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**FRAGMENTS OF A LITURGICAL WORLD: SYRIAC CHRISTIANITY AND THE
DUTCH MULTICULTURALISM DEBATES**

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Abstract

Fragments of a Liturgical World: Syriac Christianity and the Dutch Multiculturalism
Debates

By Sarah Bakker

This dissertation explores the reconfiguration of Syriac Orthodox liturgical tradition among Aramaic-speaking Christian refugees in the Netherlands. Under the pressures of Dutch integration policy and the global politics of secular recognition, the Syriac liturgy is rapidly losing its significance as the central axis of social life and kinship-relations in the Syriac Orthodox diaspora. As such, it has become a site for debate over how to be religiously, culturally, and ethnically distinct despite the narrative binary of Christian Europe and the Muslim Middle East that dominates Dutch multiculturalism discourse. Every week, young Syriac Orthodox women and men congregate at their churches to practice singing the liturgy in classical Syriac. What they sing, and how they decide to sing it, mediates their experiments in religious and ethical reinvention, with implications for their efforts at political representation. Singers contend not only with conditions of inaudibility produced by histories of ethnic cleansing, migration, and assimilation, but also with the fragments of European Christianity that shape the sensory regime of secular modernity. Public debates over the integration of religious minorities illuminate this condition of fragmentation, as well as the contest over competing conceptions of ethical personhood inherent in the politics of pluralism in Europe.

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Chapter One

Liturgical Fragments: Audibility, Scale, and the Ethics of Being a Person

The nation-state is committed to co-opt or eradicate plurality in the pursuit of a unitary national culture; this process renders unthinkable the fractured, partial worlds that many, if not most, people inhabit within the categories that it propagates (Stokes 1994: 264).

“I’m Suryoyo and I Know It!”

On February 12, 2012, *SuryoyoSteve* uploaded a home-made music video on to Youtube called “I’m Suryoyo and I know it!”¹ The song parodies a flamboyantly tongue-in-cheek international dance hit (“I’m sexy and I know it”) to detail with humorous self-consciousness *SuryoyoSteve*’s take on the fundamentals of Syriac Orthodox Christian (Suryoyo) ethnic and religious identity. The parodied lyrics celebrate the pleasures of eating sun-flower seeds day and night (*bizer*), the ubiquity of rubber sandals (*shahatas*), and endless community parties (*hafle*), as well the singer’s prowess as a liturgical singer in Holy Mass and his regret over the moral prohibition against dating, among other images of Syriac Orthodox social practice and identity familiar across the global diaspora of neo-Aramaic-speaking Christians.

The video, put together by a small group of middle-school aged Syriac Orthodox children in New Jersey, immediately went viral on social media networks

¹ See <http://youtu.be/L5HWbUTaFWA>. Last accessed May 27, 2013.

across the tight-knit and well-connected diaspora. Within two weeks it had garnered over thirty thousand views and well over one hundred comments noting where in the world the video had been viewed. Among the congratulations and outpouring of ethno-religious pride, however, was a note of criticism. One commenter wrote in to correct the children for using the Arabic *bismel Ab* instead of the Syriac-Aramaic *bshem Abo*, to refer to their singing in the liturgy of the Holy Mass. The commenter thus exhorted them: "...if we consider ourselves true Suryoyo, we should speak in our native Syriac/Arameic (sic)."

The commenter's complaint is a common one, and a source of fractious debate across the Syriac diaspora. Syriac Orthodox Christians around the world debate the grounds on which they can claim a distinct ethno-religious identity, and by what means they can procure a political audience to legitimize their understanding of what it means to be Middle Eastern Christian in secular modernity. These involve fights over language, history, and even the moral behavior by which a Suryoyo can be known.

While the contestation of language ideology and historical narrative is a common enough feature in post-Ottoman ethnic identity politics, what I find striking in this story is the effect of the interplay of multiple scales and audiences enabled by the electronic mediation and reproduction of Syriac diasporic identity. The interplay of local, national, and global audiences has political implications for crafting and claiming minority religious identities within secular and pluralistic polities. Such polities have as much need for their claims to be recognized and legitimized by a

global audience of nation-states and supra-national organizations as do minority groups within each polity.

In this case, a childish, low-tech parody of a parody of a preposterous pop song is doing very grown-up political work, constituting an audience around the musical performance of a contested, complexly ascriptive identity. That the original song was a joke that would most certainly offend the moral sensibilities of many Syriac Christians (and has spawned countless similar Internet memes) serves only to highlight the extent to which the reproduction of minor identities and traditions rely, sometimes quite urgently, on the strategic use of globalized aesthetic forms and their circulation to constitute and legitimate political claims on the local, the national, and the global scale. For Syriac Orthodox Christians, to whom I henceforth refer by the Aramaic term *Suryoye*, the aesthetic production and circulation of pop parody goes hand in hand, as *SuryoyoSteven* reminds us, with the performance of Syriac Orthodox liturgical song and moral identity throughout the global diaspora. Although there is something somewhat jarring in this marriage of pop performance and liturgical reference, together they point to a key question in the politics of pluralism in secular nation-states: how does the recognition of minority identities operate within secular regimes structured by sensory histories that render certain forms of life *audible* as well as visible?

The conditions of Syriac Orthodox Christian audibility in secular modernity are compromised in several ways. They are difficult to identify because they are difficult to count. They are difficult to count because they are difficult to categorize.

Estimates according to church records suggest there are approximately six million members of the Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch spread across a global diaspora, though this number would approach ten million if the St. Thomas Christians of southern India are included². My own research into the ethics and aesthetics of Syriac Orthodox liturgical identity focuses on a specific corner of the Syriac Orthodox diaspora located in the Netherlands, where a concentration of approximately ten thousand to fifteen thousand Suryoye (according to the financial records kept by the archdioceses and reported to me orally) have established themselves since the 1960s after fleeing different waves of violent conflict in Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq.

Syriac Orthodox Christians trace their communal identity back to the Christological debates that raged across the Eastern Mediterranean during the fifth and sixth centuries. The Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch is a member of the non-Chalcedonian, or “Oriental” Orthodox, community of churches³. These churches are heir to the ecclesial communities that emerged from a host of complex disagreements over the humanity and divinity of Christ in the earliest centuries of Christianity. Syriac Christianity’s earliest roots are traced to the second century when Christians in Syria and Mesopotamia began to use Syriac, one of the East-Aramaic languages developed in the city of Edessa, as a literary language in the midst of the culturally

² See <http://www.morephrem.com/nl/cms/index.php?page=geschiedenis-2>.

³ The non-Chalcedonian Orthodox Churches include the Armenian Apostolic, Coptic Orthodox, Ethiopian and Eritrean Orthodox Churches, as well as the Mar Thoma Syrian Church of Malabar and the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church.

and linguistically complex worlds of the Byzantine Empire and the Zoroastrian Persian state (Van Rompay 2008).

Gradually, over the course of centuries, Syriac Christian culture began to associate with the Miaphysite theological doctrinal position, emphasizing that Christ's two natures were united in the Incarnation, against the mainstream Chalcedonian position of the Byzantine Empire. In the sixth century, Syriac-language Miaphysites began to form independent ecclesiastical structures, providing the foundation for what would become a self-consciously Syriac Orthodox Church. Meanwhile, the broader world of Syriac Christianity in the Middle East fragmented and dispersed into groups and sub-groups throughout the long history of battling empires, shifting borders, mass migrations, theological schisms, and missionary conversions, and today each group and sub-group takes a kaleidoscopically refracted view of their historical relationship of one another (Baumer 2006; Braude and Lewis 1983; Griffith 2008; Makko 2010; Masters 2001; Millar 2013; Murre-van den Berg 1999, 2006; ter Haar Romeny et al. 2011; Segal 1970). Syriac-speaking Christians holding to the Dyophysite doctrine, for example, were exiled from the Byzantine Empire by the Council of Ephesus in 431 C.E, and fled to the Persian Empire, over time becoming the Church of the East, which in the twentieth century was renamed the Assyrian Church of the East. In the past, Syriac-speaking Miaphysites were pejoratively called "Jacobites" while Syriac-speaking Dyophysites were called "Nestorians" in order to brand them heretics. More neutrally, they are referred to as West-Syriacs (Miaphysites) and East-Syriacs (Dyophysites). I focus specifically on

the heirs of the West-Syriac tradition, many of whom maintain a strong sense that despite linguistic and liturgical kinship with the East-Syriac tradition, the theological distinction between the two rites operates as an almost-ethnic boundary.

In everyday language, Syriac Orthodox Christians in the diasporic community in the Netherlands speak primarily *Turoyo* (the “mountain language”), a non-standardized dialect of neo-Aramaic spoken in the highlands of Tur Abdin, roughly corresponding to the province of Mardin, in southeastern Turkey⁴. Tur Abdin, Aramaic for “the Mountains of the Servants of God,” refers to its many hundreds of monasteries dating as far back as the fourth century C.E. and was the home of the Patriarch until his forced departure to Damascus in 1933⁵.

The violent upheavals of World War One, the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, and the Armenian Genocide (during which Syriac Christians were also targeted) unsettled relations among Syriac Orthodox Christians and their Turkish and Kurdish Muslim neighbors, catalyzing numerous waves of migration to Syria, Lebanon, Jerusalem, North America, and South America. In this early period of migration, *Turoyo*-speaking refugees in Syria and Lebanon established communities and settled into a culturally Arabic oriented existence that would many years later cause frictions with kin left in Tur Abdin, as their paths crossed again in new waves of migration into northern and western Europe. This is why, for example,

⁴ Aramaic dialects other than Syriac include the extinct Nabatean and Palmyrene languages and near-extinct forms such as the Jewish and Kurdish vernaculars.

⁵ See <http://sor.cua.edu/Patriarchate/index.html>

Suryoye Steve in New Jersey sings the liturgy in Arabic to the consternation of others in the diaspora who strongly believe the liturgy should be sung in Syriac. Of central importance among these flows of migration was the removal of the entire Suryoyo population of Urfa (Edessa) to the city of Haleb (Aleppo) in Syria during World War One. A parallel, and equally important line of migration flowed across the Syrian-Turkish border from Tur Abdin, the region roughly corresponding to Mardin province, to Qamishli and other cities and towns in Syria.⁶

Suryoye first began arriving in the Netherlands with other migrant laborers from Turkey in the 1960s and 1970s, but later waves of asylum-seekers followed, fleeing violent conflict and political unrest in Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq. While many Europe-bound Suryoye settled into large communities in Sweden and Germany, those who came to the Netherlands were positioned in the eastern province of Overijssel, around the industrial cities of Enschede and Hengelo, to work in those cities' textile factories. Here, a number of Suryoye workers boarded together in an abandoned Catholic monastery close to the German border, which the Syriac Orthodox Church bought and converted into their own monastery. Families were brought over, and eventually more Syriac Orthodox Christians arrived from Iraq, Lebanon, and Syria, entering the country as asylum-seekers. Each subsequent group fled a different political crisis, and throughout the 1980s and 1990s these groups reconfigured themselves as a community around a growing number of Syriac Orthodox Churches

⁶ See Atto 2011 for detailed documentation of these migration waves.

throughout the eastern province⁷. Most families in the Netherlands today originate from either Tur Abdin or the region around Qamishli in Syria, and the divisions between these two sub-groups feature heavily in debates over identity, secularization, and liturgical performance in the diaspora.

Since then, the second- and third-generation of Syriac Orthodox from Tur Abdin have formed the largest and most visible ethnic minority in the cities of Enschede and Hengelo, though in other regions of the Netherlands they are unknown. Throughout my research period, which took place in the summers of 2007 and 2008, and then for a full year from October 2009 to 2010, I worked in several closely related field sites within the Syriac Orthodox community in this eastern region. I worked regularly at the St. Ephrem Monastery, located on the Dutch-German border and serving Syriac Orthodox in both countries, taking private lessons in classical Syriac and attending frequent public religious and cultural events. I regularly attended two different parish churches in central Enschede and central Hengelo, where I participated in church choir rehearsals and Sunday morning Mass. I attended rehearsals with a professional choir of liturgical singers associated with a local “secular” cultural association. In addition, I also attended regular events put on by local cultural associations representing opposite poles of the community’s identity debates. There I encountered hundreds of young Syriac Orthodox women and men who participated in a variety of activities in these locations, often with a great deal of

⁷ See also Sukkink 2003 and Bjorklund 1981 for closer examination of the Dutch and Swedish migration patterns respectively.

overlap. Much of my fieldworld was conducted in Dutch because it was the first language of many second- and third-generation Suryoye, although there were times when we switched to English because our conversations included non-Dutch speaking visitors from Germany, Sweden, and other parts of the world. On the few occasions when I conducted interviews with interlocutors of the older generation who only spoke Arabic or *Turoyo* or Kurdish or Turkish I relied on younger Dutch-speaking friends to interpret for us.

I worked in these field sites to examine debates among Dutch Suryoye over the fragmentation and reconfiguration of the Syriac Orthodox liturgical tradition. These debates expressed the tensions within young Suryoye efforts to craft a new sense of what it means to be Middle Eastern Christians in Europe. Under the pressures of Dutch integration policy and the politics of secular recognition, the Syriac liturgy is rapidly losing its significance as the central axis of Syriac Orthodox social life and kinship-relations. As such, it has become the contentious site of Dutch-Syriac debates over how to be religiously, culturally, and ethnically distinct despite the narrative binary of Christian Europe and the Muslim Middle East that dominates Dutch multiculturalism discourse. Every week, I participated in the melodic cycle of hymns and prayers of the Holy *Qurbano*, or High Mass, lead by groups of men and women trained from childhood to sing in classical Syriac. What they sing, and how they decide to sing it, has become a medium of religious and political transformation, a transformation that reflects a condition of rupture, fragmentation, and the pressure to integrate into Dutch society. As I attended Mass,

rehearsals, and interviewed choir leaders and participants, I paid attention to the materialities of sound as well as disagreements over meaning, purpose, and performance context. Entangled in these debates were broader questions over the relations of authority and ethics of care that my interlocutors took to be central to their identities as liturgical singers and Syriac Christians. These questions of ethics and authority emerged not only in relation to the violent disjunctures of ethnic cleansing, migration, and assimilation in diaspora, but also to encounters with the fragments of European Christianity that remain embedded in the forms of European secular modernity. Thus Dutch religious sensibilities form an important part of the backdrop of my study.

Religious identity in the Netherlands, whether atheist, neo-Calvinist, Syriac Orthodox, Muslim, Surinamese Catholic, or secular Jewish, is intertwined with the emergence of a moralized conception of Dutch national identity in the late twentieth century. This is a history narrated in the public sphere as a story of managing sectarian tensions and overcoming a religiously repressive past. These public narratives are inflected with the language of kinship, trauma, longing, and love, furnishing, for example, the material for nationally beloved novelists like Harry Mulisch, Maarten 't Hart, and Jan Siebelink.⁸ While public displays of religious identity are received with much the same hostility to be found in better-studied

⁸ Novels like Mulisch's *The Discovery of Heaven* (1992), Siebelink's *Knielen op een bed violen* (2005), and Maarten 't Hart's entire corpus since the 1970s convey a sense of conflicted longing and revulsion for the religious fanaticism of the modern Dutch nation's formative years.

secular regimes like France, there are crucial differences. In the Netherlands, it is the underlying affective dimension that inflames passions and that can be mobilized politically. The discursive threat of public religiosity to the political power of the secular nation-state thus becomes more than an abstract sign or symbol of otherness: it activates a structure of feeling built around the interior traumas of selfhood and kin-relatedness.

The Syriac Orthodox experience of public Dutch debates over the integration of religious minorities thus illuminates this condition, and the unsettled question of whether religious, racial, cultural, or even civilizational difference constitutes the salient category of belonging and alterity in European identity-politics.

“Coming into Voice”: Audibility and the Dialogics of Recognition

Such uncertainty over the salience of categories and the meaning of difference shapes Syriac Orthodox efforts to procure recognition as an indigenous ethno-religious minority. Not only the experience of diaspora in the West, but twentieth century encounters with secular nation-states throughout the Middle East have convinced Syriac Orthodox Christians that such recognition is necessary for them to survive as a self-consciously imagined community in secular modernity. But survival depends upon more than just political and legal recognition. Political longings cannot be disentangled from existential longings. The self in the self-other relation of recognition is constituted by that relationship. Althusser (1970) describes this as the process of interpellation, while Charles Taylor calls this form of recognition a “vital human need” (1994: 26).

For Taylor, the history of the politics of recognition in western liberal democracies has to do with the problem of difference in relation to the abstract citizen. It is a particularly modern problem of identity and authenticity in which the liberal insistence on a separation between the neutral, universal public sphere, on the one hand, and the private sphere where “difference” may be located, on the other, is itself culturally specific. Political recognition in secular states is thus an effect of the power to produce categories of identity and experience. A political crisis of recognition will thus register as an existential crisis.

The necessity of political recognition in secular modernity translates in everyday life into the longing to be heard and to be spoken to in a language that is mutually intelligible. I argue that the existential and the political are inextricable in the sense that existential questions have political consequences, and political situations have implications for identity and self-understanding. Mutually intelligible language requires both conditions of audibility and negotiations over meaning. Bakhtin (2006) theorizes such negotiations with the notion of dialogism, illuminating the mechanics of recognition requisite to identity formation. Throughout this dissertation, I refer to “dialogical longing” among Syriac Christians, which is a longing not only for political recognition but for the conditions of audibility and mutual intelligibility that are preconditions for that recognition.

An important and often overlooked piece of the question of identity in the modern politics of recognition is not merely what constitutes difference “worth” recognizing, but what kinds of differences are even “perceptible” to those with the

power to bestow recognition. Syriac Orthodox Christian struggles for recognition suggest that there are forms of life that do not register in the sensory regime of mainstream liberal democracies. For this reason, I attend to the aesthetic and sensory dimensions of practices that Syriac Orthodox take to be ethically essential in order to see how these practices do or do not become audible and intelligible to different audiences. I show how the sonic dimensions of the liturgical rite are evidence of presences that do not register in the visual idiom of recognition in secular modern regimes of power.

Woven into my analysis of the liturgical rite is a conversation with Walter Benjamin's essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1968 [1935]), in which he shows how technological mediation transforms the practice and significance of art itself, while recognizing that the historical traditions from which art emerges were themselves lived and dynamic. What shifts in our understanding and experience of art in modernity is our relationship with its "aura of authenticity." That ineffable quality, the aura, that makes art significant to us as art, is unmoored from the conditions of its initial production, and the living tradition of which it is a part. What art is, and what art does for us, was fundamentally altered by the fact of technical reproducibility. Benjamin sees this at work in all the arts, aural as well as visual.

I draw inspiration from Charles Hirschkind's crucial intervention into Benjamin's argument shows how moral states are inculcated through practical techniques, while sensory histories are themselves mediated by traditions of social

practice (2001: 625, 629). My analysis of Dutch-Syriac experiments in liturgical song returns, however, to the question of the material fragmentation of everyday life at the center of Benjamin's thought, in order to account for what becomes of tradition under palpable and recurrent conditions of unmooring. Thus I explore Benjamin's thesis in the realm of liturgical participation, in order to understand what is transformed in the art of ritual itself. This transformation illuminates the ritual art's power to constitute a social identity around liturgical tradition, when ritual that is sacred precisely for its ancient authenticity is mediated, reproduced, and innovated under conditions that lend the question of authenticity an entirely new, and newly political, significance.

Orthodox liturgical music, especially when situated within the broader context in which liturgical singers live their lives, works in complex ways to tie together multiple scales and temporalities of experience, enacting ethical forms of life with both religious and political connotations. For example, in his work on Estonian Orthodox church choirs, Jeffers Engelhardt (2009) explores the effect of post-Soviet Estonians choosing to adopt Byzantine singing practices and traditions, rather than those of the Russian Orthodox Church. Engelhardt argues that by choosing to sing in the Byzantine tradition, Estonian Orthodox Christians make a geopolitical claim to a broader spiritual community within an imagined "European," as opposed to Slavic, lineage. In other words, in a post-Soviet context, Byzantine singing is a chronotope that draws Estonian Orthodox Christians into a European historical and geographical imaginary, which they embody and perform *in the same moments* in which they give voice to theologically right belief. When Bakhtin (2006) originally formulated the

concept of the chronotope, he theorized it as a literary device for configuring and representing space and time in language. Ethnographers like Engelhardt extend this literary conception of the chronotope to music showing how space and time can be configured and represented through sound.

In Eastern Orthodoxy, orthodoxy and orthopraxy are corollaries that support each other: the right orthodox beliefs, in this case, are expressible only by singing the right way, which means producing Byzantine-sounding melodies and harmonies. Central to Engelhardt's analysis is a careful consideration of the materialities, both textual and sonorous, of "right singing". He shows how his informants put considerable effort and attention into making sure the music "sounds right" in how it is written and sung, in the pronunciation of words, in the tone of voice, and in the resonance of harmonies so that they sound like their Byzantine model. Hence the very "rightness" of the sound has a force in producing right belief and shaping subjects' sense of self as Orthodox Christians with a cultural and religious subjectivity oriented towards Europe.

Similar considerations obtain in the study of diasporic Syriac Orthodox liturgical performance, but with a crucial difference: the particular political and existential crises of Syriac Orthodox identity prevent any such consensus among participants. Instead, I show how liturgical performance is the medium of open-ended ethical experimentation and reinvention. Liturgical song is one of the most important tools that Syriac Christians in diaspora use to recraft their understanding of what it is to be Christian in their way. Further, I argue that the kinds of debates and

disagreements they have over sound and meaning reveal a host of fractures, fissures, and instabilities in the character of Dutch multiculturalism, in European religious pluralism, and in the basic categories of secular modernity.

One of the ways I show these correlations is by attending to what I term “conditions of audibility.” Drawing on feminist anthropological inquiries into the relation between materialities and social meanings, I show how audibility and inaudibility figure both materially and metaphorically in the politics of minority recognition. Feminist theorists are centrally preoccupied with finding, and understanding the conditions of possibility for, the speaking, speakable subject. This question has historically been articulated as a search for *voice* (Gal 1991). The notion of *voice* has frequently been employed as a metonym for women’s consciousness, and in Susan Gal’s critical review of the study of gender and language, she observes

[t]erms such as “women’s language,” “voice,” or “words,” are routinely used not only to designate [gendered] everyday talk but also, much more broadly, to denote the public expression of a particular expression on self and social life, the effort to represent one’s own experience, rather than accepting the representations of more powerful others (1991: 176).

The counterpoint to *voice* is the perception of “silence” or “mutedness” as a “failure to produce one’s own separate, socially significant discourse” (Gal 1991: 177). In this formulation, however, early feminist anthropologists missed the epistemological and political problems presented by Gayatri Spivak’s perennial question “Can the subaltern speak?”—which is to say that not all “separate, socially significant

discourses” are audible to the ear of contemporary liberal academics (Spivak 1999: 309) and as such are not granted the status of “socially significant” in cultural theory.

Gal takes an important step in complicating feminist understandings of the ways power can work in different kinds of social relations in her discussion of gendered social language. By asking how different forms of expression come to be authorized, and what kinds of strategic speech and self-silencing occur in response to authorized forms of knowledge (1991: 176-177), Gal lays out a program for ethnographic inquiry of the kind exemplified by Saba Mahmood (2001, 2005) and Lila Abu-Lughod (1986, 1993). Spivak, however, reliably complicates this approach, highlighting the complex inter-relationship between the western academy’s hegemonic position in the politics of hearing and deciphering subaltern voices. The question then becomes how to understand the politics of *voice* itself when speaking subjects can shift in and out of subaltern status relative to shifting authoritative discursive traditions and regimes of power. In Spivak’s own examples—when she failed to find the upper-class Rani of Sirmur in the colonial archives and when she found no evidence with which to interpret the 1926 suicide of middle-class Independence fighter Bhubaneswari—she determines that subaltern status is a function of historical “muting.” This muting is an inability to be heard or read by history because of contingent historical and cultural circumstances. But, she writes, “all speaking, even seemingly the most immediate, entails a distanced decipherment by another, which is, at best, an interception. That is what speaking is” (1999: 309). Feminist anthropologists and historians are faced with epistemic murk when looking

at practices like *sati* (widow-burning), or expressions of gender ideology that run deeply counter to liberal academics' own authoritative discursive traditions. There is, however, an equal danger in projecting intentions onto inscrutable practices without contextual insight into the mechanics and politics of meaning-making. And yet, Spivak says, for subaltern voices to become audible to the academic ear, they by definition are assimilated into hegemonic discourse, which silences their subaltern difference (Spivak 1999: 309).

Spivak leaves her readers with the sense of an intractable epistemological bind. Recent feminist anthropological work on music, however, suggests a possible path out of the murk. In Amanda Weidman's study of professional women singers of classical Karnatic music in colonial south India, she asks suggestively: "Can the subaltern sing?" (2003, 2006). She proposes making a concerted anthropological effort to consider the voice both at the level of musical sound and at the level of metaphor, "as a cultural construct with a particular history" (2003: 195). Following historian and postcolonial theorist Mrinhal Sinha, Weidman suggests inquiring into the historically- and culturally-specific ways women "come into voice" and the kinds of voices women can assume (Weidman 2003: 195). Sinha observes the conscious construction of a female Indian voice among women writers in the 1920s (1996). In Sinha's analysis, these women labor in their writings to be heard within colonial and nationalist politics, and she traces their strategies for developing audible voices. The concern here is to understand how the conditions of colonial India and rising nationalism shaped the possibilities for women's self-representation in the public

sphere. Weidman extends Sinha's concept of voice beyond a metaphor for political self-representation to a more literal, musical sense that enables us to consider how the voice itself has multiple histories in particular contexts, including our own academic analyses. In her historical analysis, Weidman does not try to theorize woman's voice as a representation of her agency, but instead theorizes the agency *of* the voice itself, to understand how it has the power to create distinct subjectivities and produce recognizable social meanings (2003: 222).

My analysis develops Weidman's premise that the voice is a cultural object that is both productive of, and produced by, complex histories. This approach ties together questions of performance context, audience, and the historical contingency of authoritative discursive traditions to grasp the mechanics and dynamics—the politics, in other words—that produce audible speaking subjects. By foregrounding the relation between actual voices and the social meanings they engender, feminist anthropologists can focus on explaining why and how certain cultural conditions and relations of power shape and authorize some kinds of voices, and why and how those conditions, relations, and voices can change.

One of the central questions I ask in this dissertation is how the liturgical tradition relates to the crafting of Suryoye religious and political subjectivities as Middle Eastern Christians and as Dutch citizens, *as well as* how it relates to their crafting of a sense of “community” and “public identity.” These two questions are mutually entangled in everyday life, and constitute what many in the Syriac Orthodox Church experience and believe to be an urgent crisis. The reason for this sense of

crisis is rooted in the view that the ongoing work of crafting and cultivating such subjectivities and identities is evidence of some kind of embarrassing scandal. The fact that subjectivities and identities are always in the process of being constituted and reconstituted is not a self-evident insight in everyday life in the Netherlands. There is instead a heavily normative common-sense view that *everyone* is member of bounded community from which they derive their identity. The limits of such a view are well-documented and analyzed throughout the social sciences, and although it permeates everyday life in the Netherlands, Dutch scholars such as Birgit Meyer (2009) have provided some of the most useful analytical alternatives to the bounded language of “community.”

Imagined Community as Aesthetic Formation

Instead of “imagined community,” Meyer offers the notion of “aesthetic formation” because, she argues, “a community is not a preexisting entity that expresses itself via a fixed set of symbols, but a formation that comes into being through the circulation and use of shared cultural forms and that is never complete” (2009: 4). The dynamics of aesthetic formation characterize the constant double movement that Syriac Christians engage in as they labor to represent themselves as a bounded, static community in modernist terms, even as they strain against the modernist terms by which the concept of “community” is understood. As an analytical term, “aesthetic formation” depends on a view of the history of truth that both supports and complicates the view that modernity in its secular mode shapes a

particular kind of relation between identity and the ontological foundation of textually inscribed truth-claims.

Meyer identifies a connection between “modern imaginations of community” and the distinctly “modern understanding of language that rests on the idea of the arbitrariness of the sign” (2009: 43). She emphasizes the separating effects of the referential view of language, which emerged out of the ontological rupture of divine truth and worldly power (Meyer 2009: 5). The question of how community becomes real—“felt in the bones”, as she puts it (5)—is thus a question of the sensory and affective labor that bridges that ontological divide, materializing the imagined and overcoming its arbitrariness. Speaking directly to Benedict Anderson’s argument that politically salient communities such as nations are imagined, she asks how imaginations become tangible, how they materialize in space, and how they become “embodied in subjects” (5), which demands attention to the role played by things, media, and the body in actual processes of community making. The exteriorized language of community is thus staked upon an interiorized language of identity.

Replacing the notion of an imagined community with that of an “aesthetic formation” allows for an approach to national and ethnic community that keeps the ongoing material and embodied processes of “binding,” in the Durkheimian sense of social solidarity (1984 [1893]), at the center of analysis. “‘Formation’ is useful as it encompasses both the *social entity* (as in social formation)—thus designating a community—and the *processes of forming* (see also Mahmood 2005, 17ff)” (Meyer 2009: 7), which is never fully complete. Analytically, the term aesthetic formation

privileges the interwoven, performative, and processual dimensions of crafting subjects and making communities. Where my own analysis diverges from Meyer's approach is in disentangling a particular set of power relations and epistemic practices which lead to a host of misrecognitions and misunderstandings in the performative category called "religious community."

The West Syriac Rite, around which Syriac Orthodox Christian identity is organized, is that which has endured in its capacity to cultivate an ethical community, grounded in the entanglement of affect, kinship, and ritual practice. It is precisely its aesthetic features—in the Aristotelian sense of *aisthesis*, or "our total sensory experience of the world and our sensitive knowledge of it" (Meyer 2009: 6; Meyer and Verrips 2008: 21)—which lends it the power to synthesize different aspects of social, religious, and familial life. If identity is the aesthetic form of an ethical self (as Edmund Leach wrote in 1968), community is the tangle of ethical relations—whether of care, or obligation, or authority, or responsibility, or love—that bind some people together whether they like it or not. These relations are fashioned through the powerful call and response of recognition and sustained by the ever-emergent sensory work of everyday life.

Yet every emergence is also a vanishing. The secular conception of religion as distinct from (even when sometimes isomorphic to) ethnicity not only obscures ways of being that are, simply put, vanishing, but also makes it a political embarrassment to admit they ever existed at all. It is in this sense that the claim to secular ethno-religious indigeneity, which entails a constellation of categories positing isomorphic

relations between religion and ethnicity, in fact works as a technology of power to efface the liturgical world of Middle Eastern Christianity. This process renders Syriac Christians more hospitable to integration into secular Dutch society and, by extension, into a pluralist Europe.

One of my central aims in this dissertation is to consider how liturgical voices (both inside and outside of church) produce social meanings, fashion ethical selves, and constitute the social world of Syriac Christian diaspora as an aesthetic formation. By examining the mechanics and dynamics of Syriac liturgical singing, I am able to examine the ethics and aesthetics of Syriac religious subject-formation in relation to the politics of secular recognition that dominate Dutch-Syriac debates over identity, kinship, and theology. This, I suggest, sidesteps the intractable question of whether it is ever possible to recover the voices of silenced subaltern subjects. By foregrounding the relation between actual voices and the social meanings they engender, I focus on explaining why and how certain cultural conditions and relations of power shape and authorize some kinds of voices, and why and how those conditions, relations, and voices can change.

Syriac Orthodox Christians across the global diaspora share a deeply held conviction that the church's liturgical tradition encompasses, defines, and authorizes Syriac social life. It is for this reason that efforts to procure recognition as an indigenous ethno-religious minority within a legal frame-work of minority rights articulated by secular regimes from Turkey to the Netherlands reverberate in liturgical performances across the diaspora. For Syriac Christians, the politics of

recognition is inextricable from the ethics of self-fashioning. I show in this dissertation how and why this is. In the pages that follow, I document how these Christians are compelled to reshape their understanding of religious identity through liturgical performance in response to the pressures not only of the official integration policies of the Dutch state, but also of globally circulating (and mutually entangled) discourses of multicultural recognition, religious pluralism, and secular ethnicity.

The intellectual labor involved in this re-crafting of religious identity entails a conceptual reworking of categories like “religion” and “ethnicity.” The sensory labor involved in making these conceptual reconfigurations meaningful and real in lived Syriac Orthodox experience entails a transformation of the central axis of Syriac Orthodox community: the liturgy. Syriac Christians experiment with sound, debate meaning, and rework the relations of care, authority, and kinship historically enmeshed with Syriac liturgical performance.

Liturgical practice provides a crucial space for the cultivation of Syriac Christian moral identity among the younger generations of the Syriac diaspora, and especially among young women, because it is one of the few, and often the only, place where their voices are permitted to be audible amidst their church community’s social, gendered and generational hierarchy of authority. Here, they can elicit recognition and earn respect for themselves and for their families, in the eyes of other Syriac Orthodox Christians. This dialogical longing is frustrated by frictions within singing groups over whether others are participating for the right reasons. These frictions suggest a reluctance to acknowledge their own and others’ need for

dialogical recognition. I argue that this reluctance emerges in relation to the experience of stymied longings for recognition on a broader scale: in Dutch society, in the European Union, and in global geopolitical considerations of religious minorities in the Middle East.

Ethics, Morality, and Multiculturalism

One of the central arguments of this dissertation is the assertion that the sensory labor of second- and third-generation Syriac Orthodox in the Netherlands constitutes an ethical practice—in the sense that Foucault describes as the reflexive practice of freedom (1997a)—directed not only at reshaping Syriac Orthodox conceptions of community, but also at reshaping Syriac Orthodox conceptions of ethical personhood. The tensions that emerge in the ethical practice of liturgical performance index a series of contingent crises facing the Syriac Orthodox diaspora.

Foucault’s notion of “subjectivation” refers to all those processes through which individuals are labeled or made into subjects. This can mean the process of interpellation, in which subjects are formed by powerful ideologies and discourses, but it also refers to those processes through which individuals might make themselves into subjects—the relation of the self to itself. While there is discursive power in the bureaucratic practices and scholarly categories of secular nation-states, in normative European conceptions of kin-relations and individual responsibility, and in the religious authority of ecclesiastical hierarchies, there are still spaces for reflexive practices within each of these domains, employing techniques of self-transformation in an experimental mode (Foucault 1997a, 1997b; see also Faubion 2001: 12-13).

In this Foucauldian sense, liturgical singing is an ethical practice in an experimental mode. Syriac Orthodox Christians seek to craft the self in relation to multiple audiences; they encounter and negotiate multiple forms of discursive power from many directions, and so they learn that some forms of self must be silent, while others can be sounded—depending on the audience and depending on the aim.

Thus I take ethics to be the tactical *how*, whether *for* or *against* particular conceptions of the social, that is always in some kind of relational configuration of the self to other people. Morality, by contrast, is the discursive terrain in which ethics are imagined, contemplated, contested, and reproduced. Ethics and morality may be distinguished analytically from social structure, culture, and public or institutional discourses (see Zigon 2008), but over-drawing the line between the moral and the ethical domain, on one hand, and the social and the political on the other, can obscure our understanding of how these domains intersect in lived experience, and how moral visions and ethical practices become the focus of political anxiety and social transformation.

I contend that Weidman's conception of "coming into voice" foregrounds the ethical questions at stake for the Syriac Orthodox women and men who think about their liturgical identity in terms of participating in a moral community, and the broader debate over religious pluralism in Europe in which these questions are posed. Keeping (or continually reconstructing) a certain sense of difference as a necessary ethical imperative conflicts with the ethical imperative to really live with the Other called for by the politics of religious pluralism, but on another level it is an even more

complex conflict about trying to figure out what one's voice is. European multiculturalism discourses tend to take the "cultures" in question as self-evident, *a priori* entities (Modood 2007); the imperative to categorize "cultures" as "group identities" thus entails a number of modernist assumptions about the "selves" from which "cultural groups" are made. Thus Syriac Christians try to ascertain what makes *being Syriac* Syriac in terms that are legible to their European multiculturalist interlocutors, but this effort is riddled with fissures and fractures produced by the problem of multiple scales and multiple audiences.

Among the Dutch-born Suryoye who worked with me in my ethnographic study, both in parish churches and "secular" ethnic organizations, liturgical tradition, kinship, and socio-political identity are understood as fundamentally coterminous. They configure the moral domain in relation to a politicized ethnic identity: Suryoye are known to themselves and to others by their moral behavior. This is an aesthetic formation both radically and subtly different enough to complicate their engagement with the secular politics of Dutch multiculturalism. The subtle difference of Middle Eastern Christianity within Europe accounts for the visceral sense of urgency with which Syriac Christians struggle to claim recognition in the Dutch public sphere, as well as the palpable anxiety and distress caused by their frequent racial and religious misrecognition by mainstream Dutch. It is the very subtlety of Middle Eastern Christian difference, the difficulty with which they are discerned as different from either European Christians and from other immigrants and refugees of Middle Eastern origin, which brings an irony of multiculturalism into sharp relief. Syriac Orthodox

liturgical identity is effectively inaudible because it operates in a different sensory register than that of the secular politics of recognition in Europe. The secular discourse of Dutch multicultural politics attributes a specific moral valence to religious and racial difference, which stems from the Dutch nation-state's historical experience of managing religious difference through the pillarization system. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Dutch society was organized vertically into four pillars: communities of Protestant Christians, Catholic Christians, Liberal Humanists, and, later, Socialists. The history of de-pillarization in the late twentieth century, as I describe in chapter four, in which the pillars were said to have toppled and sectarian differences overcome, shaped the unmarked invisibility of Dutch cosmopolitan nationalism. The daily social practices that enact this cosmopolitan nationalism have become a moral prerequisite for national belonging (Kennedy 1995; Lechner 2008). In response, second- and third-generation Suryoye engage the tensions of Dutch multiculturalism and integration discourse by cultivating and historicizing a sense of moral difference as the foundation of their group identity. This is a moral difference not only cultivated by individuals as a religious necessity, but which is inherited from kin as a mark of "ethnic" belonging, shared to greater or lesser degree across the national borders that criss-cross the diaspora, and legitimized with appeals to ancient Christian tradition.

I examine the way this sense of moral difference is cultivated and contested in the practice of liturgical singing by young sub-deacons and sub-deaconesses

(*shamshone* and *shamshonithe*⁹) in the Syriac Orthodox Church in relation to overlapping audiences. Paradoxically, this “moral citizenship” both embraces and repudiates the Calvinist ethical sensibilities underpinning Dutch multiculturalism and liberal democratic discourse. On the one hand, Dutch Suryoye situate themselves firmly within European secular modernity as self-described “model minorities” who actively participate in every sphere of Dutch social, political, and economic life, yet they also challenge this modernity in their efforts to revive ancient Syriac theology, which flourished for centuries in dialogue with Islamic thought, as a living tradition that still speaks to their everyday existence, and which defines itself in a subtle criticism of the perceived moral failure of Christian Europe.

