's American nationality), but a third environmental culture.
The Influence of Religion on Familial Structure

During the interviews, I encountered Christians, Muslims, those who are religiously undecided, and those who choose no religion. In marriages between Muslims and Christians, it seems as if the ability to coexist in the same house depends more on the personality of the individual than on the religious practice. Others spoke of defending or having to explain their Arab background and/or Christian faith.

The influence of Abrahamic faiths in Latin America and the Middle East has created patriarchal family and social structures (Re Cruz, personal communication, class notes, 5/24/2006; Andrus, personal communication, class notes 7/15/2006). The family is very close, the father is the family’s authority figure, and the mother is the person who perpetuates the culture and language to the children. This developed in Latin America during the period of colonialism and was reinforced with Catholicism (Re Cruz, class notes 5/15/06; Hopkins, 1998). During the first migration of Syrian, Lebanese, and Palestinian groups to the Americas, migrants brought with them a similar structure that had been influenced by the Catholic and Orthodox churches centuries before the arrival of the Spanish and Portuguese in the New World. The second wave of Middle Eastern immigration starting in the 1970s brought Muslim groups whose faith also required that a patriarchal family structure be practiced. While religious belief is only part of the picture in cultural context, in Latin America and the Middle East, religion is not only a spiritual trek to enlightenment, but also a distinct lifestyle.13

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13 While studying Mexico, I became more aware of this Catholicism as a lifestyle when I began to notice small stores and even grocery store chains named after Catholic saints. The grocery store chain in the Yucatan Peninsula, San Francis de Asis (Saint Francis of Assisi) had a massive sign that not only displayed the name of the store, but also an equally massive line figure of St. Francis of Assisi.
**Name Change**

Why do some choose to change their name to fit into the dominant culture and what are the causes? The phenomenon of Anglicizing one’s name in the United States is common. Whether it is by choice or by some clerical mishap, there are many examples of immigrants Anglicizing their names. For example, the German surname *Pfeifer* was Anglicized as *Piper*; the Italian surname *Recardi* was anglicized to Richards (Fucilla, 1943); some migrants chose to completely change their name (Kang, 1971). As in the examples given previously, changing the pronunciation or having a nickname for American English-speaking ears can often ease social interactions.

**Process of Assimilation**

Why do some people assimilate to the point of losing a connection to their family’s original culture within as few as three generations? According to research, it is well beyond the third generation (both parents and both sets of grandparents are U.S. born) of an immigrant family that complete and indistinguishable assimilation occurs (Neidert and Farley, 1985). Since complete culture change often occurs over a longer period of time (closer to five generations), what are the factors that can lead to complete assimilation within three or four generations leaving none or very little of a person’s self-identity tied to the family’s original culture? Assimilation has been tied to educational attainment and socioeconomic status. The higher one’s status is upon arrival to the United States or the higher status that is obtained through educational attainment after arrival, the greater the rate of assimilation (Rosenthal and Auerbach, 1992).
The Concept of Whiteness

Whiteness specifies the cultural construction of social privilege and power that is connected to the racial term “white” (Hartigan, 1997) but not always to Caucasian. In the introduction, ethnicity was defined as shared cultural traits, actual or perceived, and race was defined as grouping by physical features. In the United States, people of Arab or Latin-American descent are usually identified as racially “white” (U.S. Census, 2000). Research on whiteness suggests that being “white” in the United States comes with particular social privileges that other “nonwhite” people do not have (Keating, 1995). This can be confusing when a person’s ethnic group and culture is far from the Anglo-Saxon image of “white” but because that person’s skin color is fair, they fall into the “white” or “Caucasian” category (Hartigan, 1997; Keating, 1995).

Sarah Gualtieri discusses in great detail the decision of early Syrian and Lebanese immigrants to pursue the legal term “white” in order to gain citizenship and status in the United States (Gualtieri, 2001). Could social-political pressures like the concept of “whiteness” allow someone to literally let go of that culture of origin to encompass not only the racial, but also the cultural meaning of being “white”?

Reflexive Reactions from a Budding Anthropologist

I chose to focus on three study participants, Salwa, Marian, and Jaime, because they offered me a candid and genuinely sincere glance into their self-identities. A few people turned me down when I inquired about participation. I communicated with several who were either too busy or too inhibited to be comfortable with lengthy conversation that did not sound like a

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14 “White” does not always include Caucasian. In the case United States v. Bhagat Singh Thind, Mr. Thind was not granted citizenship because even though he could prove that he was Caucasian through human migration patterns, he was not “white” by social standards (Scott 1923: 330).
questionnaire.\textsuperscript{15} Very often, life gets in the way of research. It took me two years to get from idea to paper. Trying to process a deep and rich cultural history of Arabs and Latin Americans, as well as interviews, could be taxing at times. However, the process enabled me to gain a more complete understanding of research and methodology. I see this research experience as a building block in my anthropological foundation. It has given me more of a starting point rather than actual closure to my educational quest. I plan to continue conducting research on some of the themes mentioned in the conclusion. In no way can I claim to have broken ground in looking at this meeting of Arab, Latino, and American culture. I have only small scratches at the surface and I plan to keep scratching.

\textsuperscript{15} Out of the 16 interviews, only 5 consisted of more than a few lines of dialogue.
References


**Online Videos:**