Ontologies of Difference

I employ the language of “ontology” throughout this dissertation to refer simultaneously to the experience of being in the world and the analytical language that organizes and orders that experience. I find the term useful because it directs attention to the relationship between experience and categories. An “ontology of difference” is thus related to how identity and belonging are shaped socially, and refers to basic shared experiences of the self in the world, which can be known through analytical categories such as, in the modern European case, the “individual” (Gauchet 1997), the subject-object divide (Keane 2006), identity as biology (Linke

⁹ There are several ranks among deacons, and because my research focused on second and third generation Dutch-Syriacs in their teens, twenties, and thirties, most of my primary fieldwork relationships were with young women and men consecrated at the lower levels of the deaconate.

1999), or identity as incommensurable world-view (Holmes 2000). I underscore throughout this dissertation how an ontology is more than an “understanding” of difference; it is also the embodied experience of that difference that constitutes a social world. The tensions I describe in the Dutch-Syriac diaspora are the tensions that arise from inhabiting more than one social world and of being confronted with a dominant language of categories that explicitly delegitimizes the embodied dimensions of being Syriac Christian. But this dissertation is about more than merely a question of “misapplied labels” and misbegotten identity-categories: I describe the political and existential crises that emerge from being forced to contend with multiple and conflicting ontologies of difference, each with their own logic of identity formation and ethical imperatives. Categories and experiences co-constitute each other: they are not separate domains of existence, but the categories we live by can be in tension with each other, producing tensions in our experience, and vice versa. My dissertation shows how this comes about among Syriac Christian liturgical singers in the Netherlands.

Chapter Outline

Each chapter moves through a different scale of experience, in which a different ontological (and thus ethical) imperative predominates. In the second chapter, I document the materialities of liturgical sound, to show how liturgical singing itself is the central medium by which my interlocutors conduct experiments in re-crafting an ontology of Syriac Christian difference. In chapter three, I sketch out the global context, in which Syriac elites contend with a transnational and

transhistorical epistemic uncertainty and geopolitical imperative to constitute the category of “religion” and the category of “ethnicity” as separable spheres. In chapter four, I shift to the national scale to describe how a Dutch postcolonial discourse of racial-religious difference shapes the day-to-day lived experience of Dutch-Syriac Christians by exerting a different set of pressures than those that occur on a global scale. Some liturgical singers are concerned more with one set of pressures than with others, and their concerns may shift over the course of their lives. For this reason, in chapter five, I sketch out the life stories of several of my key interlocutors whose narrations of self reveal the different ethical and affective directions in which they feel that they are pulled. In these personal narratives, I highlight the way in which each interlocutor’s strategy of self-representation works as a medium of ethical self-fashioning. In the very struggle for audibility, they craft themselves—and by implication, their community—as Syriac, as Christian, and as Dutch. In chapter six, I home in on one of the central ethical predicaments shared by each of my interlocutors: the tension between a secular Dutch notion of political responsibility implicit in the discourse of moral citizenship, on the one hand, and the ethical entanglements implicit in the Syriac view that Christianity is a kinship practice. In each of these chapters, I explore the notion of audibility to highlight both the sensorial and the dialogical dimensions of securing recognition from politically necessary audiences.

Chapter Two

Liturgical Song in the Age of Electronic Reproduction: Ethical Experiments in Memory and Sound

It is significant that the existence of the work of art with reference to its aura is never entirely separated from its ritual function. In other words, the unique value of the “authentic” work of art has its basis in ritual, the location of its original use value (Benjamin 1935: 223).

Liturgical Memory

From October 2009 to October 2010, I sang in two Syriac Orthodox Christian church choirs made up of young women and men who serve as deacons and singers living in the eastern Dutch sub-province of Twente, the easternmost region of the province of Overijssel. Twente hosts the highest concentration of Syriac Orthodox families in the Netherlands, primarily in the cities of Enschede and Hengelo, where I conducted the bulk of my fieldwork. In total, the province of Overijssel contains six parishes, alongside three parishes in Amsterdam, which collectively serve approximately 15,000 Syriac Orthodox who began migrating first as guest workers in Dutch textile factories in the 1970s, and then as asylum-seekers and immigrants under Dutch family reunification policy, throughout the 1980s and 1990s. In addition, I spent considerable time studying classical Syriac and attending public events at the Mor Ephrem Monastery, just outside the city of Enschede, on the edge of the German border, where the archbishop for the Benelux countries maintains his seat. The monastery serves as a community center, publishing house, and cemetery for Suryoye families throughout western Europe.

For a year, I attended choir rehearsals, weekly prayers, and Sunday Mass, learning to sing with the liturgical singers at the Mariakerk in Hengelo and the Mor Yaqub Kerk (St. Jacob Church) in central Enschede, and occasionally visiting other parishes in south Enschede, the nearby town of Oldenzaal, and Amsterdam. I discovered that although each church's liturgical choir sings from the same repertoire of hymns and prayers, the contrasts among them, both in singing style and in their approach to understanding the purpose and significance of their singing and learning, tell a story about the tensions, transformations, and innovations of Suryoye experience, memory, and identity in the diaspora.

Although the Syriac Orthodox Church has a formal theory of sound elaborated by early theologians, in which songs are arranged in eight different tonal scales, or modes¹⁰, meant to elicit different emotional responses appropriate to different phases of the liturgical calendar, few if any of my informants were aware of the official, church-sanctioned meanings attached to their weekly singing practice, nor were they often fully proficient in the classical Syriac (a fourth century dialect of Aramaic) itself. Most singers could read and pronounce the texts, and they could memorize the basic melodies, but full fluency in the language and mastery of liturgical meanings was rare among all but the most senior male deacons, monks, priests, and teachers

¹⁰ My informants explained this concept to me using the Dutch word *toonlader*, or scale, but the musical concept is more accurately compared to the Arabic *maqam*, Turkish *makam*, and Greek *echo*, which correspond roughly, though not exactly, to the western musical concept of mode. It is also described in English as “color,” meaning it has a certain set of feelings, melodic tendencies, and an ethos associated with it.

who had received their training in the monasteries of Tur Abdin (south east Turkey), Syria, Lebanon, and Jerusalem. The gaps in the young singers' official knowledge were to many a source of embarrassment, and while the singers aspired to master the language and the full repertoire of melodies, their efforts were hindered by a complex intersection of social forces that could often cause them a great deal of anxiety and public distress. Thus it was that I began to focus my efforts on understanding both the sources of their anxiety and of their commitment to the practice despite their oft-expressed feelings of insufficiency.

Because explicit theories of sound and formal meaning in Syriac liturgical music were not generally available to the young women and men who participated in my research, my ethnography has become an exploration of the ruptures that have alienated them from this knowledge. What emerges instead of official knowledge is a complicated story of deeply felt social meanings. The young liturgical singers construct these meanings out of their experience as second- and third-generation Suryoye trying to make sense of the changing relationship between their families' religious lives and their political existence in a European context. Whether or not they can translate the language of their song, and whether or not they have a firm grasp of the church's musical canon, second- and third- generation Suryoye sing their weekly liturgy as an expression and embodiment of a moral identity that contains—to varying and sometime conflicting degrees—devotion to God, longing for dialogical recognition, and filial sentiments of love and bitterness.

The practice of liturgical song is connected to the construction of a Syriac Orthodox identity through the liturgy's position of primacy in Suryoye communal and symbolic life, as it is one of the very few cultural practices the community can call its own and on which they can base their claims to cultural distinctiveness, because of their history of many centuries of living within diverse empires (Atto 2011; Bas ter Haar Romeny 2010; Griffith 2008; Masters 2001). At the same time, the liturgical tradition is too unstable and uncertain as an authoritative tradition for young Suryoye to stake their full sense of identity and belonging comfortably, because of the way liturgical life has come to be de-politicized and de-legitimized as a central axis of social life in European secular modernity. The proliferation and circulation of singing styles and interpretations of the liturgy throughout Syriac Orthodox history, and its innovations in the contemporary global diaspora, attest to these uncertainties and instabilities. These are rooted in the temporal and spatial ruptures and dispersals that have yielded a diasporic identity predicated on personal and historical traumas.

The practice of liturgical song is one of the few socially and theologically sanctioned spaces where young Syriac Orthodox men and women can meet together to discuss and reflect upon their individual and communal moral identity and its relationship with the historical community constituted by and through the church. In rehearsals and church services, they experiment with sounds and singing styles reflective of the histories of migration and fragmentation that complicate their engagement with Dutch integration discourse and identity politics, lending political and existential significance to their aural and aesthetic choices. Their participation in

the liturgical cycle enacts the memory of historical loss and the community's potential for future reinvention, both of which are mediated through the proliferation and circulation of electronic recordings of different singing styles throughout the diaspora.

At the center of the Syriac Orthodox liturgical cycle is a book called the *Beth Gahzo*, the “treasury of song.” It contains hundreds of hymns, compiled over centuries from the institutional memory of the church community, with many songs attributed to the Syriac poet and theologian St. Ephrem Syrus (conventionally named Ephrem the Syrian among western scholars, following late antique Greek geographical naming practices), who wrote and taught in the cities of Edessa and Nisibis in the fourth century (den Biesen 2006; McVey 1989: 26-30).

Among my friends and acquaintances in the parishes, St. Ephrem was the most beloved and revered of the Syriac Fathers. They named their local monastery—and many of their children—after him, and recognized him as the authoritative source of all that was most essentially and authentically Syriac. St. Ephrem's position is partially based on his founding role and prolific authorship of songs in the *Beth Gahzo*, but he is also revered because he is attributed with establishing the most distinctive feature of Syriac liturgical identity: the Daughters of the Covenant, the choirs of consecrated women who were considered (at least by later tradition) a holy scandal among other emerging liturgical traditions in late antiquity (Harvey 2005; 2010). These ancient women's choirs were the precursor and model for the twentieth

century revival of women's participation in the Syriac liturgy throughout the global diaspora.

Within the past fifty years, with migration and access to education and wealth, the Syriac Orthodox women's choirs have been revived after uncounted centuries of suppression in the villages and towns of Tur Abdin.¹¹ This revival is spurred on by a growing sense that the institution founded by St. Ephrem is an essential, unique, and valuable feature of Syriac Orthodox Christian identity and experience. In the Netherlands, the late Archbishop Julius Çicek, the first Syriac Orthodox bishop in Europe, established women's choirs among his growing parishes. He founded the first European parish in Hengelo in 1977 and supported teaching young girls to sing the liturgical melodies and to read the *Serto*, the West-Syriac script. Ayfer, an acquaintance I met frequently at public events at the monastery, was one of the original members of this first choir in Hengelo. Having moved from southeast Turkey with her family as a very young child in the early 1970s, she was an active member of the first generation of liturgical singers until her marriage. Now, she is the mother of teenage boys and has a professional career in law, though she is still devout in her weekly church attendance. When I visited Ayfer in her tidy rowhouse in a Hengelo suburb, she reminisced with me about her time in the choir as a girl, telling me how important Çicek was to the revival's success. His will and determination, and his far-reaching activities to develop Syriac Orthodox ethnic consciousness in the global

¹¹ If there is evidence of when and how Syriac women's choirs faded from regular practice in Syriac village life under Ottoman rule I have not discovered it yet.

diaspora, and his insistence on the importance of the women's choirs to Syriac Orthodox community and identity, were fundamental to their growth and success throughout the 1970s and 1980s.

Ayfer looked back fondly, showing me pictures of when the Archbishop took them on a trip to Rome to perform at the Vatican for a concert of choirs from different traditions within Christianity. She wished, she said, that they had learned the meaning of what they sang. She understood that teaching girls the theological content of their songs was perhaps moving too far, too fast for the conservative men in her community, but at least they sounded good! And they felt valued, like they were an important part of their church and their tradition. When I asked her about the present and the future of the choir, she paused and measured her words carefully:

Without Çicek's forceful personality there is less support for the women's choirs today, and everyone is so busy with other things, so it's diminishing a little. When I was a girl the thought of doing anything else in the evenings or the weekends was unthinkable. All we had was church! All we were allowed was church. So, you know, we practiced a lot. We sounded good! Now girls can do other things...and so...it doesn't always sound so good. The choir directors now have beautiful voices and work hard, but there are things working against them.

Archbishop Çicek passed away shortly before my arrival in the Netherlands to conduct preliminary fieldwork, and the arch-diocese was somewhat in disarray, so I was not able to speak to the late Archbishop or anyone close to him to find out more about his role and relationship to the broader revival of the women's choirs throughout the global diaspora. Though I did not realize it at the time, the beginning of my fieldwork in the Netherlands coincided with a temporary ebb in formal

organizing among the Dutch-Syriac liturgical community. I was at first alarmed by what seemed a sudden cessation in organized and sustained activity among and across parishes, and a wide-spread feeling that things were falling apart. After his death, the Dutch Suryoye paused to regroup and reflect on what to make of the new era under Çicek's successor, the youthful, cosmopolitan, Princeton Theological Seminary-educated Mor Polycarpus Augin Aydin. But, as I would discover over the course of the following four years, my friends and interlocutors were beginning to lay the foundations for a newly reinvigorated revival of liturgical experimentation.

During Archbishop Cicek's time presiding over the formation of the Syriac Orthodox diaspora in western Europe, from the 1970s to the 1990s, the Syriac Orthodox made significant gains in education, wealth, and access to information about ancient Syriac tradition, often by reading historical scholarship produced in European and American universities that were translated into Syriac, Arabic, and Turkish, and published by the monastery's printing press. These developments coincided with a growing awareness of the dangers of political invisibility in secular politics, as anxieties over assimilation into European societies mixed with fear that the already-attenuated Syriac tradition would disappear from the Middle East entirely. For this reason, despite some cultural misgivings within the community about women's active participation in the liturgy, the revival of Syriac women's choirs has emerged out of a combined impulse for both dialogical recognition and existential self-discovery.

Self-recognition demands relational recognition, but this occurs in a global context where minority identities must be staked on claims of being unique, historically continuous, and sympathetic to liberal western sensibilities, and thus worthy of protection and representation from more powerful others. Syriac women's choirs are nothing if not sympathetic to interested outsiders. They tell an appealing story about Syriac liturgical identity, and provide important insight into the history of the role of liturgical song in constituting Christian ecclesial communities in late antiquity.

One of the most striking features of the ancient songs composed for women's liturgical singing is the enhanced role of biblical women's voices, far beyond their representation in the Bible itself. In the early centuries of Syriac Christianity, this was an important move in setting apart the Syriac church from its competitors, and for this reason it also is a central piece of the historical constitution of a distinct Syriac liturgical identity. Syriac Christian women used their voices to constitute the historical community of the saved through liturgical songs that wove present time into biblical history, revoicing their role in the drama of God's purpose unfolding through history. In the first centuries of the Syriac women's choirs, liturgical singing worked as a "continual enactment of the work of salvation for humankind" (Harvey 2010: 91-92). At the same time, they provided doctrinal instruction and models of moral virtue to be embodied by the community, as individuals and as a collective (69). Historically at least, Syriac women's choirs were central to the production of the Syriac liturgical

subject, who was connected to the infinite story of God's plan for the world both as a person and as part of their community (Harvey 2010).

There are compelling reasons for members of the Syriac Orthodox Church today to draw a line of direct continuity in liturgical consciousness back to the fourth century, but it is difficult for me to echo such claims without careful consideration of the observable disruptions and fragmentations of the social reproduction of Syriac Orthodox identity in modernity. But most of the songs that have been translated and commented upon by western scholars are not the same songs whose melodies have survived in liturgical memory through out the diaspora. The songs of the *Beth Gahzo* are orally reproduced and, because they are sung in classical Syriac, their textual meanings are obscure to many of those singing them. Few, if any, of my interlocutors during fieldwork could speak to the historical material that I have described above. They knew and revered St. Ephrem and St. Jacob of Sarugh, as well as the other authors of the songs in the *Beth Gahzo*, and they knew and revered their own choral precursors in the liturgical tradition, but they are part of a revival precisely because the Syriac liturgical community has undergone waves of rupture, alienation, forgetting, and suppression.

In Benjamin's language, the significance of an art form is not limited by or to its original use-value, but there *is* significance in the mere fact of *some kind* of relationship with its original ritual function. In other words, merely singing the liturgy with awareness of its historicity and its ritual form is sufficient for the constitution of the post-migration Syriac Orthodox diaspora. Even as secular modes of thinking

about tradition—such as the need to understand the theological meaning of the words being sung—are incorporated into the community, the liturgy’s “aura of authenticity” is both in its use-value as the authenticator of Syriac-ness, and in its enduring position at the center of Syriac Orthodox liturgical community. Young Syriac liturgical singers in the diaspora find themselves in a complicated situation as they try to work out what exactly it means, and what exactly it is they are doing, when they sing the *Beth Gahzo*.

Musical Geographies

The uniqueness of a work of art is inseparable from its being embedded in the fabric of a tradition. This tradition itself is thoroughly alive and extremely changeable (Benjamin 1935: 223).

This complicated situation is audible in the diverse sounds in which the liturgical songs of the *Beth Gahzo* are sung today. The Church recognizes eight distinct schools of music that have developed over the centuries due to geographical isolation. The three schools whose musical traditions circulate most widely in the Syriac diaspora are the School of Mardin, elaborated by the patriarchate at its historical seat in the monastery *Deyr El-Zafaran*, the School of Tur Abdin, developed among the villages and farms of the rural highlands of southeastern Turkey, and the School of Edessa, which is now sung almost exclusively among the Urfan refugee community centered in Aleppo, Syria.

Each school of music takes a slightly different approach to its musical interpretation of the *Beth Gahzo*, and each reflects a distinct trajectory of

geographical isolation, migration, and hybridization with local influences. In the churches of the European diaspora, the School of Tur Abdin, which was developed and sustained by farmers and mountain villagers who fled the violent conflicts between their Kurdish neighbors and the Turkish government, predominates through oral transmission from *malfono* to *malfono*, or teacher to teacher. Its style of melodic interpretation is plain and unadorned, with a low pitch, heavy, unmodulated expression, and wide, imprecise tuning. The simplicity and difficulty of farm life in the mountains echo, they say, in the simple and rough sound of their voices.

Throughout the 1970s, '80s and 90s churches in the Netherlands developed their own local variations of the School of Tur Abdin, with small and occasional differences in pronunciation, pitch, and tempo. With increases in education and access to technology, as well as growing connections with the vibrant global capital of the Suryoye diaspora in Sodertalje, Sweden, where waves of migrants from Syria are in the majority, church singers and deacons have begun to incorporate musical influences from the Schools of Mardin and, to a lesser extent, Edessa, though the use of CD and MP3 recordings.

The importance of these recordings was explained to me by Matthias, a young *malfono* at the Mor Yaqub Church in Enschede, who gave his students a collection of MP3's containing the entire *Beth Gahzo* for them to memorize at home. He shared his enthusiasm for the musical recordings coming out of Syria and Lebanon, often funded by the diasporic communities in Sweden and Germany:

You have to understand that in Tur Abdin [south east Turkey], we were oppressed for many years. We lost so much knowledge, and weren't allowed to teach and learn our own traditions. We had to hide the fact that we were Christians. You can hear it in how we sing—there are notes missing. In Syria and Lebanon, we could learn in our own schools, and were freer, so there is more knowledge there. The melodies sound more like they are supposed to, so they are more beautiful. You can hear they really know how to make music—you know—they know how to sing. If you grow up in the church learning to sing the whole *Beth Gahzo* this way, you can't help but be a musician.

His students, a fluctuating group of ten to fifteen of the more committed young sub-deacons and sub-deaconesses who were willing to give up their Sunday evenings to *madreshto* (church school), try to incorporate this musical appreciation of other schools into their two and a half hour Sunday morning liturgical performance, but the pattern of church life can make this difficult.

For many Suryoye in the diaspora, there is a pressing sense that social life must, as it was before migration to Europe, be organized around the liturgical cycle of the Church. Social events are organized around annual feast and saint days and the work and school week must be integrated into a weekly schedule of fasting (a vegan-pescaterian diet on Wednesdays and Fridays), daily prayers at home and at church, and preparation for Holy Mass on Sundays. The yearly, monthly, and weekly calendar is dictated by an eight-week liturgical cycle marked by the microtonal modal system found in the *Beth Gahzo*. Annual, weekly, and daily prayers are sung in these eight modes, depending on when in the cycle they appear.

Officially, the tonal and melodic structure of each mode is meant to evoke a different feeling appropriate to the events commemorated in that week's Mass, or that

day's prayers, such as grief at the death of a martyr, or joy at the birth of a saint, or longing supplication to the Mother Mary. It takes years to master each song with its eight modal variations, as different songs are used at different times of the year. Furthermore, they are challenging to master as they are taught orally, and the musical notation system devised for the *Beth Gahzo* in Syria in the late twentieth century rarely if ever appeared in Syriac Orthodox churches in the Netherlands during my fieldwork period¹². The musical and literary expertise required to fully participate in the liturgy rivals that of university-trained scholars, and training is begun at ages as young as six years old and continues into adulthood.

The enormous quantity of knowledge required to perform the liturgy in full is thus often at odds with the demands placed on singers by their participation in Dutch social and economic life, a requirement they are constantly made conscious of by Dutch integration discourse. Thus they struggle to balance schoolwork and employment with family and church commitments that have the potential to be all-consuming. The pressures of these obligations can be overwhelming at times, as Syriac liturgical singers are keenly aware of showing themselves to be model minorities who do not require public assistance, despite (or because of) being frequently misrecognized and mislabeled by neighbors, teachers, politicians, and academic researchers. At the same time that Dutch Suryoye try to square their sense of obligation to succeed at life on Dutch terms, there is a profound commitment to

¹² I thank Ozan Aksoy for alerting me to the existence of a notated version of the *Beth Gahzo* in circulation among folk musicians in Syria and Turkey.

village and kinship ties that remain embedded in the fragments of a world of liturgical, rather than capitalist, order.

Wide Tuning

To an ever greater degree the work of art reproduced becomes the work of art designed for reproducibility. [...] To ask for the “authentic” print makes no sense. But the instant the criterion of authenticity ceases to be applicable to artistic production, the total function of art is reversed. Instead of being based on ritual, it begins to be based on another practice—politics (Benjamin 1935: 224)

Young Suryoye boys and girls begin to attend *madresh-to* two to three times a week, when they reach primary school age. Here, they learn to read the *Serto* script, and begin the process of memorizing the standard elements of daily prayers and the weekly liturgy. After reaching a minimum level of proficiency in reading, both boys and girls begin to participate in the liturgy of the Holy Mass on Sundays, as singers and readers, and boys can serve as incense bearers and ascend the altar space with the male deacons, sub-deacons, and the priest. As they enter adolescence, many families in the Netherlands, Sweden, Germany, and Belgium send their sons to the Mor Ephrem Monastery for intensive summer training in Syriac language, theology, and liturgical music.

During these summer school sessions, the development of subtle regional differences in sound throughout the diaspora over the past thirty years reveal themselves throughout the daily lessons and sung monastic prayers in which the students participate. Because of the orality of transmission, the memory of the ear determines the pronunciation, register, pitch, and how elaborately the notational line

of a melody is sung. The monks and *malfone* instruct their students as best they can to sing each prayer and hymn in the “original” and “authentic” manner that *they* remember from their own training in the monasteries of Tur Abdin, but the array of influences from different European languages and *madreshto* teachers with different backgrounds creates a communal sound that is noticeably wide in its tuning.

Wide tuning has been shown by anthropologists of music to be a distinctive feature of participatory music, as opposed to music meant primarily for performance (Turino 2008: 45). It allows for singers of different skill levels to participate by permitting them to sing their notes slightly off-key. The wide tuning of most Suryoyo liturgical communal singing reflects the reality that young boys and girls are incorporated into the liturgy from a very young age and are expected to learn by doing. Learning to sing an array of complex melodies based on an intricate microtonal system at puberty compels most singers, as Bishop Polycarpus wryly told me, “to find their own niche in the song and stay there.”

Wide tuning also reflects the feeling among many practitioners that the purpose of liturgical song is prayer and praise, an expression of personal connection to God that is simultaneously communal and individual. The beauty and feeling of communal sound is not as important as singing with correct pronunciation and the right melodic line, even if the line is sung at a different pitch by different people. It is prayer, after all, and the general feeling is that God does not mind how it sounds, as long as it gets done. While some are content to leave it at that, for other singers there are some complications to this view, particularly along gendered and theological

lines, and the feeling that while God might not mind the way it sounds, some listeners do.

At the Mariakerk in the city of Hengelo, the girls and women spent several months rehearsing separately from the men and boys in an effort to focus explicitly on improving and experimenting with their sound. The young women in this choir took the view that while in principle what they were doing as singers was praying, in practice they were giving a performance for the benefit of their audience in the church congregation. They were there, they told me, to create a spiritual atmosphere for the congregation through their song; they were providing a service for their community. Having learned to read classical Syriac in primary school (in the period prior to 2004, when the Dutch government banned the teaching of native immigrant languages in public schools), they gathered together in the church on Friday nights to practice their singing under the direction of Marta and Rebekah, two university students (studying law and education, respectively) with a self-taught gift for singing and a love for the music of Mariah Carey. Their goal was to create a cohesive group of performers out of the middle school and high school aged girls in their choir, and they aspired to eventually make their choir into a professional group to sing at Syriac weddings and special events. Marta and Rebekah had learned to sing in the style of the Tur Abdin School from Rebekah's father at a young age, but they aspired to make their choir singing more "interesting," in their view, as they were inspired by the musical ideas they heard on CD's and MP3's from Sweden, where Syrian musical influences dominate. In choir rehearsals, they drilled the girls in singing together in tune and

with confidence. At times, they would experiment with their own melodic innovations. While Marta and Rebekah were widely admired in the community for their beautiful voices, their innovative efforts were often met with skepticism or disapproval from the congregation, and their attempts to create a cohesive, tightly-tuned sound were thwarted by a handful of other singers participating in the Sunday morning Mass who did not share their vision of the choir and refused to attend weekly rehearsals.

During Friday night rehearsals, the girls would stand in a circle around one of two lecterns holding the liturgical texts and prayer books needed for weekly Masses and daily prayers in the space called the *gudo*. The word *gudo* refers both to the collectivity of singers and to the physical space between the altar and the congregation where they stand to sing. During the Sunday morning Mass, or Holy *Qurbano*, they are divided into two groups who sing antiphonally, in call and response, each standing around a lectern broad enough for a large group to encircle it, the women and some men on the left, and men exclusively on the right. Before them is the altar, a raised and curtained dais on which the women are forbidden to step.

These fragments taken from my field notes, at the mid-way point of the fifty-day Lenten Fast in March 2010, sketches out the dynamics of an evening's rehearsal with the girls' choir in Hengelo under Marta and Rebekah's direction. Although an ephemeral snapshot from a transitional moment in the history of the choir's revival, it shows how multiple forms of tension bubble up and are addressed over the course of a rehearsal. The unstructured, almost spontaneous way that the young women,

ranging in age from twelve years old to twenty-two, proceed through their rehearsal illuminates not only their vocal experimentation, but also the way they improvise the very notion of liturgical performance itself. They forge the space and time of liturgical practice in what Seligman (2008) would call the subjunctive space of ritual, in which ritual facilitates a provisional, tentative exploration of meaning and identity. As this excerpt shows, not only are the sound of the liturgy and the technical form of the rehearsal space up for discussion, but so too are the patterns and emotions of relational belonging shared among the young women themselves.

There is a solid, energetic sound for the first hour, with about 13 girls in attendance. Rebekah does a head count, asking where a couple of girls are, noting that one former regular has stopped showing up at all. In the second half, the girls start showing their exhaustion, sitting down with headaches, dizziness, tiredness. It is the bleak Dutch mid-winter, and everyone is busy and anxious about school and exams, and they have been fasting [a vegan, low-protein diet] for weeks. One girl has an extreme dizzy spell and is taken out with two other girls...she doesn't seem to recover. Later, Rebekah sits and talks with her about a dream that upset her. [...]

Nonetheless, there seems to be a bit of crackdown happening. Rebekah is excited about Marta's confidence building exercise from the previous week and wants the girls to try it again, even though she honestly admits her own tiredness and lack of motivation. They are practicing songs for Palm Sunday and the Passion Week. I recognize the word *oeshano* (hosannah), and similar words and melodies, and one song I've also been singing with the Mor Afrem Choir at the Assyrian Mesopotamian Cultural Association...except here we're singing it more simply: slower, lower, and with fewer notes. It is a simpler tune here. Nonetheless, much of what the girls are practicing tonight is different from how their church usually sings it. They usually sing according to a Turkish style, learned from Rebekah's father, who learned it in his village, probably (she thinks) from the Mor Gabriel monastic tradition.

Tonight, however, the girls are singing for the first time in a different style, following a CD they have of a choir in Sweden. They want to change things up and Rebekah wants to resist the swell of girls showing up on the feast day after months of absence, singing badly. ("Those girls! They only want to show off! Or their families make them stand up in front of everyone when there's a large crowd to see them..."). She encourages the girls to sing strongly and

confidently, and really master the melody, so they can out-sing the interlopers. At the break, Marta tells me that they've also been consulting a CD of the Beth Gahzo made by a monk in Switzerland; she promises to give me the MP3 files when I bring my USB stick next week.

There is a bit of a discussion at the break about the Mor Afrem choir in Enschede. They didn't think it was still going, and are surprised that I work with them too. Rebekah asks if they really use instruments, and I tell her yes. She mentions the choir is part of the *Assyrische tak* ("the Assyrian camp"). Marta tries to explain to me "we are Arameans, but there are some others who call themselves Assyrian, though they're also Syriac Orthodox. But," she says, "there are real Assyrians out there, who speak Assyrian. But they're different." I ask if they are Swadaya speakers. Neither Marta nor Rebekah knows what that means. I try, "East-Syriac"...and still nothing. Then they debate with each other whether Assyrian is a dialect of Aramaic, or an entirely different language. Marta is sure it is a dialect, but Rebekah is confused by this and says she doesn't know.

The break finishes, and the confidence building exercise is a raucous affair. Rebekah continues to sit with the dizzy girl and tells her not to be superstitious about dreams. It turns out she had had a frightening dream which she thought meant something was going to happen to a member of her family. There is an edge on everyone's nerves tonight.

Marta alternately cajoles and bullies the girls into going up individually to sing, in her hilariously exaggerated Twents [local regional] accent. She makes a comedy routine out of her use of local slang (she's training to be a lawyer at university, so she can get away with it). The comedy modulates the sternness of her message. The younger girls seem to have an easier time of it than a lot of the older girls. One girl is told she has too much power in her voice and needs to sing more dynamically. Little M--- has more confidence...singing through the other girls' chatter. She sounds lovely but afterwards Rebekah asks her if she feels tired after singing like that. M---- admits "a little," and Rebekah says "its because you're not singing with your own voice." M---- doesn't say anything, but sets her face. Her normally meek, awkward, preteen manner is giving way to an ever more defiant expression.

A couple of the older girls doing the solo singing routine for the first time seem downright traumatized by the experience. S----, fifteen years old, breaks down in the middle of her song and refuses to finish, and Marta spends a good ten minutes talking to her quietly, during which S---'s face is a tempest of emotion...with the mercurial smiles and distraught laughter that indexes a young woman's pained self-awareness.

At the end, Marta lectures the girls sternly, telling them not to interrupt her when they burst out with commentary, as they tend to. She tells them they must practice at home and develop their voices so they can sing with

confidence. She says standing at the gudo singing inaudibly every week isn't good enough. (I'm reminded of what she said last week, that her mother pointed out to her that when she marries she will probably leave for another church, and then what will become of the choir?) When some girls begin to bicker with each other, Rebekah gets very stern and tells them to stop, that being women means they must be kind and gentle with others, and as Christians they should not get angry about what others think or say, but have confidence and calm within themselves. (I wonder if this is an aspirational speech for Rebekah herself, as I've seen her temper flare more than once).

However tentatively, that evening Marta and Rebekah were trying to stake out a set of claims through their singing and their choir direction, intending to make a point to those they perceived as uncommitted dilettantes, trying to push them out with the sound of their voices, and trying to make their voices strong enough to withstand resistance. They were willing, if not eager, to sacrifice the village identity of their church's accustomed sound, even though they learned it from Rebekah's own father. At the same time, Marta and Rebekah were making a claim about what it means to be Syriac Orthodox Christian women. There is a characteristic piety there, but in a distinctive voice: "You're not singing in your own voice; sing with strength, but also dynamic subtlety; comport yourselves morally, in your outward behavior and your inward sensibilities...the feeling in your heart matters, the spirit in which you do something matters." They do not dispute certain gender roles: they expect to get married and to leave the choir, but they are trying to prepare the younger girls for their inevitable departure, and to leave their mark on the liturgical sound of the Mariakerk. In their passion and hard work in the face of daily discouragement and disruption, they craft a liturgical significance for themselves that encompasses and

exceeds the kin-based structure of social and moral obligation demanded by the rest of their congregation.

When the girls know the songs, it sounds good. There is a balance and clarity and solidity to their singing. Their self-confidence is audible. In the Holy *Qurbono* on Sunday mornings, Marta and Rebekah try to use hand gestures to direct the singing, to indicate rhythm and volume, but this is a struggle with the singers who do not come to practice, and disregard direction. Liturgical singing competes against other obligations—work, school, caring for husbands, children, parents—and often does not win out. So the choir is a site of contestation between the people who see it as more of an elective, participatory part of worship, but not a compulsory form of dedicated performance, and those who want to make liturgical singing into an aurally and affectively coherent community of voices. For Marta and Rebekah, the performance aspect of the choir is more important than inclusive participation. The sound matters, the cohesion of the group as a self-conscious and intentional community matters, the relationships among the girls matter, their awareness of doing something special matters. It is a ritual that must be rehearsed, requiring qualifications beyond merely being Syriac by blood and tradition.

By contrast, the young women and girls of the choir at the Mor Yaquob Kerk in the nearby city of Enschede took a different approach to their practice. Here, they attended Sunday night *madresho* with the young men and boys, hoping to get a more well-rounded education in the melodies of the *Beth Gahzo*, grammar and translation exercises, and brief lessons in Christian spirituality and morality, which were read by

the *malfono*, Matthias, from a spiritual lesson book written by the Coptic Patriarch. The *malfono*'s goal here was to help his students gain the understanding needed to have a full spiritual experience in church on Sunday mornings, because, in his mind, only by understanding the meaning of their songs and prayers could they experience the peace from God that would make them feel rested and recovered enough to face their week again.

Though Matthias took a different position on the aesthetics and ethics of liturgical sound than Marta and Rebekah, his rehearsal space equally served as a discussion forum for young women and men of the church to reflect on the question of their moral obligations as Syriac Orthodox Christians. After singing, the group often sat and discussed the challenges of living as a Syriac Orthodox Christian in the Netherlands. They talked about the relative importance of adherence to church rules, of fasting and ritual observance, of domestic arrangements and familial obligations, of professional and political commitments, and of sexual conduct and interpersonal relationships [*only the church should intervene when a husband hits his wife! Divorce is not Christian! asserts Matthias peremptorily, while Nicme flinches*]. The fervor of their disagreements casts light on the uncertainties of their particular historical moment.

Many of these young singers were in the process of sorting through competing theories and historical claims about their identity and making decisions about their affiliations and allegiances. Some, like Marta and Rebekah, participated in Aramean cultural groups, which emphasize the role of the Aramaic language in the community

and see the Syriac Orthodox Church as coterminous with Aramean ethnic identity, while others were drawn to the Assyrian claim of a national identity shared with East-Syriac speakers of the Assyrian Church of the East and the Chaldean and Syriac Catholic Churches. The epistemic instabilities and inconsistencies among these conflicting claims produce a morass of uncertainty that becomes, at times, exhausting to navigate, especially in their struggle to represent themselves and their community to Dutch society and the state. Others among them reject the debate between the Aramean and the Assyrian camps and refuse to call themselves by any name other than Suryoye. While few among the singers would disavow the name Suryoye, the debate thickens as they inquire into what it means to be Suryoye and how to set themselves apart when in so many respects they are influenced by Kurdish, Turkish, Arabic, and now Dutch culture. A focus on moral identity at this particular moment in their history enables them to claim a continuous cultural identity that is distinctly their own and that surpasses the disagreements, the uncertainties, and the eclectic cultural influences embodied by the church's diverse musical schools of liturgical song. Singing the liturgy, even with wide tuning—*especially* in its wide tuning— itself becomes an enactment of Syriac moral identity in which a hundred different sentiments and intentions and ideologies and backgrounds can merge, materializing and mediating Syriac liturgical subjectivity in all its conflicted heterogeneity.

Singing anchors identity in prayer. Singing itself, while simultaneously praying to God and providing atmosphere for the congregation, implicates others: siblings, cousins, friends, and enemies, who circle the *gudo* before the altar and

whose voices buzz in the ear [*I know it sounds good when I get a head ache! Marta tells me*]. It is synaesthetically textured, as Ashbrook Harvey (2010) describes of St. Ephrem's time, with the sounds of bells and rustling vestments, the scent of incense and the taste of Eucharistic bread, the haptic connection of the kiss of peace, the kinetic rhythms of standing, sitting, and bowing (see also Pickstock 2010: 125-145). Individual congregants might not know the symbolic significance of each element, but they know that these things connect them to St. Ephrem, and that is what makes them Syriac Christian, whether they want to be or not.

At the same time, the liturgy is full of struggling to find the right note, slipping up the proper pronunciation, wincing at the discord or the person who sings too loudly, hurriedly flipping pages, sharing texts, catching the mouthed instructions from the senior deacon whose head peeks out occasionally from behind the altar curtain, and laughing affectionately at the sight of a toddler running up to the altar to say hello to the priest in the middle of Mass. Each of these moments, interwoven with the sound of the liturgy and at times widening its tuning, are what Kathleen Stewart refers to as ordinary affects (2007). Ordinary affects are, in their simplest sense, the everyday feelings that animate the minutes of everyday life but, in leaving a residue, reveal their significance. Each moment of singing the liturgy is laden with affect of many kinds. But these ordinary feelings of boredom, irritation, frustration, anxiety, affection, or hilarity merge with the heightened feeling of doing something sacred, however such a polyvalent term is imagined from moment to moment and from person to person. This merging makes Syriac liturgical singing a singular yet

multitudinous ethical motion to hew the shape of Syriac Christianness, in its being *and* its doing, from the stuff of liturgical prayer. The liturgy is an ethical enactment of Syriac Orthodox identity, however it sounds. The liturgy is Syriacness because of and in spite of the existential fragmentation and political unintelligibility of being *merely* Christian in a secular regime that demands audible coherence. The more widely tuned the sound, the more widely tuned the identity. That is diaspora. But the ethical commitment to liturgy as the font of selfhood remains the same.

Hence a shared moral identity anchored in the liturgical tradition is the one thing most singers agree on, even if the particulars of moral behavior in daily life are up for discussion. The over-arching theme in such discussions is the importance of distinguishing Syriac Christian morality not only from Islamic forms of religiosity, but also from western Christianity, which many perceive as having been diminished by European secularity and vacated of much of its force and meaning. Even more pronounced is their uneasiness with explicitly secular expressions of Dutch national belonging, which hinges upon equally moralized conceptions of correct behavior and belief in liberal democratic terms. Thus, from a mainstream Dutch point of view, Suryoyo moral identity requires a conservative reading of the New Testament Bible, and especially the writings of St. Paul, who provides much of the church rules and customs that are taken to be essentially Syriac Orthodox (although on the subject of women's voices in the liturgy, St. Ephrem trumps St. Paul). Conservative reading practices shape a number of daily ethical and social practices, from barring women from leadership positions in the church and restricting their role to liturgical singing,

to privileging paternal authority over domestic life, which at times extends to decisions related to marriage, education, and employment.

Thus, religious identification among the Suryoye is not a matter of freely choosing belief but of participating in the moral life of the community for a variety of reasons, preeminent of which are loyalty and love amidst a legacy of immense unacknowledged historical trauma. As Sophia, a recently married young professional in her late twenties told me of her unwillingness to openly date men before marriage, “My Dutch friends don’t understand, but I didn’t do it because I knew it would hurt my parents and they have been through so much. Why would I want to do that to them?”

This sense of self-control to protect parents and grandparents is common among the young women and men I met through the church, but it is not an unequivocal or uniform loyalty. Community and church meetings frequently become shouting matches between resentful children in their twenties and thirties and the authoritarian elders of their parents’ generation, and there is a growing awareness that the church is hemorrhaging young people, and that more and more young men, especially, are contributing to the statistics of urban crime in Enschede. Love and loyalty are mixed with bitterness, alienation, and an inability to understand each other. Nonetheless, whether as an expression of angry defiance or heart-sick loyalty, moral behavior is the arena in which second- and- third generation Dutch-Syriacs define their position as a bridge between Dutch secular modernity and their parents’ memories of a lost liturgical world.

The wide tuning of Syriac liturgical song, its electronic reproduction and circulation, and debates over sound and significance evoke Benjamin's observation that the fact of technical reproducibility throws the question of "the aura of authenticity" by the wayside and subjects the work of art to the explicit practice of politics (1935: 224). The question of what the reproduction of liturgical identity should sound like is political, in the sense that it is a function of contests over the power to make meanings that will stick. The meanings that stick will be those that are audible to a broader audience. Whether the nation-state or the global public sphere, a broader audience is required to procure the dialogical recognition needed for the aesthetic formation of identity and community.

Secularizing Song

Works of art are received and valued on different planes. Two polar types stand out: with one, the accent is on the cult value; with the other, on the exhibition value of the work (Benjamin 1935: 124).

One of the central sources of tension during my fieldwork period arose when my friends and informants in the parish church choirs became aware of the fact that I was also attending rehearsals of the Mor Afrem Choir at the Assyrian Mesopotamian Association Enschede (AMVE), a self-described "secular" choir led by a professional, university-trained musical director from Aleppo, Syria. Working with this choir posed a particular methodological challenge, because most members of the choir had fled to the Netherlands from Syria within the previous fifteen years, and generally spoke more Arabic than *Turoyo* or Dutch. The group was made up of

roughly twenty people who would come and go as their schedules permitted, and of whom most were born in the Syrian cities of Aleppo or Qamishli.

My parish friends were suspicious of the Mor Afrem choir, and expressed resentment and indignation that they sang Syriac hymns and songs from the *Beth Gahzo* outside of church, and it was true that the Mor Afrem Choir seemed to be engaged in a very different kind of project than the parish choirs. At AMVE, they sang the *Beth Gahzo* in a way that might lead one to categorize it as folklore, if one was not careful. Such a view of the AMVE's singing practices would discern only that there is a traditional body of Assyrian folk songs and that their performance "expresses" Assyrian identity irrespective of audience or context. As Benjamin points out in the quotation above, works of art tend to be received and valued either for their "cult value" or for their "exhibition value," which is to say for either their productive ritual function or for their representational aesthetic consumption. For Syriac liturgical singing, this would be reformulated as a question about whether liturgical song is to be received and value by anyone other than God, or whether the ritual function would be lost by its secular exhibition. In this case, however, the polarity between these two types is not as clear as Benjamin's formulation would suggest. This is an exceedingly complicated situation that requires careful attention to the complexities of twentieth-century Syriac history to make sense of it.

The singers of the AMVE choir claimed that their liturgical music was older than the church, that it was in fact Assyrian, and that all other forms of the Middle Eastern *maqam* derived from it, and that the ancient St. Ephrem set his hymns and

poems to already-existing popular folk melodies of the time to help bring people into the church and convert them. They conceptualized the relationship between Christian identity and ethnic identity somewhat differently from the members of the parish choirs, as Assyrian ethno-national claims were positioned, at least rhetorically, prior to religious community¹³. They practiced singing the *Beth Gahzo* one evening a week for fun and companionship, while smoking and drinking tea and coffee in the AMVE hall, which shared a building with the local Italian Cultural Association in south Enschede. When they could get the money together, the director arranged public concerts for Dutch audiences and he had even managed to take the choir on tour to England in 2009.

Elyas, the director, took pains to explain to me how important it was that they sang in the most correct and beautiful way, following the style of the School of Edessa (*Urfa* or *Urhoy*), which was sung (he said) with the same approximate melodies as the School of Tur Abdin, but with a lighter, more delicate, and lilting vocalization and more vocal flourishes, like the tremulous, high pitched wail that sounds, to my ear, more Arabic. Echoing the words of Matthias (of the Mor Yaqub parish choir), Elyas told me that the Edessan style was the most authentic, and the

¹³ For more on the emergence of Assyrian nationalism see Murre-van den Berg 1999, 2006a, 2006b. The lines of migration of Assyrians, or East-Syriacs, from the Church of the East in northern Iraq to Syria throughout the early and mid-twentieth century, in addition to differences in the trajectories of Syrian and Turkish secularization partially account for the AMVE's more secular orientation and uncomfortable relationship with the Syriac Orthodox ecclesiastical hierarchy (see Barsoum tract 1952).

most suitable for European aural consumption, of the traditions of Syriac liturgical singing.

My church friends agreed that the Mor Afrem choir sang very beautifully, but they were still suspicious. Over time, I heard stories that the director Elyas struggled without avail to perform for the rest of the Dutch-Syriac community, and that they had been prevented from performing at the monastery by the governance board of the arch-diocese, which was dominated by people from Tur Abdin and Arameanists who consistently refused to work with Assyrianists in any venue and on any topic. This situation complicates any attempt to claim that the Mor Afrem Choir sings the *Beth Gahzo* as folklore for secular audiences, while the parish churches sing it as religious expression for an exclusively religious audience.

During my fieldwork I became increasingly aware of just how violent and fraught the conflict between the Assyrian and Aramean sides could be and how the split could divide families. Beyond the firestorms that would light up on-line chat rooms on the websites of cultural organizations like Platform Aram and the AMVE, there were reports of violent attacks against priests and monks and bishops across the diaspora, of riots and knife-fights in Sodertalje, Sweden over the rival Aramean and Assyrian soccer teams, and of grants from the Dutch government lost because the community could not coalesce under a single umbrella organization to represent their interests. Arameans were blamed for their inflexibility and autocratic hold on the archdiocese, while Assyrians were blamed for impiety and the rise in crime (and thus a bad reputation) among the public housing estates of south Enschede.

One evening at the AMVE after rehearsal, I drank tea with Sa'id, an older, respected gentlemen who traveled every week from the town of Rijssen with his wife, daughter, and son-in-law so that they could participate in the choir while he sat and chatted with whomever else came and went in the hall. Sa'id had studied Assyriology at university in Syria, and he was eager to answer my questions about the tensions I observed among the Turkish and Syrian sides of the Syriac Orthodox community. He told me that, from his perspective, the Turkish side resents the Syrian side for their relative indifference to the church, which stems from the fact that in Syria religious minorities had more opportunities to develop a life and an identity outside of church. At the same time, the Syrian members of the community suffer from a paradoxical condition. They are more highly educated, coming from more developed urban areas in Syria, but because they are more recent migrants to the Netherlands they are poorer than their more established but less educated Turkish counterparts. While there is no neat, one-to-one correlation between Syrian nationality and affiliation with the claim to Assyrian nationhood, the history of secularization in Syria is different from that in southeast Turkey. Thus the disarticulation between religious identity and political identity is more imaginable among this segment of the church community. In addition, Assyrian nationalism was able to take root in Syria in the early twentieth century due to the migration into the Kharpot region of Iraqi Syriac Christians who identified as Assyrian. This migration paved the way for a more secular ethno-national consciousness to emerge in response to pan-Arab nationalism (Atto 2011; Murre-van den Berg 2006a).

The ambivalence among my parish informants regarding the Mor Afrem choir was partially to do with the question of audience, partially the matter of performance context, and partially the question of the interior quality of prayer. The problem is not quite the same as the case described by Kabir Tambar (2010) for Alevis in Turkey. Tambar describes Alevi expressions of anxiety and ambivalence about the folklorization of *cem* ritual due to the destabilizing effect on the ritual's religious significance, and thus the political legibility of Alevi religious identity. Even though Alevis and Syriac Christians share much in the way of historical and political background, there is a subtler catastrophe at work here in the double-movement of de- and re-politicization on Syriac self-knowledge.

The question raised by this double movement is whether the secularization of Syriac liturgical song is a politicization or a de-politicization. Historically, it is a politicization of one kind, as it accompanied an emergent Assyrian nationalism but with two different effects. On the one hand, the secularization of Syriac liturgical song changed the nature of Syriac community vis-à-vis the state. The Syriac Orthodox Church's protected position under the Ottoman millet system altered at the Treaty of Lausanne after World War One when the patriarch failed to claim recognized minority status for Syriac Orthodoxy. Theories vary as to why. Some of my sources tell me that the patriarch wanted to reassure Ataturk that they were "loyal Turks." Others say that the patriarch was sabotaged by members of his own delegation, or that he was excluded from the treaty talks by western powers who cast aside the Ottoman Christian minorities they had once implicated in their missionizing

efforts. Whatever the reason, Syriac Orthodox Christians lost their chance to exist on paper as a recognized minority. As Marta explained to me one night after choir practice while describing her work as a legal research intern for the Universal Syriac Alliance¹⁴: “Legally, we don’t exist. It feels bad.”

Simultaneously, there is a different kind of politicizing effect vis-à-vis the church community’s understanding of its own ontological status. Questions hang in the air: *Who, and what, are we? Are we a political entity? Are we a religious entity? Our religious identity once provided us with political recognition and protection, but no longer. The world in which we made sense has long since changed, but we do not know how to change with it, and admitting that change is necessary undermines the claims to political recognition we seek.* My friends in the choirs said to me, over and over again: “We can’t explain to people who we are, because we don’t understand ourselves. But we’re not fictional—we do exist. We are a *people!* [Dutch *volk*, Syriac *‘amo]*”.

What *is* clear is that to inhabit and perform the categories “religious” and “political” is different in Dutch secularism than it was under the Ottoman millet system, as it was different under Turkish secularism, and as it was different under Syrian secularism. Each kind of secularism has left its mark on the shape of Syriac Orthodox political self-representation and self-understanding. This raises a new

¹⁴ As of 2012, the Universal Syriac Alliance, founded as an international organization along the same lines as the Universal Assyrian Alliance, and whose current president is a Dutch-Syriac man raised in Hengelo, changed its name to the World Council of Arameans (Syriacs).

question: In what kind of situation is a religious identity more or less political than an ethnic identity?

Studies in folklore provide us with a clue. Folklorization has a long history as a tool of nationalists and nation-builders (Anderson 1991; Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983). Tambar (2010) shows that in the Turkish context folklorized Alevi ritual is that which is domesticated and non-threatening, whereas a range of other studies document how the piously worn headscarf is deemed a discursive challenge to the secular authority of the state (Bowen 2007, 2010; Scott 2010; Fernando 2010). In this context, secularism politicizes religious difference by managing it and controlling it, which ties questions of secularism and pluralism to the complexity of the nation-state as a postcolonial artifact.

In Turkish secularism, Syriac religious difference was a political challenge only in as much as it was fused with the perception of possible ethnic or national difference, as was the case for Armenian Christians in Turkey. In the post-Ottoman historical context, the ethno-religious is the kind of difference that poses a challenge to the sovereign state's discursive power (i.e., the power to make meanings that stick). One neutralizing response is to take out the religious by folklorizing it and thus making a community purely ethnic, or to take out the ethnic and make it a purely religious community defined by private, unobtrusive belief.

Syriac liturgical music came close to secularization in the mid-twentieth century when early nationalist musicians and composers wished to use the classical language to compose new songs about non-religious topics. The Patriarchate was

suspicious, perhaps because the ecclesiastical hierarchy of the church understood their structural dependence on first the Ottoman and then the Turkish state. Saba Mahmood has similarly diagnosed the dangers of over-drawing the lines of ethno-religious minorityhood against a national majority among Coptic Christians in Egypt (2012: 445-446)¹⁵. According to the oral reports given to me by my informants, the Patriarch ostensibly banned the use of classical Syriac for secular folk songs, so that at weddings and parties Syriac Christians had to bring in Kurdish musicians or sing Kurdish (or Arabic or Turkish) songs themselves. But as with everything related to the politics of the Patriarchate, reports are conflicting and many of my informants have their own agendas to protect. One question raised by the narrative discrepancy is whether the Patriarchate, as an institution, recognized its dependence on Ataturk and, in trying to prove that church members were loyal Turks, disallowed the use of Syriac in secular songs in order to prevent further ethnicization. The church hierarchy's later, partial embrace of the Aramean ideology, articulated in the pamphlet "The Syrian Church of Antioch: Its Name and History," that was written by Patriarch Mor Ignatios Ephrem I in 1952, correlates with the spread of a global diaspora in the mid-twentieth century. Migration released the majority of Syriac Orthodox Christians from complete structural dependence on the Turkish state and emboldened them to follow the example of Armenians, Copts, and Kurds in claiming ethno-national

¹⁵ Mahmood (2012) analyzes this danger as the prospect of being excluded entirely from the imagined community of the nation and thus losing the rights, privileges, and protections theoretically granted to all citizens as equal subjects of the lawful sovereign state.

identity in front of a broader global audience.

The expansion of Syriac Orthodoxy's potential audience to encompass a global scale is implicated in the process of Syriac ethnicization and secularization, but with evidently devastating results for the liturgical community. The effect of Turkish secularization was to impel the Christians of Tur Abdin to engage in a radical privatization: church services, the use of Aramaic, and the instruction of children had to be done in absolute secrecy. The fervency of Turkish nationalism in its early heyday pushed the Christians of Tur Abdin to worship underground (often quite literally in chapels carved into caves under mountains). To this day, the Turkish-born nuns at the Mor Ephrem Monastery in the Netherlands cover their habits with black robes, while the Syrian-born nuns do not. Syriac liturgical performance was absolutely forbidden and so could be reformulated as neither strictly religious nor strictly folkloric. Without an audience to recognize the significance of their kind of difference, and without a state to acknowledge that they existed at all, Syriac liturgical identity was illegible, invisible, and inaudible. In other words, it was identity-less as far as the secular categories of the modern Turkish state were concerned. This lack of public identity meant that the Ottoman-era conception of Syriac Orthodox Christian liturgical identity as coterminous with kin relations remained unchallenged until migration to Europe. Cultivating a public ethnic identity under such circumstances was no more conceivable than public expressions of religious identity.

On the other side of the border, state secularization in Syria created a space

for folklorization, under conditions of complex counter-movements of ethno-nationalism, while still leaving a space to reproduce a social ontology unifying kinship, liturgical life, and social life. This ontology was shared by their distant kin in Turkey. Ironically enough, today it is Dutch secularization that invades the ethical core of Syriac liturgical identity, as secular and western Dutch Christian allies and interlocutors insist upon western Christian notions of what it is to be Christian, what it is to be an ethical person, and what it is to be a citizen in a secular liberal regime infused with moralized conceptions of cosmopolitan nationalism.

This complex history partially accounts for why using liturgical music for secular public performance disturbs many parishioners. When she found out about my research with the Mor Afrem Choir, my friend Sophia wanted to know, somewhat angrily, why the Mor Afrem singers never came to church. It was not clear that Sophia knew for certain whether they actually do or do not go to church; I later discovered that several young men in the secular choir are in fact sub-deacons and deacons at the parish church in southern Enschede. Nor was that knowledge really the point. The anger and indignation with which she expressed the sentiment, which was shared but more successfully moderated by Rebekah and Marta, who were the choir directors of the Hengelo church, suggests something deeper at work here. Their anger suggests a difficult-to-articulate unease with performing the *Beth Gahzo* in a secular performance context because of a certain threat to the integrity, the aura of authenticity, of the moral community constituted through liturgical singing. The question of audience, context, scale, and intention together comprise the identity and

significance of a performance. But because of the mixed history of Syriac liturgical singing most choir members do not dare make their own authoritative claims about what they think the identity and significance of their sung prayers *should be*. The performance of Syriac liturgical song is complex and unstable, and it heightens the existential uncertainty of Syriacness. The Syriac Orthodox question *who am I?* is exceptionally fraught, because it is, in fact, an interrogation of the relations connecting the religious, the legal, the ethical, and the political under the complex postcolonial conditions that bind together European and Middle Eastern secular modernity.

The Authority of the Object

The authenticity of a thing is the essence of all that is transmissible from its beginning, ranging from its substantive duration to its testimony to the history which it has experienced. Since the historical testimony rests on the authenticity, the former, too, is jeopardized by reproduction when substantive duration ceases to matter. And what is really jeopardized when the historical testimony is affected is the authority of the object (Benjamin 1935: 221).

The *Beth Gahzo*, the book of hymnal melodies at the center of the Syriac Orthodox liturgy, is defined by its incompleteness. It is a source of pride for Syriac Christians that there *were* thousands of songs, but most of these have been forgotten and lost in the regular upheavals of Syriac history. The loss of the musical treasure of the church is narrated as a story of violence, repression, and marginalization. Learning and singing the melodies that remain is an act of reconstructing and reclaiming an identity prior to the Syriac Orthodox Church's embattled relationship

with Islam in the late Ottoman and early Turkish era. Ambivalence within the community towards melodic innovation reflects widespread ambivalence towards perceived innovations of diasporic Syriac identity. While creating new versions of old songs is a long-standing strategy for overcoming different periods of historical violence and loss and regaining a sense of vibrant cultural production, it also inspires a feeling of transgression and dismay against an already besieged ancient authenticity.

The cause of uncertainty and instability is not the shift from oral reproduction to electronic reproduction itself, but this shift reflects the material, temporal, and spatial ruptures that have yielded a diasporic identity predicated on historical traumas that have left very little of Syriac social life intact, except for liturgy and, in some cases, language. My overworked and anxious informants actively try to ascertain the “authentic” in who they are and what they do because the historical testimony of their parents’ and grandparents’ memory is under assault from competing political narratives and conflicting authoritative traditions. The authority of the object, in Walter Benjamin’s language, is in the Syriac case a sense of self and community constituted by and through the church’s liturgical tradition under the Ottoman millet system and through centuries of vigorous dialogue with Muslim religious thought (Griffith 2008), but which through the onslaught of modern nationalism and secularization has lost its aura of authenticity. In the words of Marcus, a young church sub-deacon preparing to enter university, who possesses a fiery conviction in his Assyrian nationality and right to a homeland, “the church cannot give you a passport.” Furthermore, he insists, “the church should not be talking about identity at

all” and has caused all sorts of trouble by doing so.

Given the gap between historical memory and political realities, the proliferation of musical reproductions throughout the diaspora, whether ritual or digital, is an experiment in discovering the essences that abide in Syriac liturgical song, and thus the continuities that abide in diasporic identities. The driving, visceral need expressed by my informants to seek these continuities is a response to the discomfort of inhabiting an invisible space of paradox within the politics of secular nation-states. In this space, Dutch-Syriac self-knowledge built on the overlap of kinship and liturgical practices, as well as the sense of moral distinction necessary to maintain the connection between kinship and liturgy, is a political liability.

And so, the question of my ethnography—*what is it to be Suryoye?*—is posed regularly by my informants as they navigate the existential bind of existing without recognition. Their question is met with distinct yet entangled responses, that are audible in the layered sounds of widely tuned liturgical song: the prideful evocation of ancient Edessa, a supplication to God and each other, and a filial gift mixed from pain and love.

Chapter Three:

Merely Religious: A History of Categories in the Secular Episteme

There are individuals walking along. Somewhere (usually behind them) the hail rings out: ‘Hey, you there!’ One individual (nine times out of ten it is the right one) turns round, believing/suspecting/knowing that it is for him, i.e. recognizing that ‘it really is he’ who is meant by the hailing (Althusser 1970: 174).

“Words don’t always mean what we want them to,” she said. [...] The room was quiet. All the people and things in it were listening. “Like...if someone shouts ‘Hey you!’ at someone in the street, but someone else turns around. The words misbehaved. They didn’t call the person they were meant to....” (Mieville 2008: 268).

Truth and error are complicated matters... (Leach 1968: xiv).

A Song for the Umthonoyo

It is dark outside the monastery. Peter and I have grown tired of the classical Syriac-English lessons we are meant, under orders from the Archbishop, to be exchanging. Instead, we talk about music. He teaches me songs with tremendous patience for my Western inability to reproduce microtones. There are Youtube videos of Peter singing solos in the Syriac liturgy during Sunday morning mass; he has a powerful voice and impressive knowledge, which is why the bishop has assigned him to teach me to read classical Syriac. He is respected, but also laughed at a little for his excessive enthusiasms. He might be called a zealot. Peter is a fervent *umthonoyo*—a man committed to serving the people of the Syriac Orthodox community and their cause. His calling is to master and teach *ktthonoyo*, literally “the language of the

book,” which is what his community calls the West-Syriac dialect of the Aramaic language sung in the Syriac Orthodox Christian liturgy. Peter hopes that it may once again become a living language that will bring unity and authenticity to the Syriac Orthodox Christian diaspora. Many others in the Syriac Orthodox community share his dream. Peter tells me of Naum Faiq, one of the earliest *umthonoye* (pl.) and the most famous of the Ottoman-era Syriac Orthodox nationalists. Peter heard Naum Faiq’s song *Leshono d’umtho*, a secular folk song written in *kthobonoyo*, on the Internet.

“I loved it, and it was in my true language,” Peter proudly tells me, “so I learned it fast, in one day.” He sings it and then tries to translate for me with a mixture of English and German (I can infer a little from the German for its similarity to Dutch):

The language of the nation, our pride;
between the people/nation (German *volk*)
give light to our thoughts (*taroitheyen*);
or (intentions)...

so that we can see the ways in the heights
we are your (the language’s) sons and daughters;
we cannot rest in this life (in kth. These lives)...

which is weak (*haiye*)

so let us go live from here so that we can come back

--return to the first days

Peter wonders out loud at song's meaning. He thinks that "first days" means the old times when everyone spoke the true language. He says to me, pondering, "maybe Naum Faiq means that this life is nothing if you do not speak the language? If you speak the language you can find heaven, where God is." Then, decisively: "Yes. This is what it means." He interprets the song to mean that Syriac Orthodox Christians will continue to be lost, unknown, and forgotten by history unless they can rediscover their ancient language and speak it again. Furthermore, Aramaic was the language of Christ—surely it is the language spoken in Heaven. The song fuels his ethnolinguistic passion and reinforces its religious significance. But then he pauses, and his face darkens with anger.

"But Sarah! Naum Faiq also wrote a song that made me so angry! He wrote: 'he was a beautiful flower in the Garden of Ashur....'" Peter's voice rises with rage and despair.

"How could Naum Faiq write this when we are Arameans! It is like the politicians! Maybe the songs are beautiful, but if you understand the meaning ... agh!" He makes an angry noise and then stews in silence. I wait for him to elaborate. He looks at me, shaking his head.

"Sarah, you will be hit if you sing a song of Ashur in front of Arameans."

Peter was not exaggerating. A person might really be hit for singing a song of ancient Assyria in front of the people who call themselves the descendents of the ancient Arameans. A person might be hit for using the word Assyrian to refer to the people of the Syriac Orthodox Church in front of those who call themselves Aramean. A person will likely receive hate mail for using the word Assyrian in an academic publication in reference to the Syriac Orthodox diaspora living in the Netherlands and elsewhere around the globe.

The problem, of course, is that the same is true for the word Aramean. Members of the same family will disagree, violently, about whether to be Syriac Orthodox Christian means to be a part of the Assyrian nation, or whether it means to be ethnically Aramean.

And so, using the word Aramean or the word Assyrian will get the person who writes about Syriac Orthodox Christians in a great deal of trouble with *someone*. This issue provokes knife-fights and riots among Syriac Orthodox Christian soccer fans in Sweden, half of whom follow the local Assyrian team, and half of whom follow the local Aramean team, and all of whom are enraged at the treacherous error of their kin for using the wrong name (Gaunt 2010). This kind of confusion and debate is a common enough effect of living at the margins of nation-states (Tsing 1993). Syriac Orthodox Christians, however, these tensions are amplified not by how little attention they have received from states and scholars, but by the dominant knowledge-practices of those who *have* written about them.

Marginalia

In the modern history of European relations with the Middle East, Aramaic-speaking Christians occasionally appear as a marginal footnote in a chapter or two on religious or ethnic minorities¹⁶. Possessing neither the numbers of Armenians, Kurds, Alevis, or Greek Orthodox, nor the out-of-category exoticism of Yazidis and Mandeans, they are often absent even as a footnote. When they do appear, their identity is obscured by their own lack of consensus over what to call themselves. It is rarely apparent in *New York Times* reports of violence against Chaldo-Assyrian Christians in Mosul, Iraq, in Ottoman references to the *Suryani* of south eastern Turkey, or in reports of Aramean Christian refugees fleeing the ravages of civil war in Aleppo and Damascus that the people indexed by these epithets are connected by a liturgical tradition that informs their shared struggle to claim recognition as an indigenous ethno-religious linguistic group predating Islamic presence in the Middle East¹⁷.

The confusion over what to call Aramaic-speaking Christians stems from a long history of migration, fragmentation, and the divisive effects of European colonial knowledge of the Middle East, which casts its shadow over Syriac Christian self-knowledge in the present. This history, encapsulated by the failure of a coherent

¹⁶ For an example, see Jabar 2005.

¹⁷ For examples, see *The New York Times*, September 4, 2009; Trigona-Harany 2009; <http://www.suryoyosat.com/index.php?p=9&id=12>; Joseph 2000; Southgate 1840; Tvedtnes 1981; Frye 1992.

nationalist movement to take hold in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Makko 2010), reveals the relationship between modern power and the naturalization of constructed ethnic and national categories. The epistemic tenuousness of this relationship is especially marked among this group because of a troubled history of political marginalization, geographic isolation, and colonial intrigue. Since the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire and the signing of the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923, efforts to cultivate a political movement rooted in nationalist or ethnic consciousness have been plagued not only by violent repression and marginalization from without, but also by theological and linguistic fragmentation from within.

Aramaic-speaking Christians, who are connected by overlapping but not fully coterminous bonds of kinship, language, and church debate whether they are ethnically Assyrian or Aramean, whether they are simply Turkish or Arab Christians, whether they are related to the Christians of southern India, or whether they are entirely without ethnicity at all, thereby defining themselves exclusively in religious terms. These debates have roots in colonial European knowledge of the Middle East as it influenced the nationalization and secularization processes of the twentieth century, but they continue at a fervent pitch within the twenty-first century diaspora in Europe and around the globe.

At the heart of these debates is a confrontation with the enduring categories and knowledge practices of the modern nation-state, into which Aramaic-speaking Christians' historical experience cannot be easily translated. Their experience shows that the relationship between religious identity (as well as the subjectivities upon

which that identity rests) and political identity (upon which legal group claims are made) remains as unsatisfactorily settled in secular European modernity as it does in Middle Eastern modernity.

The central tension underlying debates over what to call Syriac Orthodox Christians is whether ritual—thar is, the liturgy of the West Syriac Rite—provides an appropriate boundary for public identity in a secular world. Those who argue for an Aramean identity say yes. Those who argue for an Assyrian identity say no. The implied question is whether liturgical identity is not just spiritually meaningful, but also something that can work as a politically and socially efficacious mode of organizing communal life. This question brings the critical study of secularism and secularity to bear on the anthropological study of ethnicity and identity formation.

Everyday Ethnicity

Brubaker et al. approach ethnicity as a historically specific mode of identification that emerges from the interplay of nationalist claims and counter-claims within shifting discursive and political fields (Brubaker et al. 2006: 10-11). Ethnic identity becomes a politically salient mode of organizing self and other in the context of modern nation-building projects and processes. It is in the politics and discourses of modern nations that identity-formations begin to enlist secular habits of thought and feeling, which are effects, as Talal Asad (2003) argues, of state power. In *Formations of the Secular*, Asad shows how secularism is an attempt at a transcendent mediation between different identities based on race, class, gender, religion, and, in many cases, ethnicity, through the representational figure of “the

citizen” (Asad 2003: 5). The object is not, as is popularly claimed in liberal discourse, “peace, tolerance and pluralism”, but power of a very specific, disciplinary sort. The figure of “the citizen” is produced by a certain chronotopic configuration: “the homogenous time of state bureaucracies and market dealings,” which is “central to the calculations of modern political economy” (Asad 2003: 5). In secular regimes such as the Netherlands, religious identity cannot function as a public and political mode of social organizing because belongs to the private realm. For minority communities whose political and public identity has been understood in religious terms, other terms like ethnicity are necessarily reworked if they are to have any chance at claiming recognition by powerful states. The problem is that, as Hirschman has shown in the case of early Malay census making (1987), there can be a mismatch between official categories and the practice of what Brubaker et al. call “everyday ethnicity.” For Brubaker, “everyday ethnicity” is made up of “cues, identifications, languages, institutions, networks, and interactions” (11), and it is these everyday practices that, in the Syriac Orthodox case, rub up against the bureaucratic practices and disciplinary powers of secular nation-states. In the Netherlands, for example, the Dutch government classifies Syriac Orthodox Christians according to national origin for the purposes of census-taking and social policy. The government then calculates its demographics statistics on Dutch Muslims according to their nation of origin; in other words, descendants of any migrant from the Middle East and North Africa are

counted as Muslim¹⁸. This kind of misrecognition has concrete deleterious effects on communities who do not fit into such categories but are treated as if they do.

Thus conflating categories with groups is more than merely an analytical problem (Brubaker et al. 2006: 27). This is evident in the hostile suspicion with which diasporic Syriac Orthodox Christians regard the way their educated elites employ categories such as “ethnicity” and “nation” in seeking state recognition, even as both groups share the same longings that motivate the use of such categories. To this end, in this chapter I examine how Syriac Christians relate to the ways they have been categorized and written about by scholars. Their responses constitute what Brubaker et al. call “the ‘micropolitics’ of categories, the ways in which the categorized appropriate, internalize, subvert, evade, or transform the categories that are imposed on them” (Brubaker et al. 2006: 13). The “groupness,” to use Brubaker’s language (2006: 13), of Syriac Orthodox Christianity is mediated through overlapping, multisensory practices of kinship and liturgy. This “groupness” has a contentious relationship with the national category of Assyrianism and with the ethnic category of Arameanism. Naures Atto (2011), in her study of elite Assyrian and Syriac identity discourses in Sweden, refers to this state of affairs as the result of a “split-subject” brought about by the experience of migration and the experience of diaspora in Europe. Despite meticulous documentation of the migration processes and emergent identity discourses among the Swedish Assyrian/Syriac elites in her study, Atto does

¹⁸ See the website vijfeeuwenmigratie.nl for a critical assessment of the Dutch state’s accounting practices in relation to migrants and immigration policy.

not (by her own admission) theorize the broader implications of her informants' claims or the micropolitics of their category-work.

A distinction between “nation” and “ethnicity” is central to the conflict of claims-making among Assyrianists and Arameanists in the Syriac Orthodox Church; “nation” entails an aspirational relationship with state sovereignty and territoriality that “ethnicity” does without. For this reason, the claim to Assyrian identity is national in a way that the claim to Aramean identity is not. However, both identities are inflected by the habits of secular thought and feeling that are constitutive of modern Europe’s national political claims and category-making.

Perforations

Suvari (2010) critically surveys the body of Ethnic Studies scholarship in Turkey in the twentieth century, showing how mainstream Turkish scholars predominantly rely on primordialist and essentialist conceptions of ethnic continuity. Turkish ethnic studies is heavily concerned with efforts to “prove” that Armenians, Kurds, and Assyrians are “really” ethnically Turkish: genetically, linguistically, culturally, and even psychologically. This scholarly tradition is, Suvari argues, the child of racist European ideology that was carried into the formation of the secular Turkish state. These scholarly practices are necessarily intertwined with the politics of the secular state which relies for its legitimacy on a constellation of categories distinguishable from each other: “ethnicity” is related to but not synonymous with “nation,” which is related to but not synonymous with “religion.”

Scholars have elaborated on Benedict Anderson's fundamental insight that the nation is an imagined community founded on a set of parallel transformations associated with secularization (1991). These transformations were targeted at transcontinental religious communities mediated by sacred languages, the organization of society centripetally and hierarchically around the divinely authorized state, and conceptions of time in which "cosmology and history were indistinguishable" (Anderson 1991: 36). These transformations were the conditions of possibility for the political practices of the secular state vis-à-vis its citizens, such as the census, the map, and the museum (Anderson 1991: 163-186; see also Handler 1988; Handler and Linnekin 1984; Herzfeld 1982; Hirschman 1987; Hobsbawm 1990; Linke 1990). It is striking that each of these transformations entailed a perforation: sacrality from language, divine authority from political authority, and cosmology from history. Perforation, in this sense, is distinct from rupture or separation. To perforate is to poke a series of holes into something, like a piece of paper. The pieces hold together, but it is now much easier to pull them apart. I find this an apt metaphor for the condition of being Syriac Orthodox in the secular episteme. Secular knowledge-practices have perforated *being Syriac* into separable domains of religious belief and ethnic identity. For many Syriac Orthodox Christians, the two sides continue to hold together, but it is becoming increasingly imaginable to pull them apart.

The anthropological study of secularity is the study of the conditions of possibility for the biopolitical practices of the modern state. This is why I hold

ethnicity to be an explicitly secular technology of power. In the Syriac Orthodox Christian case, the production of ethnic identity is an unfinished perforation of religious life from political life in the ideological shadow of nation-state hegemony. Rendering ethnic identity separable from religious identity enables the practices of biopolitics: religious power is contained, interiorized, and depoliticized so that it can be subjected to state sovereignty. And yet, if perforation means to render separable, it also means the separation is as yet unfinished.

Two concepts are key to understanding this unfinished business. The first is Althusser's notion of interpellation—the hailing process by which subjects are constituted (1970: 170-177). For Althusser, the hail is an operation of power and an effect of ideology: we are each called into being within ideological regimes that shape what sorts of categories of personhood are imaginable. Secularism, in which “religion” is a body of beliefs and practices to which a person chooses to adhere, is an “ideology” in this Althusserian sense, and persons are interpellated as subjects within a secular regime when they understand themselves to be “religious believers” whose religious identity belongs in a private, interior, existential domain. However, the process of interpellation can misfire in situations where multiple powers and ideologies are at work (that is, most of the time). In the case of the subject interpellated as religious believer, when a person's religious identity is staked upon considerations other than belief (such as moral dispositions and ethical practices), a secular state might hail the religious person as a believer, rather than as an observer of

distinct ethical practices, resulting in a legal predicament for the religious subject.¹⁹ It is a distinct problem for the politics of religious pluralism that the interpellative powers of secular states can misfire by misrecognizing previously constituted subjects. In the simplest terms, the person hailing and the person being hailed do not recognize themselves or each other in the language of the hail. Language is thus key to the success or failure of the hail, as is its sensory dimensions: both the gaze and the voice of the interpellator, as well as the interpellated's capacity to hear and to recognize her embodied experience in what she has heard.

Though predating Althusser by decades, Bakhtin (2006) theorizes the linguistic dimension of this shared recognition in his notion of dialogism, showing how subjects are produced through dialogue. This conception of dialogue emphasizes the interplay of speaking and hearing and responding in kind. If ethnicity is a secular technology, it requires a dialogical mechanism of recognition to make it work, but the precondition of this dialogical recognition is audibility. By audibility, I mean both linguistic comprehensibility and the material capacity to be heard. Syriac Christians struggle explicitly to achieve dialogical recognition within European secularism because their experiences as liturgical subjects fashioned within the ideological regime of Ottoman pluralist politics render their language and embodied experience of self and community inaudible.

¹⁹ For detailed analysis of exactly this situation among pious Muslims and Sikhs in France, in which certain practice-based forms of ethical life are rendered illegible to secular human rights law, see Fernando 2012.

Thus the violently fractious relationship between Syriac Orthodox Christian “groupness” and the secular categories of Assyrianism and Arameanism is at least partially explained by the process of interpellation inherent in the politics of recognition in Europe. I argue that Syriac Orthodox Christians are caught in a double-bind. They are, in a sense, pleading to be interpellated, which is to say that they are trying to make themselves audible to the powers of European nation-states. Survival, both political and existential, is understood to depend on bureaucratic recognition by the Dutch state, the European Union, and the United Nations. At the same time, this interpellation by secular states, in which Syriac Orthodox Christians are formed into an ethnic or national group that also recognizes itself as such, requires what Bakhtin calls the appropriation of an “external authoritative discourse” (2006: 342). Ethnicity and national identity are discourses that need to be taught and learned (and Syriac Orthodox elites are working hard at developing their pedagogical skills) but these discourses frequently fail to be persuasive. The failures of ethnic and national identity discourses to persuade the Syriac Orthodox Christians of my acquaintance are produced by the misfiring of the secular state’s interpellative powers. This misfiring and breakdown in dialogical recognition is exacerbated by the way the state draws on the authority of western scholarly knowledge-production practices. As I show below, competing genealogies of western scholarship on Middle Eastern religious minorities, especially those of the Syriac rites, produce more confusion than they allay.

The stakes of the state’s interpellative misfiring are both political and existential. The question of whether one’s individual or collective identity is

recognized by others burns in everyday life in the Syriac Orthodox diaspora. In one of my earliest fieldwork activities, I organized a discussion group among members of the *Moedergods Kerk* in Amsterdam. When we met, a Turkish-speaking woman from Diyarbakir, said angrily,

we went from one prison in Turkey to an even worse kind of prison in the Netherlands! We are invisible; no one knows of us. Perhaps I should set off a bomb, like the Muslims do. Then people will know who we are and pay attention to our concerns!

She compares the condition of living without recognition to living in a prison. Her words betray, albeit with dark humor, the notion that violence is a language that the secular nation-state can hear and comprehend and through which dialogical recognition can be procured. The others in the discussion group were embarrassed that she said this aloud, registering their disapproval with clucking tongues, incredulous laughs, and even gasps of consternation at her political incorrectness, but no one contradicted her.

“Legally, We Don’t Exist!”

The issues at stake in Syriac Orthodox struggles to claim recognition are made even more evident in the transparent efforts of diasporic Syriac organizations to shift the categories by which they are known in the West. Consider, for example, the recent transformation of the Syriac Universal Alliance (SUA), an international NGO that represent a global federation of Syriac Orthodox organizations, and is deeply involved with locating and providing financial support to Syriac Christian refugees fleeing Syria’s civil war, among other tasks.

In the spring of 2012, the Syriac Universal Alliance published a letter on its website announcing that it was officially changing its title to the World Council of Arameans (Syriacs). Under the leadership of a youthful and energetic Dutch-Syriac president and backed by members in Sweden, Germany, and the Netherlands, the decision had been years in the making. The letter (posted in English) made no bones about the strategic political necessity of the name change:

Today, with a fresh generation of dedicated young men and women, we believe [...] that the rebranding of our name and logo are significant steps forward. Among others, they highlight our peoplehood and go beyond our linguistic, religious and cultural identity – more specifically, *it stops reducing us to a “religious community [emphasis mine].”*

The Member Federations extensively discussed different options for a new name and logo. After a long period of exchanges, it was unanimously decided that the World Council of Arameans (Syriacs) is the most fitting, professional and appealing name for our representative body.

It facilitates us in our mission to serve, promote and enhance the human rights, pertinent issues and the dignity of the Aramean (Syriac) people globally. Indeed, we firmly believe that the new name and logo will help us raise more effectively the neglected voice of the Aramean people in the media and in political platforms and arenas like the United Nations, Council of Europe and the European Union.

The term “Syriac” was kept to ensure the synonymous meaning of “Aramean” and remind the world of the indisputable and fundamental truth aptly summed up by today’s Syriac Orthodox Patriarch: “The Syriac language is the Aramaic language itself, and the Arameans are the Syrians themselves. He who has made a distinction between them has erred.”²⁰

²⁰ See <http://www.wca-ngo.org/about-us/name-change-sua-wca>. Last accessed May 27, 2013.

The name-change of the Syriac Universal Alliance is situated squarely within the fraught, anxiety-ridden politics of identity that infused everyday conversations about being Middle Eastern Christian in Europe throughout my ethnographic fieldwork in the Netherlands. While all my friends and interlocutors agreed on the problem—“legally, we don’t exist”—few could agree on the reasons or the solution. What struck me throughout the many conversations in which I participated was that the majority of people in the community had become persuaded that there was something mysteriously confounding and historically problematic about simply *being* Syriac Christian. This sense of mysteriousness was coupled with a frequently expressed sentiment echoed in the letter: *it is not enough to be merely religious, although that is how the world knows us, if it knows of us at all. It is not enough because being religious in a secular regime does not get you the legal rights and protections that being an ethnic group does.* Being an indigenous ethnic group, as the language of the letter shows, means putting claim not only to religious rights, but to territorial rights,²¹ to cultural rights, to linguistic rights—all of which are tied to particularly secular conceptions of community and identity.

Yet still Syriac Orthodox Christians are still plagued by a sense of confounding mysteriousness in spite of elite efforts to represent the community with secular clarity and so constitute the community as secular. The World Council of

²¹ See Atto 2011 for more detailed discussion of the legal battle continuing to be waged in south east Turkey over the appropriation of land around the Mor Gabriel monastery, in which the church is backed by diasporic Suryoye—one of the only areas in which Arameanists and Assyrianists are willing to work together.

Arameans (Syriacs) represents only one of three proposed solutions to this sense of mysteriousness, a sense that is compounded by the problem of reconstituting the categories of the religious and the political in secular modernity. A global diaspora speaks to national as well as international audiences and demands dialogical recognition from each simultaneously, especially in times of civil war, migration, and heightened uncertainty over the fate of vulnerable minorities both in Europe and in the Middle East. The political achievement of procuring an audience constitutes a political community. The question this achievement raises in the Syriac Orthodox context is: how does this audience-conjuring rely on certain kinds of category work? How and why do the fundamental categories of secular modernity shift and reconstitute themselves? What is *mere* about being *merely* religious?

These questions index the epistemic crisis at the center of Assyrian-Aramean debates over how to reconfigure the community constituted through their ancient liturgical rite into a secular ethnicity, a crisis deeply embedded in the tradition of western scholarly knowledge-production about Middle Eastern minorities. I turn now to a closer examination of this tradition and how it complicates efforts to know and label Syriac Orthodox Christians in unambiguously “ethnic” terms.

A Private History of Public Categories

The first time I visited the Syriac Orthodox Christian monastery of Mor Ephrem in Glane, a tiny hamlet on the eastern border of the Netherlands in the summer of 2007, I was invited to attend a special Holy Mass and public meeting in which the newly installed Archbishop Mor Polycarpus Augin Aydin would be

introduced to his flock. In attendance would be parishioners from throughout the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, and the German town of Gronau, which is located just across the border. I arrived by train in the afternoon on a Saturday, intending to stay only for an hour or two, to take some pictures and poke around, contemplating whether I should indeed change my proposed dissertation project from the topic of Moroccan Muslim integration into Dutch society. Before I knew what had happened, I was given a warm and astonished welcome by the monks and nuns and summer school teachers and led to a guest room with instructions to attend the next day's community meeting.

With trepidation, I spent the night, woke for early morning prayers and breakfast with the monks, and then, following the lead of a friendly neighbor who lent me an extra headscarf and reassured me no one would mind that I did not know what to do, found my way to the cathedral in the center of the monastery's grounds for mid-morning Mass. Hundreds of congregants filled the pews, with headscarved women on the left, and men in suits on the right. For nearly three hours we stood, sat, bowed, prayed, and listened to the call and response of priests, monks, deacons, readers, and liturgical singers as they led the community in the liturgy of the Holy *Qurbano*.

Looking back over the fieldnotes describing that first weekend I spent at the monastery, I have become aware of a curious shift in my writing practice that attests, I believe, to the epistemic precarity of claims made about Syriac Orthodox identity. This epistemic precarity has consequences for the legal and political recognition of

Syriac Christians within the national and international order of things. These consequences play out in Dutch integration policies, as well as in the geopolitical triangulation between the global Syriac diaspora, the European Union, and the minority policies of Middle Eastern states:

After the Mass and lunch, I wandered outside and was approached by two young men in their early twenties who wanted to know more about me. This was a brief but fascinating conversation. They told me that I was a "sister" and very welcome in their community, and that "they needed me" because their community was in danger of disappearing, as new generations forget their language, and history, and identity. This was echoed by several other people I talked to, and explains the enthusiasm for my presence. From what I have been reading, British academics in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries played a significant role in "producing" a sense of Assyrian identity. Having an anthropologist come and study them is a way of claiming further legitimacy: "see, we are a real, coherent, community with an identity, that is worth studying, and keeping alive."

There is a palpable feeling among many that they are in danger, not just by destruction from the outside, but by unraveling from the inside. If young Assyrians see that American researchers think they are interesting enough to study them, that may give them some pride in maintaining Assyrian identity. I suspect that this is what is in the new Archbishop's mind and explains his behavior towards me. These young guys had a very interesting moment though, when one of them said, "we are just like the Jews, except we do not have our own country". I asked (probably not as slyly as I thought I was being) whether having their own country would make things better. This led to a heated discussion between the two of them in Aramaic, and the first boy said "sometimes I think yes, sometimes I think no...."

As I spoke to these young men, the Archbishop came outside and let me know that the meeting would be starting soon, and he seemed quite concerned that I would be there. Soon, everyone went back into the cathedral, and I put my headscarf back on. The meeting was meant to be the Archbishop's introduction to "the youth" of the community. He talked for a while in the spoken dialect of Aramaic they all use with each other, telling them about his background (I caught words like Princeton Theological Seminary, Oxford University, and the University of London....), and he apparently told them about his plans for the monastery and the community. Then the crowd was given the opportunity to stand up and ask him direct questions. Some were in Aramaic, and for those who didn't speak Aramaic, in English, as the archbishop does not speak much Dutch yet.

A representative of the majority Dutch political party (the Christian Democrats) was there and he asked (in English) what steps the archbishop would take to promote integration and to help Dutch society feel like the community is open and accessible to outsiders—to help "regular Dutch people be able to distinguish between them and, say, the Somalian community." The bishop responded that the key was "self-confidence" in the community—that once people have a strong sense of who they are and where they come from, and understand the value of their identity, only then can they participate positively in society at large. The politician pushed a little more, saying he needed to know what specific overtures he'd make to the outside community, and the bishop held firm, arguing that the community needed to work on itself first before it could take such outward-looking steps, although he would be happy to work with the politician to think of joint strategies for the future.

After Mass, I was by turns unnerved and encouraged by a conversation with the archbishop's brother, who lives in Rhode Island. He seemed rather ambivalent about me: on the one hand saying, "we need people like you" and "it's wonderful that you are here" and on the other hand saying, "you will be responsible for a lot" and "at the end of your research, you really need to come up with a solution for us...". He brought up vague stories about researchers taking advantage of Assyrian hospitality in Turkey and then turning out to work for the Turkish government, causing "great harm" to the community. I asked him to be more specific...but he would not say anymore about. Later, he said: "we are the most well-integrated minority in Europe, and it is killing us."

As I look back over these notes, I am struck at the thoughtless way I threw around categories, attributing words and names and thoughts to people based on a shallow sense of the genealogy of naming practices associated with the community. After years of friendship with several people I met that day, for example, I have learned that they would not simply and uncritically call themselves Assyrian, as I somehow thought they did. This realization has initiated an unnerving exercise in critical empiricism. In the moment of ethnographic observation, there was a gap between the names spoken and the names heard, and I take this to be a cautionary tale for considering the invocations of scholarly sources to authenticate competing truth-claims about the ethnicity of Syriac Christians.

Part of the shift in my terminology is due to the fact that in the period that I was first getting to know the Dutch-Syriac community, I spent a great deal of time online, looking up everything I could find on Syriac Christianity. The key terms of my path of inquiry were initially set when I was still in the United States by my Iraqi-born Arabic teacher, who was Christian (although Protestant, as it happens), and identified as an ethnically Assyrian, native Aramaic-speaker. He taught in an esteemed language program for a highly ranked liberal arts college, and it took me some time to situate his claims in a globally contested field of knowledge. Furthermore, in the United States, “Assyrian” has been a census category since the early twentieth century as a result of waves of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century migration from the areas that eventually became Iraq and Iran. In the English-speaking world, “Assyrian” is a name that an average person would plausibly have heard in her life, maybe in children’s historical atlases explaining the “cradle of civilization” in ancient Mesopotamia, and maybe even by visiting a famous archeological exhibit of ancient Assyrian ruins dug up in northern Iraq in the nineteenth century and removed to such visible places as the British Museum. There are research institutes at global universities on Assyriology, which include present-day Assyrian studies, and some headway has been made in diasporic efforts to broaden the quest for Turkish recognition of the Armenian genocide to include Ottoman Assyrians within its scope. It took me a while to work through these materials and eventually to understand the history of this category and its problematic relationship with my field site.

Gradually, as I returned again and again to the tightly knit Syriac Orthodox community in the Netherlands, the key categories in my field notes shifted as I encountered more materials with other ways of referring to Syriac Christianity. I began with a parenthetical cheat, referring to my new field site as the (As)Syrian Christian community. On my second preliminary field trip, my notes, almost without my noticing, shifted to rely on the neo-Aramaic word *Suroye*. I was told by several community activists deeply involved with the global Assyrian lobby to the United Nations, whom I had met at the monastery, that *Suroye* (deliberately spelled with only one y) was the most neutral and inclusive term available. According to these activists, this term was inclusive enough to encompass Aramaic-speaking Christians not just from the Syriac Orthodox Church but also from the Assyrian Church of the East, the Chaldean Catholic Church, the Syriac Catholic Church, and the Maronite Church of Lebanon. The word *Suroye* was translatable as Assyrian, they told me, although, when pressed, they admitted that not all Syriac Orthodox agreed with them. By the time I returned for my full year of field research, these interlocutors were nowhere to be seen around the monastery: their influence had been displaced by a different elite bloc within the church community who disavowed the word *Suroye* and any connection to other churches from the Syriac tradition. Members of this faction expressed a virulent aversion to the name “Assyrian,” and they called the Syriac Orthodox community the *Oromoye*, or Arameans. The *Oromoye* followed a very different genealogy of western scholarship regarding their ethnic designation. This difference produced an impasse in the community’s ability to organize and coordinate

state funding for cultural programming because Assyrians and Arameans would not work together, ever, on anything, even if they were close blood-relations. This is an important point: families could split over the disagreement, for complex and varied reasons.

Shortly after my return in 2009, I discovered that there was a third contingent within the church community: those who thought that there was no need for an ethnic designation and declared that the politics of naming was self-destructive. These parties claimed that the naming debates merely added to the dangers of political invisibility and community fragmentation rather than resolving them. For these people, the word *Suryoye* was the only word that fit. The question, however, was how to translate the word *Suryoye* into other languages. The word stems from the Aramaic-language designation for the Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch: *ʿito suryoyto trīṣaṭ šubḥo*. In 2000, the Patriarch convened a Holy Synod and decreed in English that the church would officially change its name from the Syrian Orthodox Church to the Syriac Orthodox Church in order to prevent confusing associations with the modern state of Syria. Historically, western scholars of early Christian history have referred to the region east of the Levant and west of Mesopotamia in late antiquity as Syria, choosing to rely on the Greek vocabulary of a late Hellenistic human geography. The term *Syrian* and its various cognates have thus been used for centuries to designate the traditions of Christianity that employed the Syriac language in their liturgy and literary culture in order to distinguish them from contemporaneous Greek, Latin, and (later) Arabic Christian liturgical and literary traditions.

To add to the confusion, modern European scholarship on Middle Eastern Christianity has been muddled on the matter of names since the Fifth Lateran Council in Rome in 1515, when ecclesial scholar Teseo Ambrogio was instructed by Cardinal Santa Croce to learn Syriac to communicate with the Maronite delegate from Lebanon with the help of Arabic speaking Jewish translators. This launched his career (Europe's first) in the study of the Syriac, Armenian, and Ethiopic languages. Interestingly, Ambrogio's studies classify Ethiopic as "Indian" and Coptic as "Jacobite" (Jacobite refers to the theological precepts of Jacob Baradaeus, which both the Syriac Orthodox Church and the Coptic Orthodox Church share, though the use of the word Jacobite as a communal designation was to refer pejoratively to members of West-Syriac Rite²²). To make matters still more muddled, Ambrogio debated with himself whether Armenian or Coptic is best referred to as Chaldean²³ (Wilkinson 2007). This early period shuffles linguistic, theological, and liturgical designations that continued to be reshuffled over succeeding centuries of scholarship. Recently, Syriac studies scholars have begun to recognize the epistemological predicament of making coherent claims about the cultural-religious identities of early Christians in

²² In a theological sense, using the word "Jacobite" to refer to the West Syriac liturgical community, like the use of "Nestorian" to refer to the East Syriac liturgical community, was a form of propaganda on the part of other churches. Using these terms highlighted a perception of heresy that turns out to have been merely a matter of language usage rather than substantive doctrinal differences (Millar 2013; Van Rompay 2008).

²³ There is a parallel movement among the global Chaldean Catholic Church (a branch of the Syriac liturgical rite that came into communion with Rome in the sixteenth century) to claim Chaldean ethnicity (Sengstock 1982, 2005).

the Middle East (Drijvers 1996: 161; Millar 2013). To quote the brother-in-law of one of my choir friends: “This is ridiculous. No one in the world *actually* knows whose reproductive organs their ancestors came out of two thousand years ago!”

Nonetheless, one of the effects of merging a geographical designation with a cultural, literary, and linguistic designation is that the heirs of this tradition now debate whether the terms “Syrian” or “Syriac” can equally refer to a “people” in the sense of a community whose deepest ties of solidarity are based in kinship relations. In my field site this debate is amplified by the fact that in the Dutch language both Syrian and Syriac are rendered as the homonyms *Syrier* (n.) and *Syrisch* (adj.). There is no way for the Dutch language to distinguish between Syriacs and Syrians, thereby exacerbating Dutch unwillingness to recognize Middle Eastern Christians as anything other than Muslim.

The paralyzing effect of this problem on everyday life in the Syriac Orthodox diaspora became apparent to me during a political meeting at one of the explicitly secular Aramean cultural organizations in south Enschede. In March 2010, the day before regional and national elections were to occur, I attended a women’s community meeting at Platform Aram, one of the oldest and most prominent secular Aramean cultural organizations in the city of Enschede. The way this event unfolded as the women were sidetracked by a debate over their religious and ethnic identity highlights how the “name-problem” lurks under the surface of even the seemingly most unrelated efforts to organize politically and socially in the Dutch-Syriac diaspora.

On this particular evening, there was a group of fifteen women in attendance at the meeting, which was hosted by Ayfer Koç, a Syriac Orthodox councilwoman for the Christian Democratic Party (CDA), and F-----, one of the organizers of the Platform's women's council (*vrouwenraad*). The group was there to meet Myra Koomen, the alderwoman (*wethouder*) responsible for Work and Income for the Enschede municipal government and the head (*lijsttrekker*) of the local CDA party. The meeting took place around a square of long tables pulled together in the center of a large hall, complete with bar and pool table, where the Platform hosted regular political meetings, social gatherings, soccer viewing parties, and public lectures. The women gathered around the table were mostly in their thirties, forties, and fifties (old enough for their children to be older and more independent) and they chatted with each other with the familiarity of old friends. Their clothes were sober, modest, and unassuming, which cut a striking contrast with the alderwoman, who, when she appeared, seemed to fill the room with her tall and imposing presence. Alderwoman Koomen was strikingly made up, wore fashionable clothing and strong accessories, and carried herself with a demeanor that shifted smoothly between jovial laughter and implacable authority. Alderwoman Koomen was there to give a presentation on increasing immigrant women's participation in economic, social, and political life in Holland, and to encourage the women to vote for the CDA in the next day's elections. After an hour-long presentation, followed by an hour of discussion, in which the women talked about the internal and external barriers that prevented them from working outside the home, the conversation turned to examine more closely the

dynamics within the Syriac Orthodox community that made it difficult for women to organize with each other.

Alderwoman Koomen urged the women that their efforts were needed to achieve change gradually, and that social transformation happened step by step over generations. In acknowledging how difficult it could be to work against the dominance of and discrimination by men within the Syriac Orthodox community, Councilwoman Koc shared her experience participating in a working group at the monastery. She said that it had been uncomfortable at first because she was the only woman, but after a while, because she kept speaking, the men around her gradually started to respect her. At this another woman spoke up, saying, “the problem is, there are some Hitler-types among our men!” The alderwoman responded, “you need to arrange with each other to speak up at meetings and actively support each other...organize! Men only resist because they feel threatened.” More and more women around the table began to speak, reaffirming that “in church, men are the boss.” Finally, for the first time that evening, almost every woman was participating in the conversation but, ironically, the conversation spiraled out of the alderwoman’s and the councilwoman’s control. Everyone clamored to speak; everyone had something to say about what was wrong in the church.

Another woman paused the clamor to explain to Alderwoman Koomen: “It is because there are two different cultural organizations in the neighborhood; we cannot organize successfully with the other women in the church. Women from one side will not sit on a committee with women from the other side.” Councilwoman Koç

interjected to explain that the division is between the Assyrian group and the Aramean group. She herself is attacked frequently, she said, for not choosing to use the word *Oromoye* or *Assuraye / Othoroye* to designate the community, and instead using *Suryoye*, which she believes is neutral and hurts no one. Thus she cannot do anything right in anyone's eyes. One woman burst out: "It is crazy to talk about the divisions in church because we are all just *Suryoye*, end of story!"

Another woman disagreed: "No. We are not *just* Syriac (*Syrische*)—we are Syriac Orthodox as religion! Syriac-Aramean is the language we speak because we have Aramean identity!" Councilwoman Koç added a further complication to the mix: "But what about this? My family is from Mardin, so we speak Arabic, not Syriac. Does that make me not *Suryoye*? I had never even heard the word *Suryoye* until I came to the Netherlands as a child!"

Still another woman spoke up, with great heat: "*Geloof* (faith/belief) and *afkomst* (ancestry/descent/lineage) are different! If you go to America and you are Catholic, you do not tell people you come from the country of Catholicism! Your *afkomst* is Turkey, your *geloof* is Syriac Orthodox!" The discussion went round and round until finally a woman said with an embarrassed laugh, "As you see, there is a lot of confusion in the community."

Flustered and eager to regain control of the discussion, Alderwoman Koomen responded, although she seemed (perhaps intentionally to avoid confrontation) to miss the point: "but the important thing to remember is that we all believe in the same God! Whether we are Muslim, Jew, or Christian!" To this Councilwoman Koc

responded, “well, actually, it is a real problem for us, because in the media we are always presented as one or the other, so it is like we are two different groups when we really are one, and it is unclear how to explain who we are.” She paused and looked thoughtful for a moment, and then asked, perhaps rhetorically, “Who are we?” In a softer voice than she had used all evening, Alderwoman Koomen responded in kind: “Yes, this really does hold the community back, I suppose.”

In this conversation, the central tension is clear: “we cannot settle on a name, and it limits us.” The way to account for that tension is not clear, however, as everyone involved in the discussion has a different way of analyzing the problem and a different emotional response to it. One common response, that *geloof* and *afkomst* must not be confused with each other, is a response to the perception that they more frequently *are* confused for each other within the Syriac Orthodox community because, for many Suryoye, there is no ethical, aesthetic, intellectual, or affective purchase to conceptualizing a distinction between the two. The split produces both an existential crisis—*who are we?*—and a political crisis—*no one knows who we are!* In the following section, I analyze the broader epistemic frame in which categories of knowledge and categories of experience shift, disarticulate, and rearticulate with one another, producing this point of fractious contact between the existential and the political.

Historiography in the Secular Episteme

At the beginning of this chapter, my Syriac teacher told me that to sing a song of Ashur in front of an Aramean is to incite violence. In that same conversation he

explained why it is that he and other Arameans are so violently against using the word Assyrian to describe Syriac Orthodox Christians:

We know the story of the Assyrian and the Aramean people, we know the Assyrian people died before Jesus. It is written! And if someone lies and says “I am an Assyrian”—we know they are wrong. We know that the Assyrians died long before Jesus was alive. It is written in the Old Testament: six hundred years before Jesus the Assyrians died! I know because Father Yaqub told me. We know that we are of the nation of Israel, because of Abraham and Jacob. Jacob says: “my father was an Aramean.” That is why we also say Jesus was an Aramean, because he was from the tribe of Aram. And the Jewish people say that the Arameans have died, but they are wrong, because we Arameans *are* the Jewish people, but we are those Jewish people who became Christian.

But if you go to Jerusalem and say you are Oromoye, the Jews do not believe it. They look at you like you are crazy and say “But the Arameans died!” But still, we are Syriac from the Church, and Aramean from the tribe and the language. I know this from what I have read and from what Father Yaqub has told me. I heard someone say “the language is Syriac, not Aramaic because the language changed so much over time.” But it is not written what he is saying! The language has not changed ... it is the Aramean language...that is why it is called Aramaic! The Patriarch says we are Suryoyo and we are the Aramean people. The previous Patriarch wrote a letter saying “if you say something other than Suryoyo or Oromoye you are excommunicated. Thus it is possible to become Suryoyo, but not Oromoye.”

Peter’s speech flags a series of concerns produced by the fact that he inhabits overlapping yet distinct social worlds, each with its competing logics of intellectual authority. Though he lives and studies at the monastery in the Netherlands, he takes the train over the border everyday to attend a Catholic German high school where he is preparing to study biomedical sciences at university. He is proud of the fact that he excels in biology, and he is somewhat unusual among his local community in that he sees no conflict between evolutionary theory and a progressive, non-literal approach to reading the Bible (a literary approach aided by his Princeton-educated Bishop as

much as by his Roman Catholic science teachers). And while the overlap of Syriac religious authority and secular scientific authority produces no tensions where evolutionary theory is concerned, there is a tension where identity is concerned.

The authority of the texts Peter invokes to support his conviction in his Aramean ethnicity bleeds between a secular scientific conception of textual inscription as self-verifying “evidence” from which identity can be inferred (*it is written!*) and the oral reproduction of religious knowledge (*Father Yaqub has told me!*). He is immensely frustrated, however, because what is clear to him is not clear to everyone else. The status of certain authorizing texts is not universally recognized. Neither are the historical narratives he thinks they authenticate. This tension spins off into a variety of inter-related questions: the question of language (*what is the relationship between Syriac and Aramaic—dialect or synonym—and what does that relationship signify?*); the question of biblical meaning (*Was Jesus an Aramean because he spoke Aramaic?*); the question of how to read genealogical relationships (*We are of the people of Israel!*); the question of boundaries between groups (*Jews are Arameans too! But they think that is crazy*); the question of whether ancestral myths must bear some kind of relationship to historical facticity (*We cannot be Assyrian—they died six hundred years before Christ!*). Fundamentally, these are all questions about the relationship between concepts, categories, words spoken and written, on the one hand, and the reality of lived, embodied experiences, on the other. These are questions of ontology refracted by the dominant mode of knowing and

institutionalizing that knowledge in secular modernity, what I call the secular episteme.

A now well-established tradition of scholarship has shown that the modern system of nation-states requires study, not just as a political system narrowly understood, but as a powerful regime of order and knowledge that is at once politico-economic, historical, cultural, aesthetic, and cosmological (Anderson 1991; Arendt 1973; Apparurai 1990, 1991; Balibar and Wallerstein 1991; Chatterjee 1986; Gilroy 1991; Handler 1988; Herzfeld 1987). Built into what Malkki (1995: 5) calls the national order of things is a genealogy of secular thought whose power to make minority identities legible (and audible) within the politics of nation-states works through the delineation of categories within particular sensory regimes (Ranciere 2004, 2009). That is to say, categories grasp and maintain their purchase through embodied practices and sensory experience. Under the millet system of the Ottoman Empire, to be a Christian ecclesial community was to be a political entity with legal rights and responsibilities (Braude and Lewis 1982; Masters 2001; Quactart 2005). As categories shift, however, so does the sensory work that makes them meaningful in everyday life; my concern here is to show how historiographic writing on Syriac Christianity exacerbates the conditions of inaudibility hindering Syriac efforts to claim recognition, often despite the best intentions of historiographic writers themselves.

To be clear from the outset, it is not my purpose to pose a false dichotomy between academic textuality and liturgical orality; as many scholars have pointed out

(Derrida 1976, 1981; Messick 1993; Pickstock 1998; Rutherford 2006) writing itself is culturally and historically variable. According to Brinkley Messick (1993), the question for ethnographers is how writing is implicated in particular relations of domination, which opens up the question of how “authority is constituted *in* texts, while simultaneously investigating the social and political processes involved in articulating the authority *of* texts” (Messick 1993: 2). This view is rooted in a Foucauldian understanding of how discursive power—that is, the conditions that shape what is possible and thinkable—works through institutions, relationships, and epistemic practices like writing (Foucault 1971, 1977, 1978, 1980).

When Messick analyzes the transformation of the textual polity of Islamic jurisprudence in Yemen in the twentieth century, he shows how one of the characteristic discursive features of this polity was a particular kind of relationship between writing and orality: specifically, the genealogies of intellectual transmission were anchored in recitation. This was a key relationship in the structure of authority that gave the *sharia* its legitimacy. The truth of textual claims derived from their genealogical relationship with the Quran as the authorizing original. The genealogy was reproduced by a chain-link of writing and recitation among religious legal scholars. In this way, recitational practices were not a “residue” of past orality but a complex motif of a fully realized type of civilizational literacy. Muslim societies elaborated diverse, historically specific textual worlds, central elements of which were their particular understandings, and relative valuing, of the recited and the written. (Messick 1993: 24-25)

Because texts written in Arabic often lacked vowelization, it was their recited form that embodied their full, completed truth. The text was a fragment of that truth but still integral to its genealogical reproduction.

There are different modalities for legitimizing the truth of texts. These modalities are based on different ways of conceptualizing the relationship between the written and the spoken. According to Derrida (1976, 1981), the history of western thought is marked by the perception of a hierarchical relationship between writing and speaking. This perception is shaped by anxieties over the relation between the natural and the artificial, between the divine and the human, between the interior and the exterior, and between the unmediated truth and its distanced representation (see also Messick 1993: 25).

As Derrida (1973, 2001a [1978]) describes, writing in the western tradition is a representation, rather than a genealogical fragment. The spoken truth, the logos, is a metaphysically self-authorized reality—Platonic in its immutable substance. The written word, however secondary, supplementary, and “fallen,” is its reflection. The truth of a thing can be safely inferred from its inscription, which may have been morally suspect to the philosophers but is nonetheless the mode of reasoning on which the authority of western scholarship and scientific inquiry rests [*It is written! as Peter says*].

And yet the written itself can be reactivated under transforming ontological conditions, the conditions of the unwritten that Stoler describes in relation to the colonial archives of the Netherlands Indies (2009). The circulating common sense of

social practice and embodied knowledge enframes writing and lends it its significance. Stoler understands ontology as “that which is about the *ascribed* being or essence of things, the categories of things that are thought to exist or can exist in any specific domain, and the specific attributes assigned to them” (2009: 4). Citing Ian Hacking’s formulation that “what comes into existence with the historical dynamics of naming” (Hacking 2002: 26, cited in Stoler 2009: 4), Stoler concludes that while “the notion of essence implies stability and fixity” the realities of colonial practices and discourses suggest that those very “essences” were in fact under constant revision and reconstruction (Stoler 2009: 4).

It is here, in the dialectical movement from *names* to *things-that-exist*, that Syriac Orthodox Christian ethnicization and nationalization break down. The interpellative power of colonial and postcolonial bureaucratic states to name, and to bring into being by naming, reaches its limits in the construction of Assyrian / Aramean minorityhood. The reasons for this breakdown are a problem of the dialogics of recognition within processes of interpellation as well as of a triangulated relationship with western scholarly authority. The secular categories “Aramean” and “Assyrian” fail to translate into “groupness” because they fail to translate into an effective “everyday ethnicity” among a critical mass of Syriac Orthodox Christians.

Brubaker et al.’s “everyday ethnicity” is an instance of Voloshinov / Bakhtin’s “dialogical ideology,” which both authorizes and is authorized by official ideology (such as state-recognized ethnic categories). The two forms of ideology are always in dialectical relation to each other though official ideology may be subtly subverted by

the unofficial (see also Caton 2006: 51). Central to Voloshinov's understanding of the relationship between official and everyday ideology is a notion of dialogue as internal to a specific instance of speaking. A person's speech contains within it both the reply and the anticipation of another's speech. Dialogical speech is by definition polyvocal.

This dialogical conception of ideology as *speech that produces identity* reveals how it is that Althusser's interpellation can misfire and breakdown. The police officer's hail has to have some resonance with the walker's inner dialogue, that is, with the walker's "everyday / behavioral / dialogical ideology" (Voloshinov 1986). The walker must recognize herself in the hailing, even as her identity emerges in being recognized by the hailer. Bakhtin's distinction between authoritative discourse and internally persuasive discourse helps us understand how hailing can produce such a gap within the hail:

The struggle and dialogic interrelationship of these categories of ideological discourse are what usually determine the history of an individual ideological consciousness [...] The authoritative word demands that we acknowledge it, that we make it our own; it binds us, quite independent of any power it might have to persuade us internally; we encounter it with its authority already fused to it (Bakhtin 2006: 342).

The authoritative discourse of minority recognition in the global public sphere is uttered in the language of the modern nation-state. This language maintains distinct categories for ethnic identity and for religious identity. Even if ethnicity and religion

coincide in the “ethno-religious,” as categories they are divisible. This is the language in which minorities are interpellated and achieve political recognition.

So why is the authoritative discourse of secular ethnicity so difficult to internalize for Syriac Christians in the Dutch diaspora? Dutch secularism and western Christianity authorize the emergence of a categorical split between “religion” and “ethnicity.” Despite this, the West-Syriac Rite maintains its authority in the everyday practices that have interwoven ecclesial identity with the ethics and affect of kinship across the diaspora. Bakhtin’s distinction between external authoritative discourse and persuasive inner discourse helps us understand how ethnicity is not only *not* primordial or essential, it is not even the product of processual interactions, as Barth (1969, 1981) and his social constructivist heirs would have it. It is not even, strictly speaking, a biopolitical form of Foucauldian governmentality, although maps, censuses, and museums do come into it. From a Syriac Orthodox perspective, ethnicity is a technology of secular power that correlates certain kinds of categories with certain kinds of groups, whether such groups recognize themselves in the correlation or not. In other terms, ethnicity is a metapragmatic form of language in that it brings certain kinds of words into a relationship with certain kinds of embodied experiences. In the Syriac Orthodox case, the language of ethnicity does not work so well, and it renders inaudible the forms of life most Syriac Orthodox recognize as their own.

The interpellation of Syriac Christians as an ethnic group within a globalized authorizing discourse of ethno-national political recognition is never fully completed

because so many individual Syriac Christians resist appropriating and internalizing that discourse on the grounds that such recognition is contingent on an ethically unacceptable perforation of the religious and the political. Their own persuasive inner discourses, where questions of community and identity are concerned, are still robust. In their experience, Christianity is still a kinship practice. Syriac Orthodox Christian tradition has a pronounced oral dimension and is imbricated with kinship relations to the point that for Syriac Orthodox Christians from Tur Abdin, Christianity is a kinship practice mediated through the West Syriac liturgical rite. A number of studies of the twentieth and twenty-first century Syriac Orthodox diaspora remark on this point in passing (e.g. Al-Rasheed 1998; Bjorklund 1981), but none examine it or its implications. The sense of a pending unraveling of the relationship between kinship and liturgical practice instigates a crisis of authority that scholarly observers have glossed as “secularization” as if both the meaning and the stakes of the word “secular” were self-evident (for instance, Gaunt’s remarks below, also cited in Makko 2010). What appears as an obvious and faintly embarrassing power play among elite families in the diaspora to wrest power and influence over the social and financial affairs of the community from the ecclesiastical hierarchy (the “Hitler types at church”), to whom the women at the community meeting described above alluded, is, I contend, a much more complex and serious contestation of the modes of authoritative reasoning constituted by competing discourses (or, in Voloshinov’s terms, between official and dialogical ideology). The Syriac liturgical tradition places its own monastic textual tradition in a subsidiary relationship to the memory of the

ear and the aesthetics and ethics of kinship relations. The secular episteme, however, operates according to a textual tradition in which truth-claims are validated by a continuous record of documentation while the boundaries of categories are stable because their content is immutable.

The implication of this is that authoritative knowledge claims can be inferred from written records because the secular episteme posits an ontology of writing that takes continuity to be a signifier of immutability. Claims are built upon previous claims and the phenomena they signify can be safely presumed to be continuous over time, so long as they have been written down. Unlike in the genealogy of intellectual transmission described by Messick in Yemeni *sharia* scholarship, in which truth is authenticated by the authorship of specific persons and the embodied practices of recitation, the genealogical links in secular knowledge production are not anchored in the authority of individual persons but in particular institutional and categorical configurations coupled with particular epistemic practices (for instance, university credentials and scientific inference). The operation of scholarly analysis—that is, inference from evidence—depends upon a presumption not only of temporal continuity, but of interior stability: that which is observed at different temporal points can be safely trusted to remain identical with itself. This is the ontological claim in

Peter's statement that textual references to Arameans in the Bible are evidence of continuous historical Aramean ethnicity.²⁴

This mode of thinking about truth and history is culturally specific, but not necessarily historically modern. In their study of the fourth-century ecclesiastical historian Eusebius of Caesarea, Grafton and Williams (2006) show that this mode of thinking is not only about concepts and categories but about the material and sensory practices that anchor these concepts in embodied experience and make them “real.” In his *Chronicle*, Eusebius developed both a material technique and a conceptual mode of scholarly writing that enabled history, and thus truth, to be rendered visually in text. Eusebius innovated the technology of book-writing to synthesize and visualize a linear chronology of human history from disparate, conflicting narrative sources, streamlining the vastly eclectic intellectual, imaginative, and cosmological cosmopolitanism of the late antique world into a coherent “tradition” and an interactive technology of knowledge-production. Eusebius developed “new textual and visual conventions that made it possible to fix a whole world on paper” (Grafton and Williams 2006: 135-136). In a passage that could just as easily describe the colonial and postcolonial knowledge politics of the nineteenth and twentieth

²⁴ Variations of this line of thought have been developed by Hume (see Rutherford 2012), in postcolonial critiques of the subaltern silences of archives (Spivak 1999; Arondekar 2005) and in writing the histories of capital and nations (Chakrabarty 2000; Chatterjee 2005 [1986]); and in the anthropology of Christianity (Robbins 2007).

centuries, Grafton and Williams describe the way historians and chronologists since the third century BCE were writing the histories of people in the world:

The realm of history, like the realm of prophecy, became a virtual battleground on which learning and imagination could avenge the defeats inflicted on Near Eastern peoples by Alexander, induce his successors to admire and take an interest in their new subjects, or even achieve both ends at once. Some Greek and Roman writers also tried to master these swirling genealogies of individual peoples and inscribe them in well-defined universal histories of the entire human race. All participants in these discussions about universal history cited documents, chronicles, and other written sources. [...] In many cases, their works had to do more than inform: they had to prevail, in a forensic contest against competing histories” (Grafton and Williams 2006: 145-146).

From this ancient tradition of documentary synthesis and textual linearity, modern scholarship has inherited the coupling of a monologic concept of ecclesiastically authoritative truth-claims (that is, a concept that suggests that humans receive and reflect the Word of God—not the other way around) along with its writing and reading practices. Eusebius’ tradition of knowledge-production survives via the monastic scholasticism of western Christendom into the era of the modern university. While Eastern Christianity has developed an array of writing and reading practices that have, over the course of time, linked up with the hegemonic practices of the modern international university system, the oral dimensions of Syriac Orthodox tradition, and the ethical forms of life they enact, are precariously situated against the emergent hegemony of a secular mode of textual authority.

Now that elite Syriac Christians attending Dutch schools and universities in the post-migration diaspora, the question of recovering documentably authentic

“evidence” of continuous Syriac Orthodox identity through the ages beyond that transmitted via the sung liturgy has emerged as the burning question of everyday life and politics. Two trends have emerged from these dynamics. The first is a push to find “proof” of that Syriac Christians exist in ancient texts and archeology with the creation of academic centers of Aramean and/or Assyrian studies in European universities. The second trend is a complicated affective relationship among older and younger generations. Divided from their parents and grandparents by illiteracy and trauma, young elite Suryoye attempt to reshape the structure of intellectual authority in the liturgical community. This restructuring has unintended destabilizing consequences for Syriac kinship practices.

Thus, there is a particularity to the role of academic texts in producing ethnic identities within secular modernity that only really becomes discernible in the way the authority of orality in the Syriac liturgy is destabilized and displaced. Textual authority within a secular episteme entails a particular constellation of text, conceptual category, and identification process, that overshadows the oral reproduction of liturgical identity. The problem, however, is that there is no singular, dominant textual authority in western scholarship on Syriac Christian identity; there are several, each making a conflicting claim about the historical roots of Syriac identity.²⁵

²⁵ A long-standing intellectual feud between Frye and Joseph on the translation of the word “Syrian” is emblematic of these conflicts (Frye 1992; Joseph 1997). See also the intellectual genealogy in Iraqi Assyriologist Gewargis’s 2000 tract for the *Journal of*

The epistemic tension within scholarly writing on Syriac Christian identity is evident in Aryo Makko's essay "The Historical Roots of Contemporary Crisis: National Revival and the Assyrian Concept of Unity" (2010). Makko succinctly summarizes the history and migration of Assyrian nationalism and its categories for the *Journal of Assyrian Academic Studies*:

Assyrian identity and the usage of the Assyrian name did not constitute a stringent and cohesive national concept initiated by a unified group of intellectuals. In the vernacular dialects, 'Assyrian' could refer to Nestorian unity (*aturāyā*) or a nation comprised of all groups (*othurōyō*); in Turkish (*sūryānî*) to Jacobite unity; in Armenian (*asouri*) to historical descent. What generally has been considered to be Assyrian nationalism from the very beginning really started out as Nestorian and Jacobite *milletism* under the Assyrian name. With nationalistic dynamics unleashed, Assyrianism quickly became the common denominator of millet-nationalists from all denominations within less than a decade. Hence, Ottoman and Persian Assyrians were able to unite under the Assyrian umbrella when they met in the American diaspora (Makko 2010: 7).

Curiously, despite his nuanced depiction of the complexity of late Ottoman identity formations, Makko is deeply invested in arguing that the *Suryani* of that time period considered the word *Suryani* to be synonymous with "Assyrian," while in the same breath he admits that the *Suryani* of the highlands of Tur Abdin did not share this view. Indeed, Assyrianism seemed to be primarily a discourse belonging to urban, educated elites, and those who became persuaded of their national Assyrian identity

Modern Assyrian Studies ("We Are Assyrians"), in which he invokes the scholarly authority of Edward Gibbon and a genealogy of Assyriological scholarship. This provides an illuminating contrast with the genealogy of Orientalist scholars cited in Patriarch Barsoum's pamphlet on the Syriac Orthodox Church's name and history used to authenticate the claim that Syriac Orthodox Christians are Aramean (1952).

had access to nationalist publications.²⁶ Yet a core segment of the population, the mostly-illiterate village highlanders of Tur Abdin who have a certain status across the diaspora due to their origin in the monastic “heartland” of Syriac Orthodox Christianity, are discounted with a perfunctory nod.

The story Makko proceeds to tell echoes the story I heard via rumor and insinuation among the Suryoye of the Netherlands. The Jacobite Church, as Makko calls it, succumbed to the pressures of “major power politics” and the Turkish government and abandoned the notion of belonging to an Assyrian nation, despite the fact that the Patriarch Mar Ignatius Afram Barsoum I (1887-1957) had participated as a bishop in the “Assyro-Chaldean” delegation to the Paris Peace Conference after World War One and had consecrated the Jacobite Churches of West New York and Worcester under the name “Assyrian Apostolic” Church in 1927.

Makko attributes the patriarchate’s embrace of the Syrian Arab nationalist movement to its forced removal from *Deyr el Za’faran* in Tur Abdin to Hims in Syria in 1932. This, Makko, says, was “followed by a campaign to erase all signs of Assyrian identity within the Jacobite Church in the United States.” On 13 June 1947, Afram Barsom wrote a letter to his congregants in the United States, reprinted in appendix 4 of Makko’s text, titled: “Declaration of the Syrian Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch about the Nestorians.” In this letter, the patriarch forbade his church from uniting politically with the adherents of the “Nestorian” Church of the

²⁶ See Trigona-Harany 2009 for a detailed bibliographic discussion of late Ottoman Suryani nationalist writing.

East, who had first established claims to Assyrian national identity, and threatened his flock with excommunication (Barsom 1947: 4):

The people called Assyrians by the british (sic) government for political aims in 1919 actually does not exist except few poor and miserables (sic) most of them staying in villages are about 40-50 thousands excepting Malabar and few in U.S.A. ... The Nestorians are followers of a heretic sect excommunicated by all Christian communities of the East and the West and all avoid from them, specially the syrian orthodox church that excommunicate Nestor and his patrones, Diodorus Teodorus, Hiba of Edessa and Barsoma of Nissibin, and still keeps on. During the ordination of an orth. priest or bishop, Nestor and his partners are excommunicated. All orth. are absolutely forbidden to mix with them spiritually, namely to attend their mass and participate in their prayer meetings [original spelling and grammar] (Barsom 1947, cited in Makko 2010: 11-12).

When the French finally left Syria, the Syrian state deemed Assyrianism to be a threat to the Arab nationalist movement and began systematically crushing all signs of Assyrian ethnic and nationalist organizing in Syria (Makko 2010: 11). As anti-Assyrianism became more entrenched in the Syriac Orthodox ecclesiastical hierarchy, which was now firmly dependent on the authoritarian Syrian state, the choices facing the growing diaspora in the United States and Europe were recalibrated. Assyrianism, for the migrants from Tur Abdin, was no longer unappealing because it was a dangerous anti-state ideology. It was now unappealing because it posed a threat to the integrity of village-based kinship networks being reproduced across the global diaspora. These networks defined themselves in terms of their commitment to the distinctly Syriac Orthodox liturgical rite. Eventually, the pressures of seeking political recognition in secular European society affected the more religiously conservative Syriac Orthodox from Tur Abdin for whom an alternative, more piously imagined

ancestral myth became available from the academics within the scholarly tradition of Syriac Studies. One notable example is Sebastian Brock at Oxford University, with whom many clerics in the Syriac Orthodox Church have studied. Brock belongs to a different intellectual genealogy than those of the Assyriologists and archeologists working in the Ninevah plains of northern Iraq. Scholars in his lineage find textual evidence to support an “Aramean” ancestry.²⁷

Makko, himself a Swedish-raised Syriac Orthodox Christian who is dedicated to the concept of inter-denominational Assyrian national unity, admits that “today, a majority of Jacobites identify with Syriac/Aramean identity and traditions rather than with an Assyrian identity and its broader concept of unity” (Makko 2010: 14). He authenticates his own position, and delegitimizes that of his ideological opponents, with a familiar rhetorical maneuver. He invokes a “western” scholarly authority—British-born, American-raised, Swedish-based historian of Middle Eastern sectarian conflict, David Gaunt—to explain what the conflict is “really” about. As Gaunt writes:

The conflict over the Assyrian identity is on one level a result of power play within the immigrant community, and if the name issue did not exist, a similar conflict might have emerged in its place. In some ways the fight between

²⁷ In 2001, the Patriarchal Vicarate of the Western United States released a documentary film and book series called *The Hidden Pearl: The Syriac Orthodox Church and Its Aramaic Heritage*, with a number of prominent Syriac Studies scholars on its academic advisory committee. The books and films trace Syriac Orthodox heritage through a history of Aramaic language from the first millennium B.C.E., citing textual inscriptions found in the archeological ruins of “the Aramean city-states of Syria.” See <http://sor.cua.edu/Pub/BrockHPearl/index.html>.

Assyrianism and Syriacism is an opposition between modernity and tradition (Gaunt 2010: 13; see also Makko 2010: 14).

The claim that there is a binary opposition associating “Syriacism” with tradition and “Assyrianism” with modernity obscures the complex dynamics on the ground that were visible to me in my fieldwork. While it is true that there are material ways in which the authority structures of the religious tradition are becoming ever more circumscribed throughout the diaspora, thereby opening more space for secular elites to expand their power and influence, there is nonetheless a pervasive structure of feeling rooted in particular notions and experiences of kinship, trauma, and ethical personhood that lends clerical authority its continued purchase among the diasporic community. Seeing a conflict between religious tradition and secular modernity where there is in fact kaleidoscopic complexity pushes out of view the dynamics of Syriac Orthodox debates over subjectivity, selfhood, ethics, the meaning and importance of ritual form and liturgical sound, as well as the possibility of explaining the politics of recognition animating the multiculturalism debates burning across Europe.

Drawing on my ethnographic evidence, I contend that there are other discourses and forces submerged beneath the name-debates; specifically, the “power-play” among competing elites described by Gaunt and Makko glosses a complex situation in which the structure and relations of authority in the Syriac Orthodox ecclesial community are undergoing a radical, if halting, transformation. In effect, the category of “religion” as Syriac Orthodox Christians understand it is changing in

western Europe although not without critical resistance. Or, in Bakhtinian language, the inner persuasive discourse of Christian kinship resists displacement by the external authoritative discourse of secular ethnicity. One of the reasons for this is that the discourse of secular ethnicity is itself riddled with epistemic gaps.

To conclude, I offer a closer examination of the category work implicit in two different forms of history-writing that have directly affected the politics of everyday life in the Syriac Orthodox Christian diaspora. A complete overview of all the relevant bodies of research in Syriac Studies, Assyriology, comparative linguistics, ancient history, Ottoman history, and related fields is far beyond the scope of this dissertation. Instead, I compare one research project by religious studies scholars on the formation of the ancient Syriac Orthodox liturgical tradition from the fifth to the fourteenth century with work produced by historians of the Ottoman *millet* system in order to show the epistemic gap between them. I do this not to criticize their scholarship but to argue that the gap itself is evidence of the *how* and the *why* of anxieties over identity in the Syriac Orthodox diaspora. These anxieties are produced by implicit assumptions about the universality, continuity and immutability of the categories “ethnicity” and “religion.”

Syriac Studies: “The Religious Origins of Nations”

In 2010, a group of researchers at the Institute of Religious Studies at Leiden University published one phase of an ongoing, multidisciplinary study of the formation of “community-consciousness” among Syriac Orthodox Christians in the literary and art-historical traditions dating from the years 451 CE until 1300 CE (ter

Haar Romeny et al. 2010). Crafted as a response to Anthony Smith's *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*, the researchers situated their study within the broader field of ethnic studies in late antiquity, which emphasized the formation of ethnic identification among Germanic tribes on the edges of the late Roman Empire.

The authors engage anthropological perspectives on ethnic identification, both acknowledging and critiquing Fredrik Barth's social constructivist and interactional account of ethnicity as failing to account for the "evident durability" of ethnic identities over the course of centuries (ter Haar Romeny et al. 2010). Their interest is in locating evidence of content and continuity, which they infer from textual studies of the early medieval period, especially in the writings of Michael the Syrian, a "Jacobite" patriarch who was himself interested in seeking continuities with a pre-Christian past. It was Patriarch Michael, they reveal, who decided that whoever spoke Aramaic was a fore-father of his, in a particular time when political alliances were becoming as important as theological differences to producing communal boundaries (ter Haar Romeny et al. 2010: 50). For Michael both the ancient Assyrians *and* the ancient Arameans were "Syrian." The researchers show how Michael claimed both Assyrians and Arameans in his genealogy of descent, though the qualitative nature of this presumed descent is never fully fleshed out in the researchers' analyses (ter Haar Romeny et al. 2010: 330).

The Leiden researchers identify a tension between the textual evidence provided by the written record and the material evidence provided by artistic and archeological records. They recognize that the written tradition emphasizes a

continuity and a homogeneity that is not at all apparent in the visual materials used in their study:

The wall paintings in the area of present-day Syria and Lebanon show intensive contact between Orthodox, Maronites, and Syriac Orthodox, whereas there are also Crusader and Muslim influences. And neither the style nor the iconography of the art of Mosul suggests that Christians and Muslims had different artistic traditions. [...] This makes us conclude that the reality of everyday life in the small towns of the Middle East necessitated contacts between the various communities to a much higher level than the keepers of the tradition, the clergy, may have wanted. Personal identity is always based on a combination of different loyalties, which may contradict. Even though at this time the loyalty to the Syriac Orthodox Church came with a sense of common descent, it was not the only identity people had (Ter Haar Romeny et al. 2010: 51).

Their anthropological respondent, Willem Hofstee, counts the problems inherent in their approach. He criticizes the group's use of ethnicity and religion as universal categories and their assumption that artistic and literary production constitutes "evidence" of such categories. He points out that it is "only with the rise of literacy and state institutions in early theocratic states that the symbolic classifications of Durkheimian-structured symbolism turn out to be fruitful" (Hofstee 2010: 57) and thus such inferences cannot be sustained. In other words, it is only in relation to the state and to the state's ideological and technological apparatuses that "myths and memories" (Hofstee 2010: 57) have any bearing on the formation and reproduction of ethnic consciousness as understood in modern terms.

In ter Haar Romeny's response to Hofstee's criticism, ter Haar Romeny reiterates the fact that he has acknowledged the limits of universal categories, but he does not meaningfully engage the point further. While admitting, in light of an art

historian respondent's critique, that the record shows a difference in the use of language and the sense of geography among different Jacobite writers who varied in their designation of who, what, and where counted as "Syrian," ter Haar Romeny chooses to explain this key observation away, rather than to explore its central significance to the transformations of Syriac Orthodox Christianity throughout its history.

While the details of the Leiden Project's study are rich and meticulous, its researchers do not ask whether the meanings of words like "religion" and "community" have themselves changed over time within different political and cultural contexts. Their theoretical apparatus is blunted by their move to posit an "inside" and an "outside" to group identity, and by their choice to focus on a stable inside without much contextualization. Evidence of a Syriac Orthodox "inside" does not imply much about the nature of historical Syriac Orthodox identity without also examining how elite ecclesiastical writing related to processes of social identification and subjectification—how, in other words, categories are anchored in embodied, lived experiences. Such processes emerge in practices of everyday life such as kinship, ethical dispositions, structures and relations of power and authority, and the sensory regimes in which they operate and are legitimized. Without knowing anything about these processes and their relationship to the powerful literate men who represent the Syriac literary and theological tradition in pre-Ottoman times, there is little to infer about the character and quality of Syriac Orthodox "groupness" beyond literary and theological textuality. The confidence that "ethnic" or "national"

consciousness can be inferred from what Fergus Millar (2013) calls a Syriac-language monastic “scribal tradition” rests upon two epistemic practices. The first is an ontology of writing that presupposes exterior continuity as a sign of interior immutability. The second is a secular perforation of “identity” (whether ethnic or national) from “religion” (the realm of beliefs, doctrines, and dogmas).

Unsurprisingly, such epistemic practices have effects in the politics of everyday life in the Syriac Orthodox diaspora; secular scholars have long had the authority to legitimize political and existential claims by authenticating their genealogical roots in the eyes of the secular state.²⁸ The problem, as we have seen, is the confusion and distress produced in the gap between one scholarly narrative and another.

Historiography of the Ottoman Millet System

The study of Syriac Orthodox Christian identity is approached very differently among scholars of Ottoman history. A key text among late twentieth-century studies of Middle Eastern minorityhood is Lewis and Braude’s *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire* (1983). The key concept for understanding minority identities in this

²⁸ Renya Ramirez (2007) and other Native scholars have documented and analyzed a similar set of epistemological, political, and ethical predicaments for indigenous communities who are forced to rely on the documentary practices of cultural anthropologists to authenticate claims to rights and recognitions from the United States government. Such authentication tends to depend upon documentation that proves a tribe’s “continuous” habitation in a particular territory or their “continuous” practice of tribal traditions. For tribal communities who have been devastated, displaced, and decimated by centuries of federal policies aimed at their linguistic, cultural, and physical annihilation, this is an impossible double-bind.

context is the millet system, an often misunderstood historical formation that underwent a number of transformations itself:

The framework within which the Christian and Jewish communal authorities functioned under Ottoman rule has been called the millet system. Millet was a term which originally meant religious community and in the nineteenth century came to mean nation (Braude and Lewis 1983: 12).

But the millet system, Braude and Lewis argue, appears to have been less of a “system” and more of a pragmatic, ad hoc set of arrangements made over the years, such that the “form and character” of a religious group’s legal autonomy could vary drastically in different times and places. For instance, “as a result of Ottoman practice, millions of communicants of the Orthodox Church, speakers of Slavic, Romance, Semitic, and other languages, natives of Europe, Asia, and Africa, all came to be designated administratively as *Rum*, literally “Roman,” meaning Greek Orthodox” (Braude and Lewis 1983: 13). The relationship between administrative categories and local identifications and solidarities was, if not fluid, at least capable of significant fluctuation; and it was the Ottomans’ own Islamic conception of the primacy of religious affiliation that made religion the central organizing principle of Ottoman society, regardless of whether religion was in fact a primary focal point for local solidarities. From an Ottomanist perspective, Christians such as Jacobites, Copts, and Maronites were quickly assimilated linguistically into the Muslim population from the sixteenth century, while political processes such as collecting taxes and managing relations with ecclesiastical authorities were determined by local conditions (Braude and Lewis 1983: 14). This suggests that the top-down

administrative practices of the Ottoman state did not always or necessarily mirror local identities or processes of community formation.

The story of the emergence of ethnic identifications in the Ottoman era begins with the rise of Greek nationalism in the eighteenth century, which bore a complex relationship with religious identity and authority. The nineteenth century shift from Greek nationalist preoccupations with ancient Athens to their Byzantine heritage was catalyzed by contemporary preferences among the mass of religiously devout for whom pagan Athens had no affective, aesthetic, or ethical resonance (in a manner reminiscent of present-day dislike for ancient Assyrian paganism among devout Syriac Orthodox Christians).

In his essay “Millets and Nationality: The Roots of the Incongruity of Nation and State in the Post-Ottoman Era,” Kemal Karpat (1983) paints a picture of the central tension of the *millet* system’s influence on nineteenth and early twentieth century processes of nation formation among Christians and Muslims throughout the empire:

Nationality, in the sense of ethnic-national identity, drew its essence from the religious-communal experience in the millet, while citizenship—a secular concept—was determined by territory. In effect, the political, social and cultural crises which have buffeted the national states in the Balkans and the Middle East since their emergence can be attributed in large measure to the incompatibility of the secular idea of state with the religious concept of nation rooted in the *millet* philosophy (Karpat 1983: 141).

Thus, “community” within the Ottoman *millet* system featured a particular constellation of religious difference, linguistic difference, and family. A religious

millet *could* be internally differentiated by language, but linguistic difference did not become politically relevant until the eighteenth century, when nationalist elites began to push the use of Greek in order to “Hellenize the Orthodox millet” (Karpas 1983: 142). This is but one example of many different ways that Ottoman subjects could conceptualize the grounds of identification and political mobilization across the vastness of time and space in the Empire.

For a scholar of Ottoman history, the fact of the mutability of categories is unavoidable. The legibility of Syriac Orthodox Christianity shifts over time as it moves from one kind of category to another. What remains obscure, however, is the audibility of Syriac Orthodox subjectivities within an Ottoman context. Did they shift with their administrative re-classifications? How did everyday, non-literate Syriac Orthodox Christians conceive of the boundaries of their identity and community? Did they even possess notions of “identity” and “community” in terms that we would recognize? The answers to such questions are as obscure in the state-centric Ottoman perspective as in the Leiden Group’s study.

What matters *now* for the politics of everyday life in the Syriac Orthodox diaspora is that over the course of many centuries, in complex and locally variable ways, a theological distinction came to be fused with a liturgical language, which was at some point fused with a kinship network and then fused again with an Ottoman

bureaucratic category.²⁹ Though the linking of these elements in the course of centuries of Ottoman-Syriac history could not possibly have been without its disruptions and instabilities, in memory and in practice in the global Syriac Orthodox diaspora they are experienced as inseparably coterminous.

The predicament that Syriac Christians find themselves in now is that the complexities of Ottoman bureaucratic practices and their epistemologies do not translate into the bureaucratic practices and epistemologies of the secular nation-state. This finds expression in the ambiguity of the Ottoman bureaucratic concept of *ta'ifa*. This minor category indicated a group that was smaller than a millet; at times it could mean a religious group. Churches who qualified for millet status were large and visible; they included, for example, the Greek Orthodox Church. Because they were smaller, West Syriac Christian and East Syriac Christian communities were bureaucratically classified as a *ta'ifa*. Archival evidence suggests that in some times and places in the Ottoman Empire the two ecclesial communities shared the same *ta'ifa*, while in other times and places they did not (Masters 2001: 61-65). There were still other times when *ta'ifa* was not even a religious community; for example, a blacksmiths' guild could be classified as such. Given the situational flexibility of Ottoman bureaucratic categories and practices, it makes little sense to read an interior sense of Syriac "groupness" in these textual traces. To insist on an ontology of continuity and immutability is not only reductive and obfuscating from a scholarly

²⁹ For more on the roots and development of Oriental Orthodox ecclesial identities in the Islamic caliphate period, see Griffiths 2008.

point of view. It is also politically and existentially devastating. For Syriac Orthodox Christians in the global diaspora, as with many other groups who exist in uneasy relationships with state categories, such an ontology normalizes and universalizes a culturally specific language of identity that does not fit their experience.

Beyond Text

My concern is with understanding *why* current debates over Syriac identity take the shape they do. Why are there such violent disagreements over the particulars of the content of myth, at the expense of memory? In this chapter, I have argued that a secular mode of textualized knowledge production obscures the way categories themselves transform, thus muting non-textualized forms of knowledge and memory. The violence of the disagreements over whether Syriac Orthodox are ethnically Aramean, or part of a broader, ecumenical Chaldo-Assyrian nation, or are entirely without a secular identity, points to the effects of the traditions of western scholarly production and its secular categories on Syriac Orthodox self-knowledge mediated through oral memory. The Assyrian “concept of unity” runs up against the categorical crisis of epistemic precarity. This precarity refracts Syriac Orthodox experience of what is “true” and “real.” The divisions among western scholarly disciplines exacerbate this collision.

In the chapters to come, I seek to think about the relationship between the West-Syriac Rite and the social structure of the people who adhere to the rite, on the one hand, and how that social structure shapes the nature of individual and social identification with the rite, on the other. I ask how the rite achieves and maintains its

binding force, aesthetically, ethically, and affectively. These questions are difficult to answer in the practice of ancient historiography, because historians have access to neither subaltern voices nor the intimate practices of everyday life: there are no oral histories provided by the illiterate, non-elite members of the ecclesial community.

The monastic tradition of textuality may well be the authoritative, original source of Syriac liturgical identity, but today it is integrated with kin relations and village identities in a manner that depends upon its sung reproduction. The significance of sung reproduction is missed in the preoccupation with text. Ironically, this obscures the full significance of the liturgical tradition in Syriac Orthodox conceptions of self and community. The singing is what makes the tradition an integral part of everyday family life in the diaspora, even if it is only the echo of the sonic textures of a past self, as it is among those few who have broken entirely with church and family. The melodies are taught to small children; those who go on to become consecrated liturgical singers (as sub-deacons and sub-deaconesses) are not the only members of the community to find Syriac music embedded in their sense of self. Syriac Christians sing together at home at the dinner table, hum along quietly during Holy Mass at and daily prayers, dance to folk tunes inspired by church melodies at regular weekend *hafle* (parties), and listen to well-known liturgical singers from Sweden, Germany, and the Middle East perform live on the satellite television stations Suryoyo Sat and Suroyo TV everyday in their living rooms. The materialities of these sounds have a constitutive effect far beyond that of the materialities of texts. Anthropologists of religion who invoke a Derridean notion of

the impossibility of a clear “speaking subject” because of the claim that all forms of expression depend equally upon a “collectively shared code” (Rutherford 2006: 243) overlook the obstinate indeterminacy of musical “meaning.” The orality and aurality of the sung liturgy are perhaps sometimes, in some places, the symbolic representation of some singers’ meanings, but even when these meanings can be pinned down to a coherent set of intentions and interpretations, they remain situational and contested. Liturgical sound is productive, rather than representational. The sonic production of Syriac liturgical identity in diaspora is more than just an apt metaphor for the contentious production of Syriac Orthodox aesthetic formation in diaspora. Liturgical sound itself constitutes Syriac community and identity, not in spite of its indeterminacy, but because of it.

The indeterminacy of musical meaning, as Qureshi (2000) has argued in relation to sarangi musicians, suggests not an absence or emptiness of significance, but rather a contested complexity that reveals key problems in the lives of those participating in and listening to the sound. In this chapter, I have explained one of the key problems of Syriac Orthodox liturgical identity: the epistemic uncertainties of ethnic and national labels invoked to make Syriac Christians audible to state power in the language of the modern nation-state system. In the next chapter, I shift scales from the global and the historical to the national and the contemporary by examining how postcolonial Dutch conceptions of racial and religious difference bear upon Syriac Orthodox efforts to make themselves audible as religiously, ethnically, and culturally distinct to Dutch audiences.

Chapter Four

The Inaudible *Allochthoon*: Race, Religion, and the Postcolonial Politics of Misrecognition

In the Netherlands, as far as the state census, bureaucrats, social workers, and academics are concerned, Syriac Orthodox Christians are *allochthonen*. They are lumped into an official binary classification that distinguishes between *autochthonen*, or “native” Dutch people, and *allochthonen*, or “new” Dutch people. Although the category of autochthony is increasingly prevalent as part of a “nativist” discourse circulating around the globe, its opposite, allochthony, has a peculiarly Dutch nuance in the way it is implicated with postcolonial Dutch conceptions of the speaking citizen-subject. Allochthony is a broad racial configuration of foreign otherness posed against native whiteness and infused with bureaucratic force. In the Netherlands, *allochthonen* are specifically the newcomers from non-western countries, as well as their children, their grand-children, and their great-grand-children. That one can be a third- or fourth-generation Dutch citizen and still be treated as a “newcomer” on the street in daily interaction with autochthonous Dutch, as well as officially classified as such by social scientists and government policies, speaks to the category’s discursive power in shaping mainstream Dutch conceptions of “self” and “other.”

At the same time, it is clouded by a sense of problematic religious and cultural difference, which make it difficult to disentangle race, religion, and culture in the popular and political discourse. In the national imaginary, the allochthonous Dutch

family is racially and religiously marked as coming from the Middle East or North Africa, or sometimes the Caribbean, and is targeted through a range of integration policies, from the *inburgeringscursus* (citizenship/integration course) to youth-oriented social work, or *pedagogiek*, to change their “backwards,” “anti-social” cultural behavior, practices and attitudes in order to better integrate into Dutch society.

On the surface, this is predominantly understood as a progressive, well-intended set of policies and practices meant to facilitate the health and happiness of new minorities and their inclusion as equal citizens of the multicultural nation-state; it is an important part of the Dutch vision of itself as the most progressive, cosmopolitan, and modern of countries. The integration of *allochthonen* is a national obsession, both popularly and politically. Yet allochthony is an ambivalent category: even as it is used as a technology for rendering minorities recognizable to state power in a multiculturalist framework, it shapes the conditions of audibility in ways that lead inevitably to multiple forms of misrecognition and silencing for those same subjects. Syriac Orthodox negotiations with the category of allochthony in the Dutch national context articulate with the political and existential crises incurred on a global scale described in the previous chapter, lending an added layer of complexity Syriac struggles for recognition.

In this chapter, I examine the articulation of racial and religious difference in the category of allochthony. By accounting for the regular misrecognition of Middle Eastern Christianity within official discourse, as well as in everyday interactions with

autochthonous Dutch, I show how racialized religious difference in the Netherlands is produced in connection with a chronotope of secular rupture, which in turn produces a narrative configuration of space and time in which religion has been relegated to the past. This chronotope has implications for the ethics of Syriac liturgical identity and practice because of the way in which it shapes the conditions in which minority religious subjectivities become audible. I begin with Heleen's story, which sets the stage for understanding how constant racial-religious misrecognition in everyday life shapes and amplifies the Syriac Orthodox experience of ethical, existential, and political inaudibility.

Tensions of Misrecognition

Heleen and I walk together to the Bean and Bagel, an American-style bagel shop-cum-Dutch café terrace, around the corner from Enschede's central station. It is a warm, early autumn afternoon in this easternmost city of the Dutch province Twente, and we are meeting for a late lunch to talk about her life and her involvement in the women's choir of the Syriac Orthodox Church. This is the first time Heleen has been to this café; she tells me she does not visit this side of town very frequently.

I have asked her to come with me to the bagel shop because it is a calm, student café where people can sit quietly in a corner and study or talk for hours without being disturbed. It tends to appeal to international students and German visitors who come to Enschede for a day of shopping, as well as to a certain class of urban Dutch cosmopolitans who are concerned with the quality of their cappuccinos and a taste for American-style baked goods. It has become a favorite of mine for

writing field notes on the large, quiet reading table in the back, the reliable comfort of their cappuccinos, and the tolerant friendliness of the waitstaff. I also know that Suryoye do not tend to come here, and so I suggest it partially to shelter us from the inquisitive eyes of Suryoye acquaintances who might be out shopping in the city-center. We take a seat inside, and shortly our orders are taken. Heleen orders tea and her lox bagel without cream cheese, and she assures me that I should not worry about ordering a cappuccino in her presence, despite her religious dietary restriction on meat and dairy products.

Heleen tends to confound Dutch racialized perceptions of Middle Eastern migrants, with her long blond hair, vivid blue eyes, and distinctively *Twents* accent. I occasionally have to strain to understand the lilt of her regional accent and local expressions, given that I am more accustomed to the *Algemeen Beschaafd Nederlands* (Standard Civilized Dutch) spoken by the middle classes of the central provinces.

As we eat our lunch, our conversation turns to some of the thornier issues facing her church community. Heleen pauses occasionally to think, telling me with a small laugh that my questions are difficult, but interesting for her to ponder. She is cheerful and mild-mannered, and she remains noticeably open to the questions I pose to her—even questions that have elicited angry and defensive responses from other interlocutors.

Heleen attends the Saxion Hogeschool, a post-secondary vocational institution in the heart of Enschede, where she is following a course on Human Resource Management. After class, she works part-time for a national drug-store chain. As we

sip our drinks and finish our bagels, she tells me that after she completes her course at Saxion, she would like to go to university to study to become a dermatologist, because she loves biology. I have been alerted by earlier conversations with other young women aspiring to go to university that this can be a fraught family issue, but Heleen is unconcerned by the implications of living further away from her family if she continues her studies. She knows she will only be an hour away from home if she gets into the school of her choice, and most importantly, her father supports her ambitions. She talks about her father with affectionate deference—he is one of the younger members of the church board at Mor Yaqub, which is a position of high status within her community. She feels like he works hard to represent her interests to the board, and he is remarkable among church board members for his moderate and sympathetic position on women’s active involvement in the church.

Heleen is one of the more dedicated members of the women’s choir at Mor Yaqub Church. She, her sister, and her cousin drive regularly from Glanerbrug, the border village on the outskirts of Enschede, to the church in the center of the city, to sing on Sunday mornings and, somewhat less frequently, to attend weekly *madresh-to*, or Sunday school. Unlike some of the other young women with whom I have spoken in the choir, Heleen does not feel overly burdened by her obligations to church, family, school, and work. She feels that she has enough time to manage all her duties, and she says that she feels quite happy. She seems generally unperturbed by the community fights that trouble so many of her peers in the church choirs.

Heleen is less happy when we turn to the subject of her relationships with the autochthonous Dutch people in her life. She tells me that she has story after story of the misrecognition and disrespect that she and other members of her community have encountered at the hands of Dutch friends and acquaintances, a reality that she finds deeply hurtful. She recounts a story that took place before we met that exemplifies for her the strange, submerged hostility she feels from the Dutch:

At the grocery store, not too long ago, there was a sale on meat, and, you know, we are Middle Eastern...we have big get-togethers and eat a lot of meat! I went with my aunt to the store for a dinner we were going to prepare, and when my aunt approached a store clerk about getting more meat from the back, he told her there was no more. My aunt looks like most of us...she looks like she is from the Middle East, so I think that is why he would not give her the meat. So I went up and asked him for the meat myself. And, you know... I have blond hair and blue eyes, so...the clerk just thought I was an ordinary Dutch person (*een gewone Nederlandse*). So he told me it was no problem, and went to go get me more meat. When he came back, I asked him, "Can I get some for my aunt over there as well?"—and when the man saw we were related, he was embarrassed and turned red.

She pauses and sighs. She does not get visibly angry as she tells this story, but she cannot explain why it is this way, and it makes her frustrated and sad. As the Dutch server in the bagel shop approaches us to ask whether we want more tea and coffee, we both instinctively lower our voices, and the look of self-consciousness on her face mirrors the self-consciousness I feel, as if our conversation is a transgression against the cheerfully cosmopolitan-Dutch space of the bagel shop. This transgressive feeling is familiar—I have gone through the same routine with other interlocutors when the subject drifts towards the subject of Dutch discrimination. Voices are lowered, facial expressions close up, and the conversations stop in the hearing of

white, autochthonous Dutch people, as if something very embarrassing or offensive was being discussed.

When our server departs to attend to a different table, Heleen continues, “You know, now that we are talking about this, I remember something else that happened when I was in high school that really upset me.” She recounts the story with quiet emotion:

I had a friend in high school in Glanerbrug, just an ordinary girl [*een gewone meisje*] from the village, who said something to me once. You know, Sarah, how we all go to the monastery to visit our dead in the cemetery on the day after Easter? You remember how many of us come, from all over the Netherlands and Germany—there are thousands of us. The street is full of cars and bikes and people—it gets very busy! Well, the day after, I met my friend on the street in Glanerbrug, and she started to complain to me about “all those Moroccans crowding up the street” the day before. I told her, “No! Those were not Moroccans! They were Syriac people like me! I was there myself!” And then my friend said, “Ach, it is all the same.” I could not believe she said that—the difference didn’t matter to her at all! I felt really hurt by that.

Heleen’s story of racial-religious misrecognition echoes countless other stories I heard from second- and third-generation Syriac Orthodox Christians in the Netherlands during my research. Several distinct kinds of misrecognition occur in this story. The first is the misrecognition of Heleen’s bodily person. She is identified and treated in a particular way by virtue of her visual appearance and the sound of her voice: pale skin, blond hair, blue eyes, and local accent. The revelation of her “true” identity as *not autochthonous* occurs when she points out to whom she is kin. This produces embarrassment on both sides. The butcher at the grocery store has been

caught out behaving in a way that both he and Heleen know to be socially unacceptable in polite Dutch society, at least in public.

The second form of misrecognition is collective. Heleen's friend has misrecognized her community: their apparent Middle Easternness (evident in their appearance and in their behavior³⁰) puts them in the same category as any other *allochthonen*. They are effectively Moroccan and their religious difference matters not a whit. A third, more subtle kind of misrecognition is apparent in this story and was echoed in every conversation I ever had that touched on the topic of Dutch resentment of *allochthonen*: to speak of such resentment is transgressive because it violates a social taboo against suggesting that the Dutch misrecognize themselves as anti-racist, open-minded, progressive, tolerant cosmopolitans. To speak thus is to suggest that if the Dutch resent Middle Eastern Christians as much as they do Muslims, then their dislike of Muslims might in fact not be solely on the grounds of Islam's perceived incompatibility with Dutch norms and values.

These misrecognitions are a source of tremendous contention and anxiety among Syriac Orthodox Christians who find themselves interpellated within the conflated categories of race and religion in the Dutch multiculturalism debates. To make matters worse, these discourses are infused with moralized conceptions of citizenship. These instances of racial-religious misrecognition have a moral

³⁰ I have attended the day-after Easter festivities at the monasteries and have seen for myself the vocal outrage expressed by Dutch passersby at the monastery's chaotic crowd-control and diminished capacity to operate according to Dutch conventions of regulating traffic and public space.

significance in the way they invoke a chronotopic narrative of Judeo-Christian identity, an identity that is explicitly expressed in ethical terms. The Judeo-Christian chronotope obscures, and operates in a particular relationship to, a partially-forgotten and only recently resurfacing colonial history of the categories of race and religion in Dutch popular and political thought. The dialogics of recognition are thus muddled by the instability of the categories of race and religion circulating through the Netherlands. This instability becomes apparent when these categories move across multiple audiences and scales and has two effects. First it inflects the language that Syriac Christians use to talk and think about who they are as minorities in the Dutch multicultural landscape; and second, it works both to constitute and to limit the conditions of audibility in which Syriac Orthodox try to achieve recognition from the Dutch state.

Between Racism and Race-thinking

One of the thorniest questions among political and academic discussions of the Dutch multiculturalism debates is whether or not the Netherlands has a “race-problem.” Some corners admit to a “religion” problem, while others admit more generally a “minority cultures” problem³¹ but to articulate ethnic tensions in the Netherlands in terms of race is often considered by mainstream commentators as baffling as it is offensive. The reason for this, as Cherribi (2010) suggests, is that

³¹ See Stolcke 1995 for analysis of the “cultural fundamentalisms” theory of Europe’s New Racism. See also Scheffer 2000 for one of the earliest and most influential left-wing op-eds in a major Dutch newspaper criticizing the state’s multicultural policies for producing an ethnic underclass.

commonsense Dutch conceptions of race associate it with places like the United States and South Africa, which have histories of official segregation and institutionally sanctioned discrimination that was based on explicit ideologies of race-based hatred. Dutch cosmopolitan nationalism in the twentieth century was consciously promoted and cultivated as a moral identity defined against North American and South African racism. The seeds of this explicit anti-racist ideology were planted in the years after World War Two as Dutch identity reformulated itself around memories of resistance against Nazi occupation and fascist thought. Out of this experience emerged an abstract sense that holding essentialized prejudices based on skin color is simply *not Dutch*. Since then, the Netherlands' increasing Anglophile orientation brought North American and British conversations about race and racism more explicitly into Dutch awareness and fueled widespread and high-profile national efforts to support the global anti-apartheid movement in South Africa, even though there was little racial diversity in the Netherlands to test these commitments at home. There may not have been many occasions for racial encounters within the Netherlands, but because a critical mass of Dutch society cultivated a self consciously nationalist cosmopolitanism (that girded an abiding mercantilist pragmatism), it was evident that they knew what they felt about racism *elsewhere*. These North American and South African racial configurations are still generally taken as universal and normative because the category "race" is essentialized as a matter of black or white (Cherribi 2010: 139). Instead, popular, political, and even occasionally academic discourses insist that the Dutch multiculturalism debates hinge upon questions of

“norms and values” (*normen en waarden*), language, and assimilation into the Dutch society (*samenleving*, lit. “living together”). In this model, race is a static, universal category and thus inapplicable to the Netherlands. This is why the only person from the Syriac Orthodox community I met who did not think there was such a thing as Dutch racism was an anthropologist working on her Ph.D. at a major national university. But as Heleen’s story shows, this view of race’s salience in the Netherlands calls for rethinking.

It is perhaps more useful to distinguish between “racism” and “race-thinking” in the manner of Hannah Arendt in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1968), and to allow for the ontological instability of the category “race” across different times and places. Arendt traces the emergence of race-thinking in the eighteenth, nineteenth, and early twentieth centuries within interconnected processes of industrialization, nationalization, the emergence of the bourgeois class, and the colonial encounter. One of her crucial insights is the formative role of colonialism, and particular colonial relationships, in producing a European consciousness of two distinct yet related categories. Race-thinking, as Arendt calls it, in early modern Europe was primarily conceptualized through class, as the difference between nobles and commoners was imagined to be biological (hence the notion of “blueblood”) (Arendt 1968: 207-221). In the colonial encounter, racial difference came to be understood in terms of color, which signified global geographic region and a host of associated characteristics such as culture and temperament, thereby yielding a racialized conception of Europeanness and non-Western Otherness.

Arendt's insights foreshadow recent developments in colonial studies, which have documented how race figured centrally in the construction of a European bourgeois identity produced by, within, and along-side the colonial encounter. Colonial studies scholars, especially Ann Stoler (1995), identify a deep constitutive racialization of the idea of Europe that, in Stoler's words, "reverberated" (97) between the colony and the metropole. This racialization was shaped by the cultivation of normative desires and policed bodies (see also Arondekar 2005). In this analysis, race as a category is extended to the biologization of sexuality itself, and Stoler's work on the education and racialization of desire resonates strongly with contemporary European multiculturalism debates about the ways in which sexualities and gendered bodies are policed and implicated in the construction of tolerable (and intolerable) difference (Scott 1996, 2007; Coene and Longman 2008; Dustin and Phillips 2008; Phillips and Saharso 2008; Prins and Saharso 2008; Rostock and Bergahn 2008). These resonances suggest a racialized notion of civility that continues to be salient to Dutch anxieties about multiculturalism, and there is a striking parallel between colonial Dutch discourse and current integration discourse where kinship, domesticity, and the raising of children are concerned:

[m]anagement and knowledge of home environments, child-rearing practices, and sexual arrangements of European colonials were based on the notion that the domestic domain harbored potential threats both to "the defense of society" and to the future "security" of the [European] population and the [colonial] state (Stoler 1994: 97).

This biopolitical concern for the home and family as the safeguard of civilized European society placed questions of moral "upbringing" (*opvoeding*) at the center of

official anxieties about both race and class; poor whites were as dangerous to bourgeois Dutch identity as were the colonized Javanese and as such were encompassed within the same pedagogical discourse (Stoler 1994: 108). *Opvoeding* is one of the central preoccupations of Dutch integration discourse and policies directed at allochthonous families via the professional practice of social pedagogy. In both the bourgeois Calvinist colonial regime and the twenty-first century secular multicultural nation, parental failure to instill bodily self-discipline among future Dutch citizens is seen to pose a risk to the body politic.

The tangled web of racialized class sensibilities that emerges from this submerged history is evident in a pair of unprompted conversations I had with two acquaintances who were unconnected to my research. These conversations occurred in relation to a crisis that developed in their domestic arrangements: they were roommates, and they had a fight. Riet and Els are what is often called *heel gewone Nederlandse meisjes*, very ordinary Dutch girls. Both were white, local young women in their early twenties who lived together in the city center of Enschede. Together they are a study in contrasts of white Dutch class-based attitudes toward multiculturalism and race in the Netherlands.

Riet came from an upper-middle class family that had moved to Enschede from the central provinces when she was very young. Her father was the headmaster of one of the largest high schools in the area, a high school that many of my Syriac Orthodox Christian friends attended. Riet was thoughtful, well-traveled, and expressed strongly-worded cosmopolitan values. She had an Ethiopian boyfriend who

was in the Netherlands to study at one of the local universities geared toward international students. Riet and I had many conversations about the multiculturalism debates in the Netherlands, and she was of the strong opinion that there were no explicit racial ideologies at work in the Dutch dislike of racial and ethnic minorities, although she admitted that there was plenty of dislike going around, even if she did not share it. Els, on the other hand, came from a less educated family in a very small town in the *Twentse* country-side, worked for an interior design shop, and was in a long-term monogamous relationship with a boy from her village. Riet and Els did not know each other before they moved into together, and it was only a matter of months before conflicts arose. Many of these were common enough roommate disagreements, but before long their disagreements took a disconcertingly racial turn. As I was living in the same house at the time I heard first-hand Els's unfiltered disgust for Riet's lifestyle. She encapsulated her sentiments for me one day in an outburst:

She makes me so uncomfortable! She dates that African boy—she goes to that *Negerclub* [by which she meant a reggae bar] with all those dark people! I am not used to it—I am from a nice family in a small town! I have no experience with colored people! She has all these strange people coming to the house all the time—I should not have to be around all this!

A related source of tension was the fact that Riet was on permanent disability support from the government because of long-standing health issues that prevented her from working and caused her significant weight gain, all of which Els found suspicious and worthy of contempt. Before long, Els began accusing Riet of being a shoplifter, a liar, and a generally delinquent sort of person. Whenever Els spoke about Riet, it was never clear to me whether fear or disgust predominated in her sentiments.

Either way, Els's anxiety-revulsion turned on the perception of implicit connections among racial difference, the instability of class boundaries, sexual behaviors, psychological dispositions, physical health, lack of bodily discipline, and social danger. I do not believe it is a coincidence that the language Els used to describe her distaste for her roommate is so evocative of the colonial training manuals that circulated throughout nineteenth-century Java, even if Els would be surprised to learn that the Dutch ever colonized Indonesia.

This encounter illuminates an everyday thread of discomfort along racial lines around domestic arrangements, suggesting that current national Dutch bourgeois sensibilities are indeed coded by race. Further, it is the submerged relationship between race and class that explains why middle-class white Dutch feel revulsion for both working class xenophobic populism *and* for Dutch Muslims without feeling any cognitive dissonance. Both lack what bourgeois Dutch understand as a civilized *habitus*—that is, the embodied commonsense knowledge of *how to be a person* learned as a child from one's environment. It entails all the embodied dimensions of culture and history that become “second-nature” and taken for granted. A *habitus* takes shape in learned habits, bodily skills, styles, and tastes beneath the level of rational awareness or explicit intention (Bourdieu 2010; Mauss 2006 [1935]; see also Asad 1993: 75-76 and Mahmood 2001: 837-839). This civilized Dutch *habitus*, with its racialized class dimensions, is highly normative and normalized by the state in discourses of *opvoeding*. As such it is a central criterion for moral citizenship in the Dutch nation-state. It is not unimportant that the Dutch word for “citizen” is *burger*:

etymologically, citizenship is literally middle-class.³² Stoler provides another intriguing historical insight about the logic of racialization and the constitution of Dutchness:

new institutional initiatives and governmental policies...made claims to racial superiority *dependent* on middle-class respectability for the entire European population. It made linguistic competence in Dutch the marker of cultural ‘suitability’ for European middle-class norms. (Stoler 1994: 106)³³

Many Dutch minorities would recognize this discourse and its power to shape their education and employment opportunities in twenty-first century Dutch society, and a white person like Riet could lose this respectability in the eyes of her peers by her behavior. The problem is not Riet’s professed cosmopolitanism; rather, it is her sexual and social transgression of class-based boundaries of civilized behavior that represents the failure of her Dutch *habitus*.

A second key historical insight is the role that Calvinism played in the formation of bourgeois liberalism, the formation of the nation-state, and the colonial

³² Even the monarchy is lauded for their respectable, middle-class, family-centered values and behaviors—the Dutch royal family are considered by many to be exemplary for never letting their dignity get in the way of their progressive cosmopolitanism, sober practicality, and *gezelligheid* (an un-translatable word that conveys a distinctively Dutch conception of cozy, pleasant, and game sociability).

³³ The logic of racial thinking is different here from, say, US American racism in which an ideology of racial superiority has historically been used as a political wedge to orient white working class resentments towards people of color rather than towards the white privileged classes.

regime. The ideal of “‘personal self-discipline’ as well as collective moral control” (Stoler 1994: 119) circulated in a racially inflected imperial field throughout the nineteenth century, but it was originally germinated in Calvinist theology. Moral self-discipline was a spiritual, political, and economic imperative (Kuyper 1943; Gorski 2003) all at once. The national founding myth is that of a Calvinist nation founded on “civilized morals.” The content of that morality has changed, but the homogenizing, disciplined sense of a civilized national *habitus* has not.

After World War Two, the Dutch state undertook a massive restructuring of the relationship between religious responsibility and political responsibility. As the late nineteenth century pillars of Protestants, Catholics, socialists, and liberal humanists were dismantled, religious and political leaders facilitated the transfer of their pillars’ responsibilities for the holistic care and cure of souls to the state in the name of civilized modernity, national solidarity, and the overcoming of sectarian differences. Together, they constructed an enormous, elaborate, and all-encompassing welfare state. Rather than using the Dutch word *welvaartstaat*, they called the national edifice the *zorgstaat*, the care state (Kennedy 1995; Lechner 2008). As a result of this restructuring there is an emphasis on the state’s responsibility to care for the whole person.

An important tool for shaping Dutch citizenship is the field of social pedagogy. The Dutch term *pedagogiek* is not directly translatable into the English word pedagogy. It shares more in common with the German concept of *bildung*, with

variations found throughout northern Europe. To quote Petra Ponte and Karin

Ronnerman, *pedagogiek* is

partly covered by the term “education” with the exception that *pedagogiek/pedagogik* is concerned with all aspects of bringing up children (which, as well as education, also include health, social care, families, law, etc.). It encompasses the methods as well as the goals of the total emotional, intellectual, physical, and moral growth of the child for which parents, teachers and other professionals are jointly responsible (Ponte and Ronnerman 2009: 157).

Pedagogiek is thus a crucial mechanism for the operation of the Dutch concept of *zorg* as envisioned by the Catholic and Protestant architects of the welfare state, and it is embedded in a vast network of educational, medical, and other care-giving institutions and semi-governmental organizations that receive state funding and that coordinate their operations and their mandates under the Scientific Council for Government Policy [WRR]. Through the discourse of care, the Dutch state engages in a continuing civilizing mission to produce moral citizens.

To be clear, what is “racial” in Dutch conceptions of national identity is a prevalent anxiety over civilized *habitus*. Media representations of unruly Moroccans are emblematic of these anxieties, registered in regularly heard complaints on the street [*They drive like lunatics! They are noisy on the bus! Their yards are not well maintained! Their homes are chaotic! Their curtains are closed! They throw trash in my yard and harass my daughters on the street!*] Worst of all, there is the perception that Moroccan parents disavow any responsibility for shaping their children’s behavior, thereby denying the very premise of *pedagogiek* as a joint project among

parents, professional experts, and the state. In some ways, this is the most egregious transgression: a perceived disavowal of the Dutch belief in the connection between parental responsibility for the cultivation of a civilized *habitus* and moral citizenship.

Nonetheless, ambiguities abound. One of the key ambiguities to the question of moral membership in the Dutch nation is captured by an exchange that took place between close friends of mine who were also unrelated to my primary field work: Afsaneh, a devout Shi'ite Muslim who had fled Iran in the mid-nineties, and her eldest daughter Saba, who had been put in a Dutch school at the age of sixteen. Saba is as well-integrated a minority as the Dutch government could possibly hope for, with her successful business, nearly accent-less Dutch, and chic sense of style. She identifies as culturally Muslim but is not particularly pious in her observances. One night over dinner, when I was visiting for a weekend during my fieldwork, Saba complained about her experience the day before with her young daughter at the neighborhood swimming pool. She expressed intense irritation with the Moroccan boys who she felt were harassing and intimidating everyone around them. Not being easily intimidated herself, she scolded one of the boys, but he responded with a long menacing glare that she started to get scared. Retelling the story, she said, "because I am pregnant, I am really nervous now around them. They are so reckless and indifferent! They do not care whether they hurt other people! Then, to make matters worse [*nog erger*], there was this Moroccan mother in her underwear washing herself in the children's pool where Parmis wanted to play! It was so disgusting. We complained to the pool attendant. And then later she put on a headscarf and a

djellaba!” Utterly exasperated, Saba said, “How is the swimming pool any different from the rest of the outdoors?” As the conversation progressed, Saba observed, “when the Moroccan boys harass you on the street, if you laugh and look like you like it, they are okay, but if you look angry or try to ignore them, that is when they start screaming at you and calling you a whore.” When I asked why there seems to be such a particular issue in the neighborhood regarding Moroccan boys, Afsaneh explained: “It is because they are not raised well. They have no guidance from their parents on how to act.” Saba elaborated, “At home, all they get is food, a place to sleep, and beatings. The parents think when their kids are outside the house, it is society’s problem, not theirs. Honestly, if I were not Muslim myself I would vote for Geert Wilders too!”

For Afsaneh, this was a bridge too far. Utterly incensed, she burst out: “*Saba!* Do not say things like that! Wilders is against Islam—do not even make jokes about that!” But her daughter was defiant.

“What?! It is true! I understand why people are mad! I’m mad too! Our neighbors are gay and they want to emigrate because people from the neighborhood keep vandalizing them. Homosexuality is not approved in Islam, sure, but that does not mean you have to bother people about it. Why can they not just leave people alone?” Picking up steam, Saba went on:

And then I went to the beach last week, and this mother and daughter, Moroccans, were there too, and the mother started shaking her blanket out on people. Her daughter berated her and told her to stop, but then her mother said: “what do I care about other people! I hate people!” I wanted to say to

her, “If you hate people why do you go out among them?! If you hate people so much stay home!”

She paused for a moment. In a calmer, more reflective tone, she said: “But the problem, of course, is that Wilders and his supporters cannot tell the difference between me and them.”

And here is the rub. On any other evening, Saba would have been reporting on the barely-veiled insults and disrespect she receives from many of her customers in the optometry shop she owns with her husband in an upper-middle class neighborhood in Utrecht. Most frequently these insults are targeted at her language ability, which is odd, given that her grammar, diction, and accent are nearly flawless.

I tell this story of my Iranian Muslim friends to demonstrate how the Middle Eastern Christian experience of misrecognition fits within a broader pattern of racial-religious misrecognitions that shape Dutch notions of moral citizenship today. This kind of race-thinking is codified in official government documents like the *Wetenschappelijke Raad van de Regeringsbeleid* (Scientific Council for Government Policy)’s 2004 report by G. van den Brink “Sketch of a Civilization Offensive: On Norms, Normalcy, and Normalization in the Netherlands.” In section 4.3, devoted to “Migrants and Modernity,” the author explains his conceptual approach to analyzing the cultural and religious differences among citizens of migrant descent:

In the previous sections, we have seen that in the Netherlands there continues to be a great deal of agreement over the norms governing private life. Most citizens generally concur on matters related to the equality of men and women, the raising of children, and questions around life and death. The most notable exceptions are among those Dutch citizens with an allochthonous

background. They maintain—especially on the subjects of childrearing and family life—many of their own ideas. There has been little discussion of this for some time. Many were convinced that such differences of opinion present no problem to a tolerant society [*een tolerante samenleving*]. Nevertheless, in the past few years there has been increasing debate over whether these ideas hinder successful integration [*inburgering*]. I rely on a survey taken among a large number of allochthonous citizens [*allochthonen*] in the Netherlands in 1998. This survey distinguished between five groups: Turks, Moroccans, Surinamese, Antilleans, and autochthonous citizens [*autochthonen*]. Because the differences between Turks and Moroccans are minimal, I will treat them as a single category and refer to them as Dutch citizens with an *Islamic* background [emphasis in original]. (van den Berg 2004: 110, my translation)

At no point in this document is the Dutch word for race (*ras*) ever used. Instead, the word *afkomst*, which can refer to background, ancestry, descent, lineage, birth, and, less commonly, race, is used three times in relation to the category of allochthony. All kinds of meaningful distinctions are obscured by what can only be explained as a distinctly Dutch form of race-thinking implicit in this use of *afkomst*. Such race-thinking collapses linguistic ability, embodied notions of civility, religious difference, histories of migration, and color into a singular category within a sensory regime that privileges color over any other marker of identity. Saba's *habitus* of civility, which was cultivated during her Iranian childhood by a pious Muslim mother, and her highly normative sense of revulsion for the manners of her Moroccan neighbors are not enough for her to escape misrecognition (and thus disrespect) from white Dutch people. She is interpellated within a sensory regime that takes her skin color to be a sign of a religious and cultural difference that she does not even possess.

To conclude this section, the kind of race-thinking described by Arendt and later scholars of colonialism coincides historically with the rise of the counter-

Enlightenment and explicitly fascist varieties of racist thought (Berlin 1976, 1980; Herzfeld 1987; Holmes 2000), though it is not the only significant category to arise from the colonial encounter. Enlightenment notions of civilization, urbanity, and rationality were crystallized into a form of difference through colonialism also, producing the very idea of “Western civilization” in opposition to everywhere else.

Specters of European Ambivalence

The racial and religious constitution of “Western civilization” contained within it a class dimension that produced a parallel discourse of “autochthony.” Nadel-Klein (1995), for example, highlights an often-overlooked tendency to apply orientalist and occidentalist thinking within Europe itself, as documented in her study of literary depictions of rural villagers in the British Isles. These villagers, much like the “peasant” categories throughout other regions in Europe, are seen as “aliens within the gates.” They are depicted as the primordial, pre-cultural Others who threaten “western” rationality and order. Nadel-Klein connects the Hobbesian view of the peasant in the “state of nature” to contemporary political and scholarly interpretations of Balkan violence, and eastern Europe and Mediterranean backwardness and incivility. The key operating category in Nadel-Klein’s analysis is the notion of autochthony, a sense of coming from and belonging to the land that resonates strongly with the blood-and-soil aesthetics of the counter-Enlightenment (1995: 109-134).

The menacing figure of the autochthonous peasant takes on a different cast within its relationship to the rational, liberal European when autochthony becomes a

political movement to claim exclusive rights of access and belonging within the nation-state against the vagaries of late twentieth-century capital flow and economic transformation. Geschiere and Ceuppens (2005) and Geschiere and Nyamnjoh (2000) observe the correlation between the movements of people and capital in the late twentieth- and early twenty-first centuries and a rise in “autochthony” movements in both western Europe and Africa. Autochthony in this case becomes a discourse of primordial native belonging and privileged access to national resources, and it is a Janus-faced twist on the discourse of indigenous rights. As a category of difference, it is less specific than ethnicity and therefore more politically malleable, which enables the assertion of a politics of a “beleaguered majority” that is in danger of becoming a marginalized minority.

Geschiere and his colleagues understand autochthony as a political and affective response to global flows of people and capital and the sense of threat to a given national group’s access to material resources. As such it is a distinctively late twentieth-century and early twenty-first-century condition. Autochthony movements, Geschiere and his colleagues argue, are rooted in the contradictions of capitalism’s historical unfolding (Geschiere and Nyamnjoh 2000). This perspective yields an understanding of why, in a particular historical moment, certain kinds of claims to identity and belonging suddenly become salient. The premise, in Geschiere and company’s view, is that autochthony is fundamentally a local response to a global set of economic-political-historical conditions geared to produce “a mobile mass of wage-laborers” and compartmentalized and classified to control the global labor

market (Geschiere and Nyamnjoh 2001: 162). Ceuppens and Geschiere (2005) thus ask how autochthony discourse comes to appear “natural” in such disparate circumstances as those found in Africa and western Europe. The vagueness of autochthony lends it a malleability that permits constant redefinition against new “others” in a variety of contexts. In Flanders, autochthony is “caught between ‘civic’ and ‘ethnic’ definitions of citizenship, whereas its target is really the welfare state, more in danger of being undermined by the global economy than by the influx of immigrants” (Ceuppens and Geschiere 2005: 402). Autochthony discourse collapses earlier distinctions between the categories of race, religion, language, and culture, enabling xenophobic sentiments to move fluidly across local, national, regional, and global scales, while harnessing diffuse anxieties over access to the welfare state’s resources (Geschiere and Ceuppens 2005).

Douglas Holmes (2000) makes a related argument in his analysis of integralism, an umbrella category encompassing a range of politics from both the Left and the Right in Europe that is a direct heir of the counter-Enlightenment. Integralism is a particular kind of nationalism that “disparages the secular nation-state” (2000: 13) and the Enlightenment principles undergirding visions of progressive cosmopolitanism. Holmes attributes integralism to the alienating effects of modern industrialization—displacement and poverty—that evoke a “broadly experienced rupture” (Holmes 2000: 4) in a collective sense of belonging. Integralism enacts a commitment to a particular, unified notion of tradition and locally defined identity that is based on an essentialist perspective of culture and identity rooted in the

Counter-Enlightenment. It is catalyzed by an experience of social dissonance produced by “fast-capitalism,” an incarnation of capitalism distinguished not so much by its speed as its corrosive effects on existing ethical and social formations. One of the formations radically refigured by fast-capitalism is the relationship between “the poor” and society, where the poor have lost their instrumental value to the rest of their community. The implications of this argument are similar to that of Geschiere et al., as the “poor,” or “surplus labor,” have become the target for political and intellectual elites to enact their exclusionary philosophies (Geschiere and Nyamnjoh 2000). In each of these cases, autochthony achieves its political power and poetic resonance directly from counter-Enlightenment thought and sensibilities, expressed most powerfully by the metaphor of “blood-and-soil.”

This “blood-and-soil” metaphor articulates a polymorphous relationship between identity and state power. John Borneman (1991) has noted that in the ferment of central European national consolidation, which coincided with the Enlightenment and the establishment of liberal democratic states elsewhere, Europeans of both liberal and illiberal persuasions began to link their sense of cultural, linguistic, and historical connection to place with sovereign power (Borneman 1991: 10-15; see also Balibar 2004). With the consolidation of disparate peoples into national groupings, nationalist thought produced particular templates and narratives for those whose differences, for a variety of reasons, could not (or would not) be easily submerged into a national identity. Complex differences in local histories account for the dissimilar fates of Europe’s Jews, Roma, Basques, Bretons,

Corsicans, Cornish, Welsh, Lapps, Swedish-speaking Finns, Walloons, Friulians, and Frisians, among many, many others. The history of each group's relationship with the nation-state tells a different story. The universalized category of "minority" as it is conceived in conventional usage, however, has been fashioned by European sociological and anthropological theory from the iconic, and bloody, experiences of Europe's Jewish and Romani populations. In this usage, the category of "minority" is conceptualized as an irreducible form of difference—a conflation of race, culture, and religion—that challenges the discursive power of the nation-state. As a result, these minorities became objects of the European nation-state's most gruesomely violent anxieties.

A number of studies of the position of Jewish groups in early modern Europe reveal foundational moments in the formation of secular European states that continue to implicate new minorities in their effects (Arendt 1968; Benbassa 1999; Hyman 1998; Markell 2003). These studies have shown a complex relationship between religious identity and the ways in which difference and national belonging came to be understood during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as secularism was emerging as a formal doctrine of state and thinkers from Hegel to Marx to Herder occupied themselves with the "Jewish Question" (Markell 2003; Hodgkinson and Foley 2003). The assumed universal validity of Hegel's and Marx's musings contributed to the universalization of Jewish outsidership in Europe as the very definition of "minorityhood." Furthermore, the universalization of "the Jewish

Question” made axiomatic the assumption that minorityhood, in all its possible forms, is inherently a political and theoretical problem to solve.

Patchen Markell’s (2003) discussion of the emancipation of German Jews in the nineteenth century illuminates a stubborn paradox in the way religious identity has been figured into national belonging. The question of the political emancipation of German Jews was bound up in questions of an emerging state sovereignty that required a form of recognition *from* unemancipated minorities as much as it promised to *bestow* recognition. In order to make German Jews subjects of German sovereignty, a radical discursive transformation had to take place around the definition of their difference. Where once they were seen as members of a *Volk* or *Nation* (themselves highly circumscribed, biologized, and culturally contingent categories) whose cultural difference translated into an absolute political outsidersness, Jewish difference became defined as a matter of individual belief (Markell 2003: 136). In the period of burgeoning disciplinary regimes of power (Foucault 1991), European Jews had to be brought into the nation-state in a way that changed the discursive ground of their difference. This move resulted in a problematic paradox, also highlighted by Paula Hyman in her study of the French Enlightenment’s construction of Jewish difference, in that Jews were now an eternally marked category *within* the nation and subject to its powers and constantly in need of monitoring by the sovereign (Markell 2003; Hyman 1998).

The historical experience of the Jewish minority in Europe during the period of modern nation-building resonates with the experience of religious minorities in

western Europe today, as their recognition of difference is hinged on a paradoxical requirement to assimilate while maintaining their visible difference. Markell theorizes the ambivalence of the state towards religious minorities, but undertheorizes the ambivalence of the minority itself to the entire project, as evidenced by the split between Jewish reformers and traditionalists (Markell 2003: 144-147). At the heart of this ambivalence lies the complex and ambiguous relationship in nationalist thought between religion and race as forms of irreducible difference that could inspire loyalties beyond the borders of the sovereign state.

The history of ambivalence on all sides toward difference, and the question of whether difference is inherently threatening to the discursive power of the modern nation-state, also plays out in contemporary western European multiculturalism projects. Assimilation into the nation-state is required, and yet difference must be continually marked so as to monitor its potential discursive challenge to the nation. At the same time, minority groups themselves struggle to determine the grounds on which they relate to the nation-state and how they themselves understand what it means to be who they are. Many of the confusions and conflations that occur in the political struggles around the status of immigrants and refugees in Europe today emerge from the universalized discourse of minorityhood modeled off the particular experiences of European Jews and, to a lesser extent, the Roma. While there are many resonant similarities between the experiences of older and newer minorities, universalized discourse obscures a number of crucial differences.

Sociologist Yasemin Soysal (1994) observes another layer of ambivalence on a global scale as nation-states of the late twentieth century reckoned with the discourse of universal human rights. This specifically liberal discourse empowers a conception of belonging that complicates the racializing “blood and soil” model of citizenship characteristic of nineteenth- and twentieth-century European nationalist thought (Linke 1999). Rather than citizenship being staked upon genealogical histories tying the citizen to a bounded a territory, with the belief in essentialized cultural identity that attends it, in liberal thought citizenship is staked upon the presumption of a universal, abstract citizen-subject.

Liberalism thus enables a civic, rather than ethnic, basis for political membership in a state (Benhabib 2002), but contains within it the paradoxical requirement of (a potentially exclusionary) cultural belonging to facilitate the liberal aspiration for freely-chosen political participation (Povinelli 2002). Significant difference poses a problem for the premise of the universal abstract citizen-subject. Much of the scholarship theorizing civic models for political participation in the European nation-state is stamped with the European desire for a particular kind of universal. As we see in the Dutch case, this universalist desire is an effort to reckon with the multiple, continent-wide hauntings left by the Holocaust and the World Wars, foundational moments in the construction of shared European identity, even as they were the apotheosis of the national and colonial entanglement between race and nation (Arendt 1968; Balibar 1991; Bunzl 2004).

Povinelli argues that liberal multiculturalism runs the risk of “scattering the self” whenever it elicits from its minorities a performance of difference within the bounds of acceptable cultural belonging, because of the perduring danger that cultural differences might edge beyond the tolerable, the recognizable, or the reducible (2002: 4-5). In the late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century version of the European secular, minority subjects are now needed “to provide a sensorium of cultural competition and difference without subjecting the liberal subjects to the consuming winds of social conflict” (Povinelli 2002: 16) so that the European secular nation-state can enact and embody a universal, inclusive liberalism. Povinelli investigates the tensions this produces in minority citizen-subjects who continue to inhabit a relationship of mutual ambivalence with the nation-state, especially when they are caught between conflicting pull of their own liberal political subjectivities and the apprehension and experience of their own, sometimes illiberal, difference.

While Povinelli locates her ethnographic work in Australia (in some ways a European periphery), Matti Bunzl (2004) takes up similar questions with reference to the historical and present-day relationships that exist between the Austrian nation-state and its Jewish and queer minorities. The defining event of his analysis is the Holocaust; he traces its violent logic to the exclusionary politics of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century nation-state. Bunzl distinguishes between minority identities (in the case of Jewish citizens) and minority practices (understood as deviant behavior) in the case of queer citizens. The logic of the nation-state, Bunzl argues, is shifting toward a more inclusive cosmopolitanism under the influence of liberal

discourses espoused, and enforced, by the European Union. This, he argues, corrodes the sovereignty and exclusivity of the early modern nation-state, which in turn leads to an affirmative and inclusive logic in which Jewish and queer identities are accepted and celebrated. There is a gap between Bunzl's and Povinelli's analyses in the way they conceive of the liberatory potential of twenty-first-century liberalism. For Bunzl (2004), the liberal conception of ethical personhood has *expanded* to include Jewish religious difference and queer sexual difference. For Povinelli (2002), liberalism *reduces* the variety of possible forms of personhood on which citizenship can be staked by rendering difference superficial and cosmetic. The underlying subjectivities thus fall in line with the universal, abstract-citizen subject. Where Bunzl sees liberation, Povinelli sees violence.

The gap between Povinelli's and Bunzl's analyses of liberalism's emancipatory potential raises the question of how a particular minority's "difference" is experienced and conceptualized in relation to the nation-state in a given moment of history. In both the Australian and Austrian cases, contemporary multiculturalist discourse is haunted by public shame over the Holocaust and the brutal repression of Australian Aborigines, while Jewishness, queerness, and Aboriginalness are reworked into *particular kinds of difference* that are acceptable within a liberal, multicultural state. Each group's difference is acceptable and worth celebrating as long as it does not disrupt the secular condition of public reason and private rationality.

It is with explicit awareness of this broader European context of liberalizing politics that the Netherlands defines itself as an anti-racist state. The cosmopolitan

nation upon which this state is imagined to rest entails an unstable mix of consensus-driven corporatism—the legacy of pillarization—and increasing liberalization. As I show below, the tension between corporatism and liberalism has a direct bearing on Syriac Orthodox efforts to represent themselves to the Dutch state. Such tension emerges in the uncertainty over the ethical identity of the multicultural citizen-subject. This is why a more textured understanding of how race has operated as a technology of power in Dutch colonial history is able to illuminate how the multiculturalism debates turn on anxieties over the cultivation of ethical citizen-subjects. As the sensorial register of ethical classifications, the history of race-thinking in the Netherlands shows precisely *how* religious difference comes to be construed as a problem for the body politic. Ironically, the national Dutch forgetting of its colonial history was also a way to forget how race worked in producing the moral subjectivities of bourgeois Europeans in the era of nation-formation.³⁴ In the nineteenth century, race worked as the

organizing grammar of an imperial order in which modernity, the civilizing mission, and the “measure of man” were framed. And with it, “culture” was harnessed to do more specific political work; not only to mark difference, but

³⁴ Other Foucauldian-influenced thinkers on European pluralism such as Etienne Balibar (1991) have recognized how race continues to be central to the practice of biopolitics. It is likewise striking that Marilyn Strathern, writing of the study of European kinship (1992, 2005), asserts that whenever Euro-Americans discover something about genetics, they feel they have learned something about kinship. Biology is taken to be fundamental to identity in a way that makes it a matter of public and political concern. In other words, the implication is that European notions of identity are inherently racialized.

to rationalize the hierarchies of privilege and profit, to consolidate labor regimes of expanding capitalism, to provide the psychological scaffolding for the exploitative structures of colonial rule (Stoler 1994: 27).

Crucially, Stoler's Foucauldian analysis of Dutch race-thinking in colonial governance shows how conceptions of race linked color and religion to shape new disciplines of knowledge that "permeate the body politic at large" (Stoler 1994: 27). This accounts for the dissimilarity between middle- and upper-class cosmopolitan nationalism, on the one hand, and overtly xenophobic right-wing social movements, on the other. Nyamnjoh and Geschiere (2000) and Holmes (2000) rightly identify the roots of populist European mobilization against minorities in anxieties over access to the retrenching welfare state, but there is more to the story when accounting for the race-thinking of otherwise self-consciously anti-racist cosmopolitans. Explicit working-class racism is linked to, but not precisely the same as, the generalized race-thinking that permeates the common-sense of all classes of the Dutch body politic. The biopolitics of race-thinking is not so much about cultivating bourgeois Christian bodies, as it is about creating secular, late-capitalist bodies—a civilized *habitus* predicated on the "emancipated," "speaking," subject who exists in a very specific kind of relationship to the history and category of religion. I turn now to this secular conception of a civilized *habitus* and its silencing effect on the Dutch-Syriac liturgical subject.

Really Living With the Other

On a hot, muggy July day, I walk to Hilversum station to meet Nime, who has come to see me from Amsterdam. Nime grew up in Oldenzaal (a small town in Twente, near Enschede and Hengelo), but has been living in Amsterdam for several years, where she studies at university to be a dentist. She is 24 years old and had her last exam ever yesterday. She is still a regular member of the women's choir at her parents' church, even though she lives hours away.

As we walk from the station to a café terrace in the center of Hilversum, she tells me that she hopes to find two different part-time jobs, one in Amsterdam, and one in or near Oldenzaal, so that she can keep spending weekends there to attend church with her parents. We sit at a table outdoors and order cold drinks and a cappuccino. She speaks eagerly, full of ideas and feelings and passion. She says that she is entering a phase in her life where she feels she is having an identity crisis: she is trying to figure out what it means to be Dutch and to be *Suryayto* (a Syriac woman) at the same time. She finds it very difficult: over and over again she refers to it as a struggle.

We flow seamlessly between Dutch and English, as she is a highly educated university student, and English at times provides expressions we need that are difficult to convey in Dutch. She is irritated with Dutch attitudes about integration. The problem, she says, is not minorities' failure to integrate, but the Dutch inability to really respect difference, that they absolutely *cannot* and *must not* be themselves, if they want to be accepted in Dutch society. The prevailing view, she thinks, is that "it is fine to be different over there, but not where we can see it or be affected by it."

Here race suddenly becomes part of the conversation: we are at a rather nice café in Hilversum, which is the center point of a posh region in Holland called ‘t Gooi, and she points out that in this wealthy area, everyone is blond, and no one looks like her. My own observations is that it isn’t 100% blond, but it is blond enough that I understand where her self-consciousness comes from. Her predicament is that she feels she cannot be part-Dutch or part-Suryayto; partial identity in one means an entire rejection of the other, and she does not know what to do about it. It does not make sense in Holland that “Christian” is her identity, something she was born with and that comes with family and social obligations, not something she chooses—even though, at the same time, she says, if she were to cease to believe in God, she would cease to be Suryoyo. She knows she would no longer be accepted in the community. She does, however, distinguish between Suryoye (Syriac) and *Oromoye* (Aramean). She is secretary of the Suryoye Aramese Federatie Nederland, the nation-wide Aramean cultural organization that coordinates the activities of local Aramean organizations; she is soon to be appointed national director. She supports the establishment in Hengelo of Aram House, a building that can be both a museum and a conference center for the community, which would have nothing to do with the church. When she speaks of *geloof* (literally “belief” but used functionally like the English word “faith” or “religion” as in “What is your religion?”), she means it as something different from being *Oromoye*. I ask her, “if someone who had been involved with the church, and was an active Suryoyo for fifty years, were to have a spiritual crisis when they were older, what would happen?” She says, “it would have

to be kept secret and brushed under the rug, or you would be shunned by the community and held to be no longer Suryoyo!” As an example, she mentions an aunt who has left the community and is shunned. She has become completely Dutch, and has no contact with the family or anyone else in the community. This story echoes many other stories I heard from other choir women who have also lost connection with family-members who have converted to Protestant Christianity.

“The expectations in the community are intense,” Nicme says. “You are expected to marry another Suryoyo, and that, far too young.” She raises her voice, passionately striking her hand on the arm of her chair: *“dat kan toch niet?! Het kan gewoon niet! Zo werkt de wereld niet!”* [That cannot be, can it?! It just cannot be! The world does not work like that!] She says, “I had to tell my parents...it just was not going to work out that way. I have done everything I could have and should have done. I have been a dedicated member of all the organizations and have gone to all the events, but it has not happened and it probably will not.”

She speaks lovingly of her own parents. Although they were somewhat fearful when she moved to Amsterdam and became depressed following her departure, her parents have been supportive of her efforts to develop herself, grow, and make her own decisions. But, she says, there are some problems in the larger family, and part of why she decided to leave originally was because she needed to extricate herself from what she sees as the dysfunction of her relatives.

She feels the problems in her larger family are typical of the community and a result of being overly insular themselves. By not looking outwards, and by not

opening themselves up to the world and the society they are in, they are trapped in (what she thinks of as) immature habits of mind and behavior like intense competition, feuding, and the nursing of resentments over minor slights and grievances. Nicme says most people in the community lack perspective on their lives. In the years she has been living in Amsterdam, making Dutch friends, going to school, and learning about the world, she has noticed she has outgrown her age-mate cousin who stayed home and went to the University of Twente. Where once they responded in the same way to things, now she is perplexed by her cousin's attitudes, reactions and the way she handles her relationships with other people. Even though they both went to VWO, the highest level of university prep high school, and both went to university, their outlook and emotional development have taken different trajectories, because she physically removed herself from the tightknit community and her cousin did not.

I ask about the village politics that seem to affect the community's ability to organize and communicate with each other. Nicme sighs, with evident exasperation: "they want to recreate Tur Abdin in Holland and they do not understand that is is not possible!" She thinks that people cannot go back and should not preoccupy themselves with going back to a place that has nothing, no people, nothing going on to offer themselves or their children. She says, "we have to accept what we have lost and not try to get it back. What we still have, yes, we should protect and take care of, but we should not waste energy and resources trying to recreate something that does not and cannot exist anymore."

In Nicme's view, this mindset is not good for the community: it keeps them small-minded, parochial, and disengaged from the world they are a part of, and it is contributing to the problems they recognize. Nicme feels the community is stuck partially because of this unwillingness to move on. It is hurting the community and their ability to be recognized or accepted in the Netherlands. She tells me that when she was young, she and her sister made a pact with each other to never speak Turoyo outside the house or at school:

Dutch people judge you for it. I would never do this interview with someone in Turoyo, in a public space like this. People would look at me and I would be *afgekeurd* (rejected) immediately. On the outside, I have to be Dutch, and one hundred percent so, even though I am not on the inside. It is difficult. I do not know what to do about it. I do not know what to think about it.

Nicme raises numerous questions about the tensions of living as a racial-religious minority in the Netherlands. She faces pressures from within her community as well as pressures from without. She awkwardly inhabits the borderlands between her family-religion (her liturgical identity) and the secular cosmopolitan Dutch nation, although her participation in the liturgical choir at her parents' church continues to be the one non-negotiable dimension of her existence. The first question Nicme raises is one of the dialectical relationship between externally imposed ghettoization and an impulse within the community to keep to themselves, which relates to the complex transformation of the way the Dutch have historically organized pluralism through the pillarization system.

The second issue is produced by the first: Nicme feels that the Syriac Orthodox community maintains its difference by not engaging with others around them, and that in the long run this will hurt both the Syriac community and society at large. Keeping together in an insular way and reenacting the social dynamics of life in a rural Turkish village cannot and should not be sustained. But this pushes up against the third tension, which is that Syriac sociality is bound up with Christian liturgical identity and as such is the ethical core of being Syriac. To lose that sociality risks losing the qualities that make Syriac Christians ethically recognizable to themselves: the spoken and sung dialects of the Aramaic language and the tightly-knit bonds that connect families to each other through the church. As a highly-educated citizen who has left certain elements of these behaviors behind her, she can still be painfully rejected by her white Dutch peers if she expresses any part of herself that is not normative of white middle-class Dutch identity. When she and I sat together in a white-middle class Dutch space, it was perfectly acceptable (even a sign of prestige) for us to switch occasionally into English to capture some elusive thought, but it would not have been acceptable to switch into Aramaic.

This final issue—not being able to speak what she feels is an important part of who she is—is connected to a crucial point she made in another part of the conversation that day:

Really living with the Other is the great problem of society. It is a problem for me too. My neighbor is gay. Publicly, of course it is no problem, he is my neighbor, it is fine. But deep down, inside, I know the Bible says being gay is not okay, and I am a Christian before anything else. So that makes me a hypocrite...I am just as bad as anyone else.

Language and moral identity are impossible for Nicme to disentangle in her sense of what it is to be a Syriac Christian, but it is precisely these parts of her self that she must silence to achieve the secular civilized *habitus* of a respected Dutch citizen. Nicme’s crisis has to do with how hard she has to work at cross-purposes with herself. Laboring to exhaustion to protect and preserve an endangered linguistic-religious identity (which, when linked to kin-relations constitute a liturgical identity), she simultaneously works to silence and suppress the very religious subjectivity that is shaped by and gives shape to that identity. The affective and ethical reach of her liturgical identity—in its entanglement with insular kin-relations, in the effort to preserve *Turoyo* and revive classical Syriac, and in the cultivation of a moral disposition—is not simply inaudible to her secular Dutch environment: she must actively work to keep it silent. This suggests a distinction between “speaking” and “audibility” within the secular civilized *habitus* that is now normative for Dutch conceptions of multicultural citizenship.

Gloria Wekker (2004), herself a Surinamese-Dutch anthropologist, unpacks the relationship between speaking and Dutch citizenship from a postcolonial perspective. She considers the complex, submerged connection between racial and religious difference in the constitution of Dutch national identity. She argues that Dutch colonial race-thinking did not end with decolonization but was re-channeled into a progressive discourse of international humanitarian aid and development. The coupling of racial identity and religious identity as an object of domination in the

colonial encounter was not merely suppressed and forgotten by the Dutch public sphere, but was sublimated into an ethics of international cooperation, as the Dutch became “champions” of aid to the Third World in the 1970s and 1980s. This ethics of cooperation, however, was marked by an enduring, implicitly neocolonial sense that the Global South needed, in her words, “to shape up” under guidance from the white, civilized North (Wekker 2004: 494). This reproduced a common-sense notion, originally forged in the colonial encounter, that whiteness stands for the universal in an immediate and concrete way that continues to circulate without critical reflection in the Dutch public sphere as well as in everyday interpersonal interactions (see also Ghorashi 2005).

In this way, race became a visual sign of “emancipation” in Dutch multicultural politics: a gendered, sexualized, and temporalized conception of freedom defined by having been released from some previous external restraint or control. This notion found expression in a November 2003 proclamation by the Minister for Social Affairs, who announced that the emancipation of autochthonous women was a *fait accompli*³⁵ (Wekker 2004: 490). This proclamation codified a prevalent assumption that white, middle-class Dutch women are the epitome of modern emancipation. At the same time, the proclamation flagged the continued coupling of race with a civilized *habitus*—now defined by bourgeois emancipation

³⁵ See also

http://www.aletta.nu/ezines/web/OpGelijkeVoet/2003/November/emancipatie_allochtone_vrouwen_prioriteit.htm for detailed interview from November 2003 in which Minister de Geus outlined his policy objectives for migrant women.

rather than bourgeois Christianity. This proclamation came in spite of the fact that some racial minorities, for example Surinamese women, participate in the labor market at a noticeably higher rate than white women (Wekker 2004: 490-491).

Empirical realities continue to fly in the face of dominant representations in the public sphere for specifically political reasons, as a cohort of Dutch sociologists are beginning to show (van Reekum and Duyvendak 2012; Duyvendak and Scholten 2012; Bertossi and Duyvendak 2012; Duyvendak and Scholten 2011; Hurenkamp, Tonkens and Duyvendak 2011). Race works as a silent ordering principle in Dutch conceptions of national identity, obscuring, for example, the fact that “one in every six Dutch people has migrant ancestry (Huguenots, Belgians, Spanish and Portuguese Jews, Hungarians, Indonesians, Surinamese, Antillians or Turks and Moroccans)” (Wekker 2004: 491). Facilitated by national educational curricula and media representations, this recurring self-misrecognition is the effect of an actively suppressed historical consciousness in the public sphere. In turn, this misrecognition produces widespread expectations that minorities “shed” their difference and non-normative identities as quickly as possible. However, as Wekker points out, and as Heleen observed at the beginning of this chapter, assimilation is nearly impossible for those with dark skin:

In the public sphere the assimilationist model of mono-ethnicism and monoculturalism is so hegemonic that all signs of being from elsewhere should be erased. Of course, those who can phenotypically ‘pass for’ Dutch, i.e. those who are white, are in an advantageous position. It is migrants with dark skin color who do not succeed in enforcing their claim on Dutchness or have it accepted as legitimate (Wekker 2004: 492).

The difference between the butcher's treatment of Heleen and his treatment of her more "Middle Eastern-looking" aunt attests to this claim. As the Netherlands constituted itself after World War Two as "a small, but just nation, providing international, ethical leadership" (Wekker 2004: 292), the Dutch imperial past and involvement in the slave trade has been almost entirely removed from the Dutch educational curriculum and from public debates about Dutch identity. This constitutes what Wekker calls "a massive blind-spot, which barely hides a structure of superiority towards people of color" (2004: 492).

Colonial nostalgia sublimated as an ethical (white, post-Christian) cosmopolitanism finds expression in a discourse of emancipation that produces Dutch subject-citizens who "speak" their identity. Suhraiya Jivraj and Anisa de Jong (2011) show how Dutch "tolerance" has become an explicitly nationalist discourse that approaches minority identities by "emancipating" them from themselves, their histories, their communities, and their commitments. In Jivraj and de Jong's analysis, "speaking" and "dialogue" are the key tropes of the Dutch state's "homo-emancipation" policy, which pushes queer Muslims to "speak" their sexual identities publicly and according to a confessional model of sexual subjectivity. This frequently entails a public breaking with their own ethnic and religious identities. Ironically, they argue, the policy has the effect of silencing the people it is intended to emancipate (see also Mepschen, Duyvendak and Tonkens 2010 for broader discussion of more explicit entanglements of gay rights discourse with anti-Islamic politics and representations).

The homo-emancipation policy, and the way it is implemented vis-à-vis religious and ethnic minorities, is particularly revelatory for understanding the secular civilized *habitus* and its relation to the category of religion. The policy turns on a political and publicly shared assumption that sexual identity is both biological (thus inherent and immutable) and public: it is the “speakable” part of a citizen’s identity. Indeed, it must be spoken, at the expense of religious and ethnic identities, in order to constitute the minority subject as a “free” citizen. This suggests that the secular civilized *habitus* partitions sexual subjectivity from religious subjectivity. This partitioning constitutes religion as a minor category of social life: invisible, inaudible, and highly circumscribed. Even more importantly, from a secular stand-point, religion is not an immutable category of experience or identity, and as such belongs in the realm of the “ethically optional.” The sexual, on the other hand, belongs squarely in the public sphere where it is both “not optional” and subject to biopolitics. Failure to “speak” sexual identity becomes a sign of “unwillingness” on the part of religious and ethnic minorities to integrate (Jivraj and de Jong 2011: 155). Thus the erasure of queer Muslims and other religious and ethnic minorities from the public sphere is secured by partitioning a “speaking” sexual subjectivity from a “silent” religious subjectivity. This is a concrete problem for multicultural citizenship, and it throws the implicit uncertainty surrounding the question of the tolerance of difference in the stories of Heleen and Nicme into relief.

Organizing Difference

There is a tension within diverse academic accounts of Dutch historical attitudes toward difference that reflects the tensions within those historical attitudes themselves. Sam Cherribi, a Moroccan-born, French-educated, and self-avowed secular Muslim sociologist who served for awhile among the first cohort of Dutch-Moroccan Members of Parliament in the 1990s, attributes late twentieth-century multicultural policies to a historical Dutch spirit of tolerance. This, he writes, is the spirit inherited from both Spinoza and from Snouk Hurgronje, the nineteenth-century attaché for the colonial government in the East Indies who converted to Islam and argued that interfering with the affairs of Muslim locals would be bad for trade (Cherribi 2010). This is an outward-looking spirit of tolerance that essentially amounts to: “it is in our own interest not to annihilate you.”³⁶ This is a different set of social concerns than those implicit in the careful policing of the boundary between the bourgeois white Christian European colonizers and the racial-religious colonized Others that Stoler describes. It is not the tolerance that Nicme nods to in her reflection on her own inability to “really live with the Other,” which she describes as her inability to speak her own moral identity as a Syriac Christian in public, as well as her inability to integrate her private reading of the Bible with her social relationships with

³⁶ This tradition was famously and controversially invoked by former Prime Minister Balkenende in a speech to the *Tweede Kamer* (Lower House of Parliament) where he nostalgically referred to the *VOC* (*Vereenigde Oost-Indie Compagnie*) *mentaliteit*, or the “Dutch East Indies Company mentality” in which, he said, the Dutch expressed their best qualities of creativity, mercantilist drive, and spirit of adventurous exploration. Dutch-Surinamese political groups immediately demanded an apology for whitewashing the Dutch role in the slave-trade during the VOC period. See *Volkscrant* 10/26/2006 for coverage of the outcry.

her neighbors. It is also not the tolerance expressed by the Dutch Protestant and Catholic Churches who have since the 1960s been on the vanguard of protecting minority religious identities from secular silencing in the name of a meaningful religious pluralism. Led by the *Raad van Kerken* [the Council of Churches], devout Dutch Christians have lobbied and organized in defense of Muslim and other religious minority rights under the motto of *Samen Leven, Samen Bidden* (“Living Together, Praying Together”). First opening up their churches to Muslim immigrants to use for prayer, these churches played a central role in shaping early Moroccan and Turkish community organizing along religious lines. Interestingly, Cherribi interprets these efforts as misguided, because they have the unfortunate effect of shaping the “non-secular dynamic” of Islamic community formation in the Netherlands, to the detriment of all (2010).

These churches, however, represent the last vestiges of Dutch *verzuiling* (“pillarization”), a system of organizing religious difference according to a corporatist model of representation and recognition. From the mid-nineteenth century until the 1960s, Dutch pluralism operated as a system of “pillars” in which there was a religious organization for every aspect of life: school, labor union, political party, newspaper, sports league, butcher, baker, and even the bar. The Orthodox Calvinist-led movement to maintain careful boundaries between religious (and comparable ideological) blocs developed in the early nineteenth century as part of a backlash against French Enlightenment values negatively associated with the Napoleonic occupation of Holland from 1806 to 1813. Dutch historian Annemarie Houkes

(2009) argues that when the Constitution was reformed in 1848 to formalize the separation of church and state, Orthodox Protestants led the way in establishing a political culture in which religious institutions alone mediated the integration of new groups of citizens into public life, in outright opposition to Enlightenment-influenced Liberals who would eventually be incorporated into the pillarized approach to organizing society anyway. Consolidated by conservative Calvinist demands in 1878 to procure equal state funding for religious schools, religious pluralism was secured through a rigid, vertically organized, and self-reproducing system of outright segregation³⁷. Protestants, Catholics, Liberal Humanists, and later, Socialists maintained their difference through endogamous marriage practices and were represented to the state by elites from within the pillar. Under the leadership of Orthodox Reformed theologian and politician Abraham Kuyper, the Anti-Revolutionary Party (ARP) formulated the concept of *souvereniteit in eigen kring*, “sphere sovereignty,” as an alternative to theocracy in a compromise with the equally powerful Liberal Party. Although the political landscape was fraught with faction-splitting, the ARP maintained its dominant and influential position in Dutch politics through the 1970s, until it dissolved in 1974 and was reformulated into the Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA). Since the 1980s, power has predominantly shuffled

³⁷ South African *apartheid* would be modeled on this principle.

between the CDA, the Liberal Party (VVD), and the Labor Party (PvdA),³⁸ occasionally punctuated by populist uprisings and marked by brief periods of ascendancy by the anti-Islamic parties *List Pim Fortuyn* and Geert Wilders' Freedom Party (*Partij van de Vrijheid*).

Blom and Talsma (2000) offer a careful corrective to the view that *verzuiling* was an official system or was known as such by those who took part in it, as is often assumed by non-Dutch observers. "Pillarization" is an after-the-fact metaphor used to describe the ad-hoc arrangements of a pluralist society that emerged contingently through ongoing political and social negotiation. The power of the metaphor is that even in Dutch, one can speak of "toppling" or "dismantling" the pillars as if any such thing could be decisively accomplished. Recent Dutch scholarship such as that by Houkes (2009) and Blom and Talsma (2000) shows how the entrenched nature of "pillarized" thinking about self and society enables a perception that sectarianism has been successfully overcome without much actual substantive change in corporatist habits of thought. Equally lost in the narrative of de-pillarization is enduring residue of the distinctly Calvinist conception of *deugd*, or religious virtue, which with *eenheid*, (unity) and *harmonie*, (harmony) became the moral foundation of the national civilizing project of the nineteenth century as much

³⁸ During my fieldwork in the municipality of Enschede, where most Dutch-Syriacs live, three Syriac Orthodox serve on the city council: two Arameanists as members of the CDA, and one Assyrianist as member of the PvdA.

for Liberals and Catholics as for Protestants (van der Laarse 2009: 36-42)³⁹. Here, religious differences were organized vertically, but national citizenship depended on the universalization of an ethical vision of Protestant Christian virtue.

This is a key insight for understanding the predicament in which Syriac Orthodox Christians now find themselves as they attempt to procure recognition from the state and from their neighbors. Syriac Orthodox religious difference is subsumed within the racial-religious category of *allochthonen*, which has in many ways come to be construed by the Dutch state and society as the Muslim pillar (as in the WRR government report quoted above; see also Cherribi 2010 and Buruma 2006). Suryoye efforts to inhabit a hyphenated Syriac (Assyrian/Aramean)-Dutch form of multicultural citizenship is hindered by post-pillarized attitudes towards the role religious identity *should* be playing in a minority community that shares in the virtuous conception of national identity.

To Speak of Normal Things: Religious Silence and Secular Rupture

In her recent ethnographic research on genetic counseling in the Netherlands, Karen-Sue Taussig found that *verzuiling* continues to be integral to a nationally cultivated world-view. She observes that for mainstream Dutch society there are “different kinds of difference” that require explicit management by credentialed

³⁹ Van der Laarse refers explicitly to the formation of the Dutch nation in the nineteenth century as a project to “Protestantize” the Enlightenment (2009: 7-10).

experts (Taussig 2009: 28). Her work also locates a tension between the enduring pillarized approach to bounding and managing difference, on the one hand, and the obscuring narrative of de-pillarization, in which boundaries have been overcome to produce the liberal “abstract citizen,” on the other (cf. French example in Gauchet 1997; Scott 1996, 2007).

Taussig makes a revelatory point for American anthropologists accustomed to thinking about Foucault’s depiction of normalization as a “subtle” process. In Dutch genetic centers, as elsewhere, normalization is explicit, openly acknowledged, and deliberately pursued (2009: 86). The concern shared by her geneticist interlocutors is to render genetic differences *gewoon* (“ordinary”) by categorizing them. The notion of ordinariness is ubiquitous in the Dutch language: unusual only in that it is used constantly, everywhere, to reaffirm what is supposed to be unmarked in everyday Dutch society. *Gewone Nederlanders* are everything Gloria Wekker described above: white, post-Christian, and inclined to believe in their own universality. Rendering difference *gewoon* through processes of classification, Taussig argues, is an essential technique of tolerance: the social ideal of ordinariness is achieved by managing difference (2009: 87). She notes that while categories themselves may be contestable, the imperative to categorize is never contested, while building consensus is essential to the process of producing categories. Here the Syriac Orthodox fail (from a Dutch perspective) again, because building consensus is impossible for reasons that transcend the Dutch context. Debates within the Dutch-Syriac community about whether to consent to be classified as Assyrian, Aramean, or Suryoye relate to

transnational and historical pressures that exceed the Dutch national context. These transnational and supra-national pressures push diasporic elites to split ethnicity from religion. The Dutch state, its bureaucrats, its social workers, its school teachers, and its academics are less concerned with *which* category Syriac Orthodox Christians ally themselves as long as they claim *a* category, preferably one that translates into their own racialized idiom of recognition.

Taussig tells a startling story of a diagnostic audit where geneticists debated whether a Turkish child under examination was physiologically dysmorphic “for a Turk” using language that suggested their view of phenotype/morphology was nationally bounded (2009: 127). In other words, these geneticists equated biology with nationality, though, interestingly, they referred to national identity as ethnicity. She describes a visual regime of identification in the diagnostic production of categories in which notions of national, racial, and ethnic identity play an important part in the interpretation and normalization of bodies.

Even more salient connections between citizenship, national identity, religious difference, and a racial regime of classification are evident in Taussig’s analysis of the way the secular scientists in her study equate religious identity with a form of self-silencing that is damaging to “normal,” healthy living. Specifically, Dutch geneticists are frequently faced with Orthodox Calvinist patients from the *Bijbelgordel* (the Dutch Bible Belt) who do not “speak” their sexual and medical

identities because such things (they assume) are religiously taboo.⁴⁰ The religious taboo here is seen as dangerous because the things that are being “silenced” are, in the secular scientists’ view, important biological truths. Religion thus gets in the way of dealing with “normal” things like sickness and health in a “normal” way. This view not only guides medical practices in relation to religious minorities (in this case conservative Calvinists) but also contributes to the construction of the category of religion as the non-modern other against which the modern Dutch self (that is, the person who is free to speak about normal things like sex and the body) is defined (Taussig 2009: 146).

This is also, crucially, a spatialized and temporalized imaginary. The Dutch Bible Belt is a temporal construct as much as a geographic location: people here are seen as “backwards.” It is this very perception of backwardness, however, that makes them interesting to Taussig’s geneticists, who see a biological mapping of religious identity in religiously sanctioned endogamous marriage practices. While the secular perception is that self-silencing on biological matters is a mark of being religious, there is a simultaneous biologization of religious identity in bio-medical terms. This biologization shapes the way that religious identity is imagined and how it is seen to fit into the secular modernity of Dutch cosmopolitan national identity. Religion can thus lead to “dangerous situations,” and processes of categorization keep such

⁴⁰ The implicit logic here is that because Calvinists believe in the doctrine of predestination, any major disaster is a sign of God’s will that a person is not one of the Elect who are Saved. This is, for a committed Christian, a potential source of profound shame and anxiety.

religious difference from becoming a threat to social order. Secular social order in the post-pillarization era is secured by a civilized *habitus* through which citizens can “speak” their normalcy, because they are (at last) free of the silencing effects of having-been religious.

This temporal construction—the notion that religion silences—produces three sets of dilemmas for Syriac liturgical singers: 1) they resist categorization in multiple ways and at multiple levels, 2) they resist consensus, and 3) they have a racially marked ethical *habitus*. The depth and source of their ethical commitment to keeping Aramaic-speaking Christianity from dying out is, figuratively speaking, inaudible to the Dutch powers working to normalize and categorize them.

Audience, Scale, and the Audible Citizen

For all the reasons I have just described, religious difference has a particular salience in Dutch multicultural discourse in relation to a racialized sense of being not yet civilized, not yet modern, not yet free to speak in “normal” terms about one’s “normal” identity. This chronotope of secular rupture structures the terms in which minorities might make themselves audible as citizens of the multicultural nation. And yet for Syriac Orthodox Christians, religious difference has another kind of salience, and the gap between mainstream Dutch and Dutch-Syriac conceptions of religious difference renders certain dimensions of Syriac Orthodox historical experience inaudible in their Dutch surroundings. The young women of the choirs, like every Syriac Christian living in the Netherlands, are kin to someone who escaped violent conflict in their villages and towns. For those who fled Tur Abdin, these experiences

are framed in starkly religious terms. Second- and third-generation Dutch Suryoye grow up hearing from grandparents, aunts, uncles, and parents: *they killed us because we are Christian, and because they are Muslim. The Quran says they have to.* Syriac Christians struggle to make sense of these narratives and discuss them extensively amongst themselves, in the fresh light of the Dutch multiculturalism debates. They hear the agonistic currents in Dutch discourse and try to make sense of their families' memories, but a problem of scalar imagination, influences how they do so. As a young woman in the Mor Yaqub church choir told me,

Syriac people try to turn the other cheek, because that is what you are supposed to do as a Christian, but deep down we cannot get over what happened. We used to just hate the Muslim Turks and Kurds, for what they did to us, but now that feeling has expanded, because of what we hear in Holland in the news all the time, to Moroccans and Surinamese too. It does not make much sense really, but I think it happens unconsciously.

Her words demonstrate the slippage between categories and the ontological instabilities that blur the boundaries of concepts like race, religion, problem, and other in everyday experience and popular discourse. This slippage perplexes even those who engage in it. These conflated categories are the result of overlapping discourses and historical narratives. For critics of multiculturalism, the integration “problem” is caused by religious difference that produces bad behavior. Proponents of multiculturalism trying to undermine this thesis do so by calling it “racist,” because accusations of racism powerfully invoke the post-war moral conception of Dutch identity as tolerant, cosmopolitan, and always on the right side of history, depending on how one looks at the colonial occupation of Indonesia (Boehmer and De Mul

2012; Oostindie 2010). In this discourse, religious difference and racism become antonyms, while problematic behavioral otherness becomes racialized.

In Syriac Orthodox experience, the intimate is embedded within the geopolitical—a slippage between scales that is characteristic of Dutch integration and immigration discourse. Such discourse seeps into Suryoyo discussions of their place in Dutch multicultural society. Popular and political multicultural discourse fixates on Dutch Muslims, especially those individuals of Moroccan and Turkish descent, as mainstream Dutch political and media elites interpret social frictions produced by economic inequality, cultural insensitivity, and outright prejudice as problems of religious difference, and thus locatable in the otherness of Muslim immigrants and refugees (Cherribi 2010). These social frictions, most visibly taking the form of public unruliness among adolescent Moroccan (actually Rifian Berber) boys, are scaled up, however unevenly, to international geopolitical debates about violent extremism and political Islam (Valenta 2006: 444-474; van der Veer 2006: 527-538). The irritations and associations evoked among mainstream Dutch voters regarding youthful male Moroccan public unruliness are thus activated and reframed by populist leaders like Geert Wilders as a problem of Islam's incompatibility with Dutch moral identity.

It is in this context that Dutch Suryoye are keenly aware of the ease with which they can be scrutinized and judged by Dutch bureaucrats, teachers, school administrators, doctors, employers, customers, classmates, neighbors, and researchers to be a “problem.” As the school or neighborhood or workplace is rendered in the

popular and political imaginary as a microcosm of global geopolitics, the mere fact of Dutch-Syriac existence is inaudible within the obfuscating binary of white post-Christian Dutch *authochthonen* and Islamic *allochthonen*. But because of the history of violent marginalization and erasure, this oversight is not only problematic for Suryoyo activists and leaders trying to engage the political system on behalf of their community, but it also compounds the existential distress and sense of ethical crisis connected to the inaudibility of Syriac Orthodox histories of trauma, marginalization, and displacement.

I turn now to examine the variety of ways that Syriac Orthodox families respond to this sense of ethical crisis and conflicting pressures levied upon them on the national scale and on the global scale. These responses amount to a form of ethical self-fashioning that betrays the complexity and precarity of their position within the local community, within the national public sphere, and in the global secular episteme.

Chapter Five

Voices of the Spirit: The Ethics of the Singing Subject

Humans, then, are not blind egos following deterministic sequences of events, of cultural paradigms and rules. They plot sequences of experiences in narratives organized around for whom and what they care (Borneman 2001: 42).

Outsiders who see rules and not the love that runs through them are often too ready to label other people as “prisoners” (Murdoch 1978: 60).

The Weight of History

Consider Nahrin, who has no time. She carries the weight of history in her name, from Beth Nahrin, Aramaic for the stretch of ancient Mesopotamia that lies between the Tigris and Euphrates, and she feels that weight in the daily rhythms of her life. Married and in her early thirties, Nahrin has piercing green eyes, a gentle, measured voice, and a look of absorbed introspection when she speaks. On the occasions when she is caught up in the excitement of a thought, words come quickly and warmly, but then she looks abashed as she catches herself being hasty and forceful. She works full-time for the municipality; when she works with the public she is conscientious about being respectful and kind. She says that she is always careful about how Dutch people perceive her so they know that Suryoye are respectful and will be respectful in return. She throws her disciplined energy into her family and her church. Every morning for fifteen minutes, Nahrin and her nine-year-old son work together on their classical Syriac homework in preparation for Sunday

night *madresh*to, and she often drives her elderly diabetic aunt, a nun at the Mor Ephrem Monastery, to the doctor's office, to translate from Dutch to *Turoyo*. She is a leader in her parish church's youth committee, where she is developing educational programming and social events, and she sings the liturgy every Sunday in the Holy *Qurbono*, one of only two mothers at St. Jacob of Sarug Church who have chosen to return regularly to the girls' choir after marriage. She does all this while maintaining a spotlessly clean house, a well-stocked kitchen, the resources to entertain visiting kin who might drop by on a moment's notice, and a cheerful husband (a distant Lebanese cousin whose great-grandparents came from Nahrin's village in Tur Abdin, in south east Turkey). With an embarrassed laugh, she admits to reaching her limit when it comes to exercise: her husband teases her for throwing away money on a gym membership she never has time to use, but she will not give up her membership because, she says, "you have to have a gym membership. Dutch people exercise!"

Nahrin tells me that she believes in living by example and that it is her responsibility to show her son the importance of living Syriac Orthodoxy in all its aspects: caring for family, participating in church community, following church rules, studying the ancient language, and singing the liturgy in the Holy *Qurbono* every Sunday. She feels it is equally her responsibility to show Dutch society, whether the people she helps at City Hall or any one else she meets on the street, that Syriac Orthodox are good citizens: polite, respectful, and well-behaved. She says often: "to be respected, you must be respectful!"

Nahrin shows in these words a keen sense of the dialogics of recognition and how her spoken words have the power to shape not only herself and her son, but also her community, and Dutch society's perception of her community. In some ways and from some perspectives, Nahrin is the ideal embodiment of the elusive subject called forth by Dutch multiculturalism: a hybrid model of both pious Syriac motherhood (humbly vocal, selflessly hardworking in the home, visibly devout), and of the "emancipated" Middle Eastern feminine *émigré* to the Netherlands (humbly vocal, selflessly hardworking in the labor market, visibly secular). In both cases, she knows full well that her life is an object of scrutiny and a measure of success, whether of the ancient church's survival or of the Dutch state's integration policy, such that her work on her self is a selfless vocation. This vocation has both an ethical and an aesthetic dimension: she is aware of herself as a visible and audible sign of matters she cares deeply about and for which she feels personally—ethically—responsible. There is an interplay of ethical and aesthetic actions in Nahrin's life that cannot be disentangled.

In the previous chapter, I examined how a postcolonial Dutch discourse of racial and religious allochthony contributes to the misrecognition of Syriac Orthodox Christians. In so doing, this discourse constructs the category of religion in opposition to the "emancipated" secular Dutch citizen. Religion is thus not only racialized but equated with the repressive power to silence, a power that (from secular perspectives) *should* be obsolete in the moral lives of Dutch citizens. Ironically, as the stories of Heleen and Nicme show, the secular *habitus* of the civilized speaking citizen-subject produces its own silencing effects on the religious and ethical subjectivities of

minority citizens. The crisis of political recognition and its relation to Syriac Christianity's existential crisis is thus in part a complex matter of audibility. The Dutch nation is but one audience among many to whom the Syriac Orthodox address themselves, and to whom they listen as they reflect on what it is to be Syriac.

The existential bind in which Syriac Christians find themselves in is multi-layered: it is both a crisis of public recognition and a crisis of ethical self-fashioning, individually and communally. The extent to which Syriac Christians can make different parts of themselves audible to the national community in which they legally take part is only one half of the problem. They also define their lives in the post-migration European diaspora as a historic moment of ethical reinvention. The ethics of the singing subject are thus the reflexive practices by which a singer shapes her sense of self in relation to the moralized discursive terrain of her social world. This work on the self has effects on the formation of community. The future of the relationship between liturgy and kinship is an open question: what needs to be made audible is not yet fully formed. This open question elicits a range of ethical responses among Syriac liturgical singers in their efforts to craft a new sense of what it is to be Syriac Christian in Europe. A key point in my argument is that the strategies of narrative self-representation are not after-the-fact simulacra of an interior, *a priori* ethical self. Rather, building upon Bakhtin's dialogism, I take these strategies of self-representation to be the ethical tactics of self-cultivation and the aesthetic formation of community-identity, that are produced in complex relation to the Dutch discourse

of the “speaking” self. Speaking is supposed to be simple but is actually complicated. Singing fills in the gaps where speech is silenced.

Similarly, I argue that for Syriac Orthodox liturgical singers in the post-migration diaspora, especially the young women, the singing voice is a medium of ethical self-fashioning and of self-representation, but the Syriac Orthodox process of “coming into voice” in secular Europe is riven with faultlines produced by the multiply-scaled complexity of their audience: the world, the nation, the congregation, the family, and each other. Feelings of instability and uncertainty arise as young Suryoye debate among themselves *what kind* of relation they should have with the liturgical tradition. Its centrality remains undisputed, but the character of that relation is up for debate. In chapter two, I showed how it is this experimental mode of playing with liturgical sound that constitutes the post-migration Dutch-Syriac liturgical subject in diaspora.

In this chapter, I sketch out the range of ethical questions that Syriac liturgical singers pose to themselves in their everyday lives and in their liturgical practices. I show how and why they formulate the questions to which liturgical singing is the answer. The single most important of these is the question of Syriac Orthodox motherhood. Mothers such as Nahrin find themselves held doubly responsible for the reproduction of Syriac identity and of Dutch moral citizenship.

The Ethics of Motherhood

In contrast to Nahrin, consider Ilona. She is the oldest sister in a large family of daughters who actively participated in her church's liturgical community. When she married, she left her parents' church in the city center to join her husband's church in a southern suburb of Enschede. Falling in line with many other women in the community, she no longer sings in the choir, because she believe it belongs to younger women who have the time. Moreover, she admits that the singing is a little different at her new church. She still attends Sunday morning Mass devotedly, but no longer as a leading participant who feels personally responsible for the church's survival and well-being. Instead, she devotes her energies to teaching her children to speak *Turoyo* as their first language. This, she feels, is the key to preventing Suryoye from disappearing from the world. When I visit her at her house, a modest but tidy rowhouse with a concrete patio and a children's playground just outside the back gate, in a middle class neighborhood in a southern suburb of Enschede, she says that she is pleased to show me what "Syriac motherhood" is like. We spend the day talking and playing with her children. In the afternoon, we walk with her small son in a stroller to pick up her five-year old daughter from primary school.

During our walk, Ilona tells me about her experience with the Dutch school system. Her daughter's teacher has expressed concern about her daughter's low level of Dutch. The teacher was shocked to learn that Ilona and her husband speak flawless and unaccented Dutch, and that they were consciously choosing to speak only *Turoyo* with their little girl at home. The teacher told them that in the level of her Dutch their daughter is developmentally behind [*heeft een achterstand*] her peers. Ilona has seen

her daughter's frustration in not being able to communicate clearly with her teacher and classmates, but she is not concerned. She pointed out to the teacher that she herself learned Dutch exclusively at school and that her own parents did not speak a word of Dutch when she was growing up. Nonetheless because her daughter is not progressing in some areas in class, Ilona and her husband agreed to work more with her in Dutch at home. She feels that being reasonable and open with the teacher was met with equal openness and reasonableness, and together they are working to help her daughter progress.

Ilona and Nahrin both construct a strong ethics of motherhood that is tied to a sense of obligation to multiple overlapping social worlds: they feel personally responsible, as mothers, for the survival and reproduction of what they understand as the historical liturgical identity of Syriac Orthodox Christianity. But the way they configure and orient their sense of responsibility is different. While Nahrin focuses on cultivating her own and her son's liturgical voices, by studying to master the classical Syriac in which the liturgy is sung while simultaneously creating a sense of community out of the group of regular singers who participate in the liturgy, Ilona's efforts center on ensuring that her children's mother tongue is *Turoyo*, the endangered vernacular dialect of neo-Aramaic spoken in her parents' long-abandoned villages in Tur Abdin.

Ilona's and Nahrin's commitments, although contrasting, are equally inscrutable to the logic of Dutch multiculturalism discourse. Whereas the Dutch state and social workers would take certain aspects of their behavior and their

commitments as a sign of “traditionalism” in the way they refuse to “emancipate” themselves from their religious and linguistic pasts, I take these women to be engaged in a subtly radical and creative form of ethical invention. As they reinvent the ethics of Syriac motherhood they are reinventing the social reproduction of Syriac Christianity in the West, and it is instructive that they are doing so in such noticeably divergent ways.

For Nahrin, the essential, ethical core of being a Syriac mother is participating in the liturgy, but this is not only a matter of teaching by example and reproducing what she already knows and grew up with herself. In fact, Nahrin was prevented as a child from learning to sing the liturgy by her own parents. Because her parents moved too far from church for them to feel comfortable allowing her to travel to *madresh-to* alone as a child, and no one was able to drive her, Nahrin was forced to quit going very early on. By refusing to accept this situation, and by rejecting the norm that female liturgical singers should be comprised of young unmarried women, she has decided to attend *madresh-to* as an adult and rehearse with the *gudo* every week for Sunday morning Mass, both for herself and for her child. The whole liturgical community benefits from her decision, as she brings her professional experience and poise to the organizing committee that has, since my departure, made tremendous strides in reinvigorating interest and active involvement among young people in the church community. Inspired by her example, more young women have decided that they too will return to the *gudo* after marriage.

Ilona, on the other hand, is far more concerned with keeping *Turoyo* a living, spoken language, which flies in the face of the Dutch state's insistence that mastering the Dutch language is the first criterion on which citizenship is based, and thus is the highest priority among integration policies and practices targeted at new minorities. That an otherwise "perfectly" well-integrated mother who already speaks flawless Dutch would *choose* to speak another language with her child is, as the teacher's reaction attests, *shocking*. These observations are not incidental. They get to the heart of Dutch anxieties about ethical personhood in the multicultural state and the national preoccupation with minority motherhood.

Dutch sociologists Berg and Duyvendak (2012) argue that there is a pronounced national obsession in the Netherlands with the role of mothers in the "production of moral citizens" that takes shape in a variety of targeted interventions towards allochthonous women. It is the mother's responsibility, they argue, to produce citizens who are properly "autonomous." This requires a number of interventions targeted at reshaping allochthonous women's own subjectivities, especially their religious subjectivities, so that they can contribute to cultivating a *habitus* of secular emancipation in their children (2012: 2-3). Berg and Duyvendak draw an unbroken line of continuity back to the seventeenth century in the Dutch conception of the role of mothers as autonomous within the domestic sphere. This was amplified in what they call an explicit "civilizing offensive" in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, a domestic mission that squares entirely with the civilizing mission of Dutch missionaries and colonial administrators in the East Indies. Far

more than in other western European countries, the institution and ideal of autonomous motherhood and the radical nuclear family survived the culturally and socially transformative effects of second wave feminism, which is reflected in lower rates of female participation in the labor market even today (Berg and Duyvendak 2012: 5-6).

Twenty-first century Dutch motherhood is thus implicated in what Berg and Duyvendak call a “paradox of paternalism,” that is, “the idea that the government should intervene, yet people should remain autonomous subjects” (2012: 7). The paradox is resolved by applying paternalistic policies to very specific groups of citizens who are understood to be “not yet” autonomous; in other words, allochthonous mothers (Berg and Duyvendak 2012: 7). The explicit moralism of teaching children how to become autonomous, ethical citizens was configured after the 1960s with reference to the Holocaust and the Dutch experience of World War Two. Citing Adorno’s famous dictum, the Dutch state and its proxy organizations asserted that teaching children to be autonomous was essential to “prevent another Auschwitz” (2012: 8). Thus throughout the course of the twentieth century, feminism and de-pillarization led not to a breakdown in the tradition of paternalistic thinking about motherhood and nuclear families but reconfigured them in relation to a particular conception of the “emancipated and autonomous” subject. Although targeting the education of women is a global phenomenon found in international development policies and NGO strategies everywhere, in the Netherlands there is a particularly nationalist inflection to this woman-centric discourse. Additionally, while

nationalist maternal discourses are also to be found in many other states globally, Dutch nationalism takes the distinct form of secular progressive cosmopolitanism, such that its nationalist inflection is obscured by an insistence on its universal humanism. Berg and Duyvendak's analysis centers on the tension they see between the emphasis on progressive emancipation and the emphasis on motherhood as a tool for the state. They argue that

integration policies focus on mothers *as a vessel* for the development of their children into citizens and for their children's integration into society as a whole. The idea is then that women should teach their children and families how to behave, think and feel Dutch. The mother is in such instances an entry point into communities (Berg and Duyvendak 2012: 12-13).

These state interventions (especially in the form of municipally-run parenting classes) focus on teaching allochthonous mothers how to talk to their children about sex, thereby intervening "in the most private sphere of the home and the family: mother love, sex talk and marital communication" (Berg and Duyvendak 2012: 18). An even more pointed intervention into the domestic relations of allochthonous families centers on social workers' preoccupation with teaching women how to emancipate them from their (presumably) illiberal, sexist husbands. I encountered an example of Berg and Duyvendak's observation in my own fieldwork on several occasions. At the women's committee meeting at Platform Aram described in chapter three, the Dutch alderwoman from the local CDA party lectured the first- and second-generation Syriac Orthodox women in her audience at length about how they should speak to and manage their husbands in order to secure some independence for themselves, with explicit remarks about how this would benefit their children. At a large community

meeting hosted by the Enschede city police department and several inter-cultural social work organizations geared towards allochthonous families, speakers described their concerns that Syriac Orthodox families were even more resistant to interventions from police, social workers, and schools than other local allochthonous communities [*we have lots of Turkish and Moroccan officers on the force, but never a single Suryoye! And Suryoye families are always so closed and hostile to outsiders! It is impossible to work with them! complained a police officer*]. The consensus of those presenting was that the key to opening up the insular Suryoye was to find a way to get fathers out of the room and to talk to the mothers.

Not surprisingly, Berg and Duyvendak show in their ethnographic material that these discourses have the effect of reifying nationalist self-conceptions of white autochthonous women as “us” (“progressive Dutch”) in opposition to “them” (“conservative migrant mothers”). Migrant mothers are “held accountable for caring work and collective responsibilities while being addressed as potentially autonomous subjects, symbols of progressive nationalism” (Berg and Duyvendak 2012: 18). In this way, they do double duty both as vessels of integration and as the constitutive Other of the white, “emancipated,” autochthonous nation.

This double-bind goes to the heart of the painful, strained relations that exist between second- and third-generation Syriac Orthodox choir women and their mothers and grandmothers. The affective dimension of these complicated relations is key to understanding the ethical reconfiguration of Syriac Orthodox liturgical identity in the West.

Strapless Party Dresses

Ilona's younger sisters, Elisabeta and Mariane, are pillars of their liturgical community. Nineteen and twenty years old, respectively, they could, with their expertise and experience, teach *madreshto* and lead choir rehearsals in their church if their youth and gender did not disqualify them in their own eyes and the eyes of their peers and elders.⁴¹ They still live at home with one older unmarried sister, Evelien, who has no interest in participating in the choir (she is busy enough, she says, working one hundred hour weeks as a primary school teacher at a local Catholic school, and being a very involved aunt to her nieces and nephews). In many ways, the unspoken dynamics of their family life encapsulate the fissures and tensions of everyday life in the Syriac Orthodox diaspora.

Each daughter in this family configures her relationships in terms of speaking and silence, although in highly variable ways. One afternoon after church, I spent the day, as I often did, with the family. After several months, they were beginning to get

⁴¹ Elisabeta's and Mariane's situations were slightly different from that of Marta and Rebekah at Mariakerk, who are permitted to lead the choir. Their leadership has thus far been limited to musical direction. Boys attend *madreshto* lessons separately with a male *malfono* to study the meaning of the Syriac words they sing. At times, Marta and Rebekah expressed a desire to attend these lessons themselves to develop their understanding of what they sing. The *malfono* was open to including them and the other young women of the choir in his lessons, though at the time of my research the women's half of the *gudo* was overwhelmed enough with their school, work, musical rehearsal, and domestic schedules. In addition, many in the congregation were indifferent to their efforts to lead and improve the church's sound. Marta and Rebekah had what sway they had because of their skill and talent as singers, their slightly older age, and the confidence they have acquired from being trained as a teacher and a lawyer, respectively.

comfortable with having me around and letting their guard down about difficult issues. As I helped the girls prepare brunch to eat outside, it became apparent just how self-conscious and isolated Mrs. Mansur, Elisabeta and Mariane's mother, feels about her difficulty speaking the Dutch language and how frustrated her daughters are with her over this. The girls had been encouraging her to try to study Dutch more—or perhaps more accurately were giving her a hard time about it—but Mrs. Mansur is convinced she cannot learn. When I mentioned that my mother found Dutch very difficult to learn as an adult also, Evelien asked, “but could your mother read and write in English?”

When I replied that she could, Evelien responded, “well, there is a big difference then. She had the basis for learning another language formally.”

With a look of tired, strained resignation, Mrs. Mansur turned to me and said in halting, broken Dutch, “when my daughters speak Dutch to each other, I cannot understand them.” Her expression and tone conveyed a feeling I had observed in her frequently whenever she seemed to be trying to make light of what was really, deep down, an excruciatingly painful situation.

In a later conversation with Elisabeta, the youngest daughter, I learned that she too feels the strain of not being understood by her mother. This is not only a matter of when Elisabeta speaks Dutch to her sisters, but a matter of radically different outlooks on life that stem from the fact that her mother is illiterate, while she herself is engaged in advanced study at university. Because her mother was too old to start school when the Turkish government established public schools in the villages of

Tur Abdin, she never learned to read or write, even though her younger brother and sister did. Elisabeta feels the difference is, at times, a vast chasm. Nonetheless, she values her education more when her mother tells her that she wishes she could have gone to school. Mrs. Mansur is nothing but supportive of her daughters' educational aspirations, which is not a universally shared sentiment among the community, as I often heard complaints from young women that the more educated they become, the more they feel despised by elders and prospective marriage partners alike.

Despite occasions of deep misunderstanding and frustration, Elisabeta works hard at her relationship with her mother. In comparison to many other young women in the community, she believes that her relationship with her mother is very good, because she keeps no secrets from her. She attributes her success in life to this openness. She tells her mother everything, unlike many of her friends whose mothers, they say, are only concerned about shame and social control and so will not converse with their daughters about matters that are important to them. Elisabeta finds it dreadful that a friend of hers has not told her mother that she has been dating a boy for an entire year, though it is not surprising given the intense moral disapproval with which romantic relationships among young men and women are met among most Syriac Orthodox families.⁴²

⁴² Unchaperoned courtships are a tricky matter for many young Suryoye. Engagements tend to be abrupt, short-term affairs conducted under the eyes of the community at *hafle*, church feasts, Bible studies, or through activities organized by the secular cultural organizations. Alternatively, they may happen in secret, at the risk of becoming the subject of vicious neighborhood gossip if discovered. Either way, many of the young women and men of my acquaintance remarked frequently that the

Despite gaps in world-view and the emotional strain of their unequal capacity to hear and comprehend each other, Mrs. Mansur is Elisabeta's most important interlocutor on the subjects of moral identity and ethical self-fashioning. After talking with her mother, Elisabeta decided to stop attending weekend *hafle* [parties] because she learned from her mother that attending these parties as a young unmarried woman meant that people would think she was on the hunt for a husband. At nineteen, with a university education to finish, she decided she was not. In conversation with her mother, Elisabeta contemplated the moral semiotics of a strapless party dress she once desired, determining just how much skin on her shoulders she was willing to bare at weddings and formal occasions. [*"To here," she says, holding up her hand to her collarbone, "and it should at least have shoulder- straps."*]. In conversation with her mother, Elisabeta decided that she wanted to continue singing in the *gudo* with her sister Mariane, working extra hard to provide logistical support for the choir's special feast day performances and to keep Sunday night *madreshito* going, even when it is unpleasant and tiresome. Her mother and father both, in fact, would have preferred that them to stop working so hard inside and outside the choir because they were tired of seeing each of their five children, one by one, burn out on giving all to "save" the church, only to then feel let down by the church board, the ecclesiastical hierarchy, and the larger community. Instead, Mr.

Bishop spent most of his time granting divorces, because too many people marry too young, without knowing each other well enough, simply so that they can have a taste of freedom.

and Mrs. Mansur wanted their children to take some time for themselves, to focus on their education, their part-time jobs, and their home life (the girls worked very hard to help their mother keep house and prepare for regular extended family get-togethers), and to get some rest occasionally. Nonetheless, Elisabeta and her sister determined that they would continue fighting to make the *gudo* a strong, cohesive community of voices. Even though they do not learn anything anymore at *madreshto*, they continue to attend in order to stimulate younger students and provide a good example. Mrs. Mansur accepts her daughters' commitment, although she is frustrated by how little her daughters get back from the church for their efforts.

Elisabeta's speaking relationship with her father is also complex, but in a different way. One day when she and I were having an unrelated conversation, I asked her what sorts of things angered her, and she said, "being disrespectful." I was surprised when she brought up her father as an example, as I had always observed what I interpreted to be a dynamic of immense deference on her part to her father's authority. She recounted for me the history of her relationship with him, which she described as a history of teaching him how to speak to her. When she was younger, she said, her father would say things to her like: "get me water"—he would demand it, and not respectfully. In response, she would get out a glass and a bottle of water, and place it on the table in front of him, folding her arms and looking at him without a word, refusing to pour the water for him. Gradually, through this kind of silent communication, he has adapted, and learned to speak to her in a way that makes her happier. He was stricter [*strenger*] when she was younger, but is now better about

communicating more respectfully with her. Her older sisters would never, she thinks, have challenged him in this way. She also thinks that his experience working around Dutch people for so many years has influenced the way he thinks and has brought some Dutch ideas into the family. Dutch ideas in general, she says, are suffusing the community. She expresses a long-standing feeling of anger toward her father, but also love, compassion, and sadness for the myriad ways he is inaudible to those around him, and for the disrespect and violence and prejudice he has suffered both in Turkey and in the Netherlands.

Throughout my fieldwork, I spoke to few fathers other than Mr. Mansur, and almost no grandfathers. As a young woman, it was generally considered inappropriate for me to engage in close conversation with older men, and so instead I learned to see them through the eyes of their daughters, granddaughters, and nieces. These relationships loomed large in the way young liturgical singers (and former singers) theorized their own identities and their position in the church and in Dutch society. Anthropologists like Bjorklund 1981, Sukkink 2003, and Atto 2011 have all written of the generation gap produced by experiences of migration and diaspora, but there is an important gendered dimension to the generational hierarchy that calls for closer attention to shed light on the complexities of an emergent Dutch-Syriac liturgical subjectivity. This subjectivity configures “speaking” with “singing” in highly variable ways, as certain things are said and certain things are silenced, and the gap between them is sung, all in an experimental mode.

In conversation with Elisabeta's sister, twenty-year old Mariane, I learned that their father has some knowledge of the Bible and the theological significance of many church matters. He seems to know a lot about St. Paul and what St. Paul demands of Christian behavior. Mariane was persuaded of the importance of wearing a headscarf in church because her father showed her where in the Bible Paul says it is necessary to show respect for God when praying. Her cousins, she remarked, do not agree that this instruction applies to them, although her father showed them the passage as well⁴³. The girls respect their father's knowledge, which he learned as a boy from the village priest in Tur Abdin. After coming to the Netherlands in the 1970s to flee violent conflict between the PKK (the Kurdish Worker's Party) and the Turkish government, Mr. Mansur worked for many years as a custodian and handyman at the University of Twente. Whenever I visited, he was pleased that I was there and he asked me to write his story, telling me that although he could read a little he cannot write well. He told me that it is painful not to be able to write because he has so much he wants to say and there is so much that needs to be said: "no one knows who we are

⁴³ We discuss the meaning of the headscarf. She is not sure whether it is a requirement or a choice. She is not sure whether it is about showing respect for God, or about shielding men from female sexuality, and thus not distracting them from prayer. She asked me what I thought. I said that I was happy to wear a headscarf while in the church, but that I did not know how I would feel if I had grown up with it as a demand. I admitted to feeling that if a man cannot control his hormones and cannot handle even being in the same room as women, then that is his responsibility, not the woman's responsibility. Mariane said her older sisters Elisabeta and Martine think that way too. She herself does not agree.

or what we have suffered. We are too small and too insignificant. We are like one hair in a head full of hair.”

On one of my visits, he spent a long, long time telling me about the trip he finally took to his home village in Tur Abdin, which is now entirely Kurdish (his wife was too frightened to return with him). He felt awkward at first when he was berated for saying good morning in Turkish instead of Kurdish, but happily he ended up talking to people there and having a good time. He tells me that while it is true Turkey is a place of discrimination, the Netherlands is too. He has been out of work for over a year because he discovered his employers at the University of Twente were paying him far less than other employees who were Dutch, and that they were not treating him fairly. He tells me that he felt terrible because he could not write down what was wrong.

“But,” he says, “I felt better when the lawyer came. She did a good job writing down my story. I think she expressed my experience just right.” He tells me that his generation is stuck, more stuck than the younger generation, because they really do not belong in any world. There is nothing left for them in Tur Abdin except memories of violence. The villages that once were theirs are now ghost towns in deserted highlands and they have been struck from the nationalist record of Turkish history. There is nothing for them in the Netherlands, where their language, experience, and identities are entirely inaudible and incomprehensible to those around them. Again and again he says, “I am sad that I cannot write about it.”

His daughters are models of good Suryoye behavior and are clearly devoted to their obligations as daughters, as Christians, and as liturgical singers. Everyone is sweet, good-natured, thoughtful, and kind, but at the same time tensions arise in their interactions with each other. They can roll from moment to moment with laughter and familiar teasing to intense overreactions and irritation. This is like every family, of course. But there is something more. The girls fall into a stony silence when their father begins to soliloquize, longing as he does for a listener, feeling in turn unheard by him. They express a deep ambivalence with their mother, scolding her angrily for minor irritations, and frustrated by her lack of comprehension of basic Dutch common sense. They are angry with their parents just as everyone is angry with their parents, especially in a multilingual diaspora, where migration produces vast generational chasms. But this is a reason to acknowledge and pay closer attention to the affective root of existential crisis (and its political implications) in a parent's unspoken suffering. Their mothers cannot speak to be understood and are isolated by their linguistic inaudibility. Dutch political culture valorizes a particular kind of speech, while vilifying the inability to speak Dutch as "unwillingness to integrate." This places minority subjects in an ambivalent relation to the secular civilized *habitus*. If their fathers talk too much, because no one listens to them, a minority subject's deferential attachment to them becomes a sign of the irredeemably non-secular Other.

The speaking subjects of the cosmopolitan Dutch nation are defined by their emancipation their her religious and linguistic pasts. The predicament flames into

crisis when that past is in fact the familial present—a present that is dynamic, in flux, and thoroughly alive with affective attachments and ethical reinventions. How do individuals emancipate themselves from religious and linguistic identity when the religious and the linguistic are inextricably bound by love and kinship to precarious forms of life? How do individuals emancipate themselves from the ethics of kinship?

The Ethics of Kinship

As a student of social pedagogy, Mr. and Mrs. Mansur's youngest daughter Elisabeta is being trained in Dutch theories and methods of socialization, education, and fashioning a particular relationship between the individual and society. She is being trained and authorized to speak in particular ways, and to elicit speech from others, but she struggles to elicit such speech from her mother and father. What matters to her is that the forms and relations of care⁴⁴ echo how it was in Tur Abdin, a harsh, impoverished, violent backwater. Kinship relations in Tur Abdin were not only conceived in terms of patrilineal descent and mythically constructed genealogies, and reproduced by endogamous and patrilocal marriage practices, but they were saturated with theological significance and reproduced through ritual forms (Bjorklund 1981: 65-69).

But how it was is not how it can remain. New, authoritative forms of care like social pedagogy and the Dutch radical nuclear family take kinship out of the religious

⁴⁴ Or, that which is essentially kinship, in the sense that Marilyn Strathern (2005) or John Borneman (1992) or James Faubion (2001) describe as a biological idiom of belonging and relatedness.

realm and place it in the public realm. This effects a perforation of the religious from the public, a perforation that runs right through the middle of Syriac Orthodox family life. Liturgical practices are thus open to reinterpretation in a new context, but the affective attachments to parents' and grandparents' meanings and experiences are hard to displace, for what would that leave them with?

Young women like the Mansur sisters are left to their own ethical, affective, and aesthetic devices to reconfigure a sense of kinship and religious life from what liturgical fragments remain. Ilona, for example, is quite busy enjoying her life with her small family. She is twenty-eight, with two young children and a pleasant, intelligent husband she adores. She works three official days a week at an office design company, which she spreads out across 4 days, so that she is able to pick up her children from school and spend the afternoons with them. She works a full day on Wednesdays, which her husband takes off from his job as a property tax analyst for the municipal government (*gemeente*) in Hengelo, in order to spend the day with his children. She tells me that she sees him as perhaps liking children more than she does herself; she attributes this to the positive influence of her husband's father. Her father-in-law, she says, is unconventional for a Suryoyo man. He likes to cook, he is not afraid of doing "women's work," and she finds him to be open and worldly in a way her own father has never been. Her father-in-law is perhaps unusual for a Suryoyo of his generation, but more importantly, he in no way resembles Dutch stereotypes of the culturally and religiously unregenerate middle-aged Middle Eastern man.

When I visit Ilona's house one afternoon, we talk about how Syriac Orthodox Christian family life has changed in the Netherlands. The love Ilona feels for her husband, and the myriad subtle ways she feels supported by him, is palpable. She emanates warmth when she speaks of him, and says, with only a little embarrassment, "I am a little bit of a feminist, actually." She suggests that this accounts for the way she thinks about her husband. "It used to be that you were dependant on your parents," she says, "but now you are dependent on your partner. If he is not there for you, you are really stuck."

Her relationship with her husband exceeds and inverts the logic of one of the central tropes of Dutch integration discourse—that allochthonous women need to be emancipated from their husbands and fathers (Berg and Duyvendak 2012: 14-15). Ilona met her husband at a church Bible study organized by her brother, and they married without significant delay. Her relationship germinated and grew according to properly religious conceptions of Syriac Orthodox romantic and family relationships. What she has reconfigured is the role of the extended family network in her life. She still expects to spend Sunday afternoons with her parents, her sisters, and their families, but her primary emotional speaking relationship is with her husband. Ilona does not "emancipate" herself from Syriac Orthodox kinship, but pragmatically reconfigures it so that her marriage relationship, which is influenced by Dutch notions of sexual partnership, is at the center of it. At the same time, she reconfigures Dutch kinship, with its privileging of the radical nuclear family and maternal autonomy, to share her parenting load more equally with her husband, her sisters, and her extended

family, and social life continues to center around church festivals. Furthermore, her parenting objective is not to produce Dutch citizens whose moral identities are defined by secular emancipation, but Syriac Orthodox Christian children whose first language is *Turoyo* and who organize their lives around their obligations to church and extended family through ritual practices like fasting, regular prayer, singing Syriac songs, and carefully controlled moral conduct.

The Aesthetics of Ethical Life

One of the most striking moments in my fieldwork when the entanglement of aesthetic and ethical life became apparent occurred during another day spent with the Mansur family. Because it was a Sunday afternoon, the married siblings and their families—Ilona, her husband, and two small children, and Karin, her German Suryoyo husband, and their baby⁴⁵—were there to spend the afternoon visiting with Elisabeta, Mariane, Evelien, their parents, a visiting aunt, and, of course, their brother Samuel, who generally remained silent and watched TV in the living room. In the course of the afternoon’s meandering conversations, someone mentioned a vicious rumor that was circulating through the Dutch- and German-Syriac community. According to the rumor, a Syriac Orthodox girl in Germany had been disgraced for making a sex tape with her boyfriend several years prior. Someone, presumably the boyfriend, had put the tape on the Internet for all to see. The day before my visit the sisters had heard that the girl in Germany had attempted suicide. During the course of

⁴⁵ Karin and her family live just across the border in the German town of Gronau.

the afternoon, over tea and snacks, the women in the family discussed the news with varying levels of dismay, disapproval, and skepticism. They all agreed that no one could say for sure whether the rumor of the girl's suicide was true, but Karin insisted that the original allegation *was* true. She claimed that she had watched the tape for herself with tremendous disgust. Elisabeta, the youngest sister, wondered out loud at the fact that she had never heard anyone say anything bad about the boy involved with the affair. With indignation, she reminded her sisters and mother that the boy was also Suryoyo and just as guilty.

“Why is he not spoken of the same way?” she asked. “Is that not a double standard?” Her sister Karin and her aunt responded fiercely. Her aunt said, “it is better for her to have killed herself!” Elisabeta was visibly offended by this comment and protested. Karin turned to her sister with force:

“You do not know what she did, on that tape, with every possible hole from every possible angle! She cannot call (*vertonen*, exhibit) herself Suryoyo after what she did!” Beyond this, no one had much to contribute but head-shaking, tongue-clucking, and an attempt to change the subject, especially, I think, because they were aware of my presence in the room. During this exchange with her sister, Elisabeta frequently looked at me out of the corner of her eye with what I interpreted as an expression of nervous self-consciousness. Being well experienced with secular university goers in the Netherlands, she had every reason to suspect I would not be an approving audience for this kind of talk. For a secular audience, her sister's words

were transgressive in their insistence that Suryoye ethnic identity and Syriac Orthodox moral conduct were inextricably related and that it was better for the girl to have died for her behavior. Whether Elisabeta moderated her own opinions of the matter for my benefit or not, I have no way to know. What was clear was that she was attentive to the problem of audience and that she had every reason to worry that I, as a Euro-American academic, was likely to disapprove of what I heard. Worse yet, from Elisabeta's perspective, this kind repressive social control that is achieved through vicious gossip is precisely the kind of practice that secular audiences attribute to illiberal religion—of, in other words, the “backwards” and “religious” village mentality that Syriac Christians try so hard to disassociate themselves from in Dutch eyes. Put another way, the aesthetics of Syriac ethics is a political problem for securing “model minority” status in the Dutch multiculturalism debates. This is not just an image problem, however. Many young Syriac Orthodox women I knew complained of the repressive social control that they were subjected to by their extended families and social networks. This tension presents a deeper ethical predicament for young women like Elisabeta as they try to determine who and how they should be in the midst of conflicting moral discourses about sexuality, self-exposure, and gender identity.

Another arena where young women debate the ethics of Syriac identity is the *saumo*, the regular ritual fasts to which the devout adhere. According to church law, Syriac Orthodox Christians must fast, in this case by following a vegan-pescatarian diet, every Wednesday and Friday, for the fifty days of Lent before Easter, and during

frequent three-day fasts throughout the liturgical year.⁴⁶ In total, the devout fast for approximately six months out of the year. Many of my friends and acquaintances complained about what a burden this could be because the low-protein diet left them feeling tired and weak during their working week.⁴⁷ This state of affairs yielded a number of different kinds of discussions about the purpose and meaning of the fast. At dinner once, Mr. Mansur explained that the purpose of the fast is to allow the body to feel weaker, so that the spirit becomes stronger. Immediately, however, his daughter Ilona expressed a very Euro-American “health-conscious” interpretation of the fast. She had recently adopted the popular (in certain circles) notion that “traditional” diets are far healthier than “modern” diets. Because Ilona had begun studying yoga and had visited an osteopath for her fussy infant son, she had come to the conclusion that the fast is meant to cleanse and purify the body of fat and toxins. This was a theory I heard discussed among the choir girls at the Mariakerk rehearsals as well. Ilona had found that when she was nursing, her baby was far less fussy during the fast. Her osteopath had explained to her that most people should not consume lactose anyway, and thus it made sense to her that the fast was a means to encourage a healthier, more natural way of eating. When she discussed this

⁴⁶ Unlike many other Christian traditions in which the Lenten Fast lasts only forty days, Syriac Orthodox tradition observes Lent for fifty days.

⁴⁷ Though the fast-friendly staples of fish, vegetables, bulgur, and lentil soup made for fine dining as far as this researcher was concerned, Dutch-Syriac Christians are “integrated” enough into Dutch society to have adopted the ubiquitous Dutch breakfast of bread and cheese. The only alternative, it was explained to me frequently, was bread and jam, which does not get you through your busy morning.

perspective at dinner with her family, her sisters responded enthusiastically, while their father began to look downcast and did not argue.

Despite the sisters' enthusiasm for the "health-conscious" interpretation of Syriac ritual fasting, they still longed for a deeper theological explanation. It is striking that they seemed not to hear their father's explanation that the spirit was strengthened when the body was weakened, a notion with roots in distinctly ancient Christian ascetic conceptions of bodily discipline and the relationship between suffering and spirituality (Brown 1988; Harvey 1990, 2006; Elm 1994). Such a perspective does not translate into their own experiences and common-sense understandings of the body, the soul, and the world. Their father's spiritual theorizing was, in a very literal sense, inaudible to them. And yet they sensed something was missing from their understanding. They turned very naturally to the fountainhead of Syriac theological authority: the ecclesiastical authority. During the Lenten fast, the Mor Ephrem Monastery hosted an informative lecture to explain the purpose and significance of the *saumo*. The sisters and a number of their choir friends attended. The lecture was delivered by a priest from one of the churches in Hengelo in *Turoyo*, and the young choir women took turns translating for me. All of the young choir women in attendance, from Mariane and Elisabeta to Marta and Rebekah, expressed immense displeasure at how many of their non-choir peers in the audience resorted to asking questions about what they could and could not get away with eating during the fast. Such ethical laziness, they told me later, would lead to the kind of empty Christianity of the Dutch, who, they claimed, vaguely remember that their

grandparents' generation used to fast, but without any conception of why. After the lecture and the question and answer session, my friends expressed frustration and dismay with the shallowness of the priest's explanations. As they explained, they had learned nothing new that they did not already know from their own fathers, and that the priest's answers lacked depth. Ultimately, they blamed the patriarch and the ecclesiastical hierarchy for not taking a clearer stance on what should be done in the fast and why, and they were extremely impatient with their peers who sought ways to make the fast easier. Surely, they agreed, nodding their heads at each other grimly, this was how Syriac Orthodoxy would disappear from the earth. So much has been lost already, they said, because the patriarch gives in to pressure so easily and fails to offer meaningful spiritual guidance.

The Voice of Authority

The patriarchate's failure to provide meaningful education about the *saumo* is but one example among many in which young liturgical singers have been let down by the church they work so hard to save. One of the most egregious instances was first mentioned to me obliquely by numerous friends and acquaintances. I later learned more when Ilona, Mariane, and Elisabeta revealed that their own brother had been at the heart of this scandal that shook the liturgical community to its core and turned many young people away from the church in disillusionment. Several years prior to my arrival for fieldwork, their brother Samuel was one of the primary organizers of a series of Bible studies and church parties (*hafle*) that were incredibly

popular throughout the entire local community. It was at these Bible study meetings that Ilona had met her husband. Young people from other Syriac Orthodox parishes throughout the province began to attend regularly because they were so well-planned, informative, and fun. Three young, western-educated monks from the Mor Ephrem monastery led the Bible study series, which was hosted at a different church every month.

After some time, a number of church board members grew discontented with the popularity of these events. Soon a vicious rumor spread that the monks were behaving inappropriately with young women. It came to light that many young men and women were uncomfortable going to confession with their own parish priest, who tended to have been raised and trained in monasteries in Tur Abdin and thus had little understanding or empathy for the realities of everyday lives of young people in Europe. Consequently, a number of young people, both men and women, began to confess privately to the young monks of the Bible study instead. Although the matter at hand was only confession, the fact that the monks were speaking to young women privately was considered problematic enough for the ecclesiastical hierarchy to get involved. The patriarch excommunicated the young monks, effectively ending the Bible studies and church parties. The monks left the country and joined other churches, while many previously devoted young people were left traumatized and disillusioned with their church community. Elisabeta and Mariane told me that their brother was devastated. Feeling betrayed by the Syriac Orthodox Church, he no

longer attends. He still prays and fasts, but does so by himself. No one in his family, as devout and devoted as they are, holds it against him.

What was striking about this series of events was that the key controversy that led to the downfall of the excommunicated monks was a debate over who was authorized to speak and to listen and the kinds of appropriate relations inherent in those authorized forms of speaking and listening. Mr. Mansur explained to me that only priests may receive confession from women because priests are married, and, so it is implied, their sexual subjectivity is cultivated to contain and manage whatever sexual implications may be in the confession. Monks, in contrast, are not married and it is understood that they cannot handle taking confession from women. They lack the relational *habitus* to maintain appropriate boundaries. This was echoed in an unrelated conversation I had with a monk at the Mor Ephrem Monastery, during one of my frequent extended visits. At that time, a major sex abuse scandal in the Dutch Roman Catholic Church was erupting in the news. Father Yaqub commented to me that the scandal was evidence that the Roman Catholic Church really needed to start permitting its priests to marry.⁴⁸ “Celibacy is a challenge, and you cannot be single-handedly responsible for the well-being of a parish when you do not have the support

⁴⁸ That Father Yaqub did not find it unseemly to speak to me, a young female researcher, about this subject had to do with my ambiguous status in the community at that point in my fieldwork. At the monastery, the Bishop made it clear that I was a visiting scholar, so I was for all intents and purposes treated as if I were a man. This was not consistently the case, however. For good measure, my father happened to be visiting me that day, and so Father Yaqub was leading us on a tour of the monastery when this conversation took place.

of the marriage relationship,” he said. The expression on my face must have betrayed a thought I was reluctant to verbalize because he said quickly:

It works for us to have boy students living here for summer school because we are a community. As monks, we give each other the support necessary to manage the challenge of celibacy. If you are a celibate priest on your own and you are dealing with all the personal problems of your congregation, it is too hard. You need to have a wife and a family to manage it.

The insight with which Father Yaqub, who had been raised and trained in Turkey at an age young enough to have been educated in the secular Turkish school system, spoke about the sexual politics of priestly and monastic pastoral authority belies Dutch stereotypes about conservative religious men from the Middle East. It could be reduced to a question of women’s sexual danger to men, but that is an oversimplified understanding of the dynamics of pastoral care and relations of authority that shape Syriac Orthodox liturgical identity. Father Yaqub’s concern is with broader questions of social order and how to manage the inevitable tensions that arise in the overlap of ecclesiastical and familial relationships because these tensions can arise from many different kinds of situations.

The problem remains, however, that young Suryayto women still do not feel comfortable confessing to their parish priests, whose Dutch is limited if they speak it at all and who were educated in the Middle East and have no sense of what their lives are really like. Married or not, such men cannot hear what these woman need to say. Worse yet, the ecclesiastical hierarchy has not fully grasped the extent to which this is a serious crisis in the reproduction of Syriac Orthodox Christianity in the West, although it is worth noting that the new young Bishop is trying very hard to address

the issue. If young mothers find that their lives are inaudible to their liturgical community, they will seek an audience elsewhere.

Another important instance of the younger generation's sense that the church community is failing them is the sad story of Mr. Çelik. Until 2004, every Syriac Orthodox Christian child in Enschede and the surrounding region learned classical Syriac from Mr. Çelik, who traveled from school to school to provide Syriac lessons. Mr. Çelik is widely recognized as the one of the most knowledgeable, if not the *most* knowledgeable, church deacons and *malfone* in the Netherlands. He learned from the greatest monastic singers and scholars in Tur Abdin. He is also recognized as being a patient, kindly, and gifted teacher who passed on a love of the classical language to his students. In 2004, in a spate of right-wing, anti-immigration policy shifts, the Dutch government banned teaching native immigrant languages in state-funded schools. This had once been a mainstay of Dutch multiculturalist policy but with the rise in public opinion against the prevalence of Arabic still spoken among minority populations, it was one of the first accommodations to be eliminated. Mr. Çelik thus lost his job in the Dutch school system.

Nonetheless, Mr. Çelik continued to teach *madreshto* at Mor Yaqub Church in central Enschede. When they were much younger, many of my choir friends learned to sing the liturgy from him. However, influential members of the church's governance board got wind of the fact that he had been spotted attending a social event at the Assyrian Mesopotamian Cultural Association in south Enschede, where I attended rehearsals with the secular professional choir described in chapter two. The

Mor Yaqub Church board is dominated by Arameanists who violently oppose any association with their Assyrianist counterparts. Mr. Çelik was then prohibited from teaching *madresh-to*. He was followed by a succession of less well-trained *malfo-ne* who were all deemed markedly less qualified and pedagogically skilled by their *madresh-to* students. Some students had more knowledge and skill than their teachers, but because of their age and gender they were not allowed to teach. Finally, in recognition of his skills and intelligence, the Bishop hired Mr. Çelik to be his private secretary at the monastery. Until, that is, the governance board of the archdioceses, also dominated by Arameanists, discovered it. They promptly overrode the Bishop's authority and fired Mr. Çelik. Since then, Mr. Çelik has made his way working as a free-lance handyman and carpenter. My friends and acquaintances express outrage when this history comes up in conversation. Many consider it an indictment of the damage done by the politics of naming manifest in the intractable fights between Arameanists and Assyrianists. It is also an indictment of the powerful men on church governance boards whose personal political and financial agendas determine what the culture of each parish will be like. My friends and acquaintances believe it is a tragedy, for Mr. Çelik, for themselves, and for the future of Syriac Christianity.

Another, more immediate crisis occurred in the lives of my closest informants during the last month of my field research in 2010. The Mor Yaqub Church held its annual name-day festival on the day of the Feast of St. Jacob of Sarugh. Because the event was so large and the organizers expected so many congregants, they moved to the large hall attached to the Mariakerk in Hengelo. The bishop was expected to be in

attendance and the *gudo* was scheduled to perform a series of liturgical songs in front of the whole parish. The members of the *gudo*, young men and women alike, had spent hours in extra rehearsals to practice their singing, and Mariane and Elisabeta stayed up most of the night to photocopy lyrics, iron robes, and prepare for the event. After Sunday morning Mass, I drove with Mr. and Mrs. Mansur from the Mor Yaquib Kerk to the Mariakerk and sat with them at one of the long tables in hall where many hundreds of people had gathered to eat together. When the choir began to sing, Mr. and Mrs. Mansur and I looked at each other in consternation. Throughout the entire event, the choir was inaudible over the noise of the audience, who never once looked up or lowered their voices as the young people sang. Mr. and Mrs. Mansur shook their heads and tears filled their eyes as their daughters struggled in vain to be heard.

Then, to add insult to injury, several prominent members of the governance church board interrupted the singers to give a speech addressing the bishop about their efforts to put the event together, never once acknowledging that it was the young people behind them who had put in the hard labor to make it happen. Although the speeches were happening in *Turoyo*, I grasped from Mr. and Mrs. Mansur's indignant reactions and the faces of my friends on stage that they felt the members of the church board were engaged in what they saw as predictable grandstanding by the "big men" in the community. When the painful proceedings had finally ended, Mr. and Mrs. Mansur kissed me sadly goodbye, before I fled for the train station.

Two weeks later, I met with Mariane and Elisabeta to say goodbye, as my research period had come to an end and I would soon be returning home to the United

States. Over coffee, we discussed what had happened on the day of the Feast for Mor Yaqub. They admitted to me that they had felt crushed by how the proceedings had gone and that they were very close to giving up altogether. But, they said, afterwards they had received letters of thanks and appreciation from Nahrin, who had been singing in the choir that day herself, their *malfono* Matthias, and Daniel, one of their fellow singers. These notes made them feel like they were part of a community of people who understood and appreciated them. These expressions of recognition helped to reaffirm their sense of commitment to their church. What is visible in this moment is a subtle but significant shift in how these young women mediated their relationship to the church. This shift reveals the emergence of a coherent community of voices. With the sense that as liturgical singers they could be their own audience, they reconfigured the ethics of being Syriac as an aesthetic formation; that is, a continually reinvented community of singers reinterpreting the significance of the ancient liturgical tradition.

After I left the field, I learned from my friends that the choir began to reorganize as members learned from each other how to bestow the dialogical recognition for which they longed. I later heard from Nahrin, Mariane, and Elisabeta that the core members of the *gudo* have refashioned a youth committee that organizes social events, outings, and public debates. The *gudo* has new robes, and the core contingent has grown with regular practicing, making the sound stronger, clearer, and less widely tuned. More and more, they are choosing to sing in the same key and at the same pitch.

The Ethics of the Singing Subject

Through their reflexive practices, these liturgical singers constitute themselves as subjects in relation to the liturgical tradition. It is not just their use of the liturgy but the way they place themselves into different kinds of relationships with it according to contested notions of what liturgical community is and should be. These contested notions are related to their experiences of *inburgering*—that is, becoming “integrated” into Dutch society by the explicit cultivation of norms, values, and a “speaking subjectivity.” And yet there is also a space of unspoken excess. This excess is the affective dimension where ethical reinvention occurs around multiply-scaled crises of dialogical recognition. Mariane and Elisabeta exemplify such ethical reinvention in the face of unspeakable affect in their commitment to keeping the liturgical tradition bound to a living, coherent, self-conscious community of voices as a matter of love and loyalty to their parents’ lost world. Despite their parents’ expressed wishes that they would put their energies to more pragmatic use, they use liturgical singing to anchor their explorations of what is ethically possible as Middle Eastern Christians in Europe.

Liturgical singers face a range of questions and feel the pull of a variety of forces in their daily lives. The complexity of their circumstances and of their responses to it indexes a broader set of questions about the nature of the relationship between the politics of recognition and religious pluralism. One of the key problems with which they all must struggle, irrespective of their individual commitments, is the

issue of responsibility. Every person who contributed to my study claimed to feel a strong sense of responsibility toward someone or something. But what responsibility *is* bears closer examination. In the next chapter, I turn to this question to explore its implications for the relationship between my liturgical interlocutors' efforts to reinvent themselves ethically and the politics of religious pluralism in Europe.

Chapter Six

***Being Christian, Becoming Christian: Freedom, Kinship, and the Ethics of Care* in the European Politics of Religious Pluralism**

No one, not even his mother, who was afraid to ask him whether he still believed in God, understands his religion or his broken alliance (Caputo 1997: xvii).

Throughout 2010, I conducted extensive fieldwork at the St. Ephrem Syriac Orthodox Monastery, the cultural and spiritual center of the Suryoye community in the Netherlands. During this time, I attended a number of public events that brought the Syriac Orthodox community together to talk about questions of identity, integration, and what it means to be Middle Eastern Christian in western Europe. A particular series of events that occurred several months apart collectively shed light on a key dimension of Suryoye struggles to fashion themselves ethically and represent themselves politically. Both of these events were fairly explosive, as I explain below, but what connected them was the theme of responsibility, a polysemous notion that suggested an entangled relationship between freedom and obligation and that has implications for understanding the politics of religious pluralism in Europe.

The first event was a public lecture called “Making Choices for the New Year,” which was intended to offer intellectual growth and spiritual guidance to those Syriac Orthodox faithful who long for such things and to instill such longings among those who do not. The parishioners in attendance were a mix of young, middle-aged,

and elderly men and women who sorted themselves into their pews by gender, with head-scarved women on the left, and men in suits on the right, as is customary in this conservative corner of the Syriac Orthodox diaspora. The speakers were Dutch-trained theologians and religious philosophers who were either Syriac Orthodox themselves or possessed expertise in ancient Syriac Christian theology. The first speaker was a young Suryoyo man who was among the first generation of Syriac Orthodox to grow up and be educated in the Netherlands. He had earned a Ph.D. in philosophy from a Catholic Dutch university and was in the process of writing a book about Friedrich Nietzsche.

Reading from a prepared paper, the young scholar expounded upon the concept of freedom in western Christian thought. His central point was that “Freedom is both a blessing and a burden. It means not just getting a choice, but also *having* to choose.” Reminding his audience of the harshness of life was in the old country, where most of life’s decisions were constrained by some other power, he said, “now in western Europe there is a new freedom, a freedom that brings new burdens and new questions: “What should I study? What should I do with my life? Who should I marry? Where should I live? The freedom of these questions is so burdensome.” The scholar continued, eliciting knowing chuckles from the crowd, “It is no wonder half the Dutch population is on anti-depressants: they are the most “free” people on earth—of course they are miserable!”

Peppering his talk with references to Augustine and Kierkegaard, the scholar explained that freedom in Christianity does not simply equal “modern emancipation” popularly understood. He said,

Freedom is a pressure, and we humans must think carefully to understand what it is we are doing when we act on our freedom. Most importantly, we must understand that the duties and customs of being a Christian are part of freedom itself, though we have to come to our belief without coercion. This is the freedom that defines our humanity.

This final point—belief without coercion—disturbed his audience, and the shared dismay in the room was audible. When the time came for questions and answers, the scholar received variations of the same question. Over and over, members of the audience stood up to ask: *How do we reconcile this insistence that Christianity is something we can choose with the understanding we all grew up with that it is a tradition into which we were born and to which we are tied by bonds of kinship and social belonging?* Audience-members recounted personal traumatic experiences in their struggle to answer these questions; they described fights with grandparents and parents, doubts about what to teach their children, and experiences of what could be called an existential crisis. They asked: *Where is freedom in the idea that I am a Christian and have to be a Christian because it is my identity? If I have always thought that who I am is based on a hereditary and primordial Christian identity, but you are telling me I am not Christian until I seek, discover, and choose to believe, then who am I?*

One young man formulated this question in a particularly incisive manner, pushing the conversation to a deeper theological terrain that seemed to elude even the events' organizers. Tellingly, he quoted Henry Ford: "You can choose any color of car you want, as long as it is black! This is really a problem for us, right?" The crowd laughed, and some rolled their eyes and clucked their tongues in disapproval at his levity, but at some level he seemed to hit upon the core theological tension presented by the western Christian understanding of "belief." His question exposes the logical knot at the heart of theological discussions of freedom within monotheism's exclusive truth claim: what is there to choose when there is only one true God? And yet in response, the young scholar ended the conversation by reasserting his central claim: "I do not think you *are* a Christian," he said, "I think you *become* a Christian." This met with gasps across the room, as his audience exchanged dark looks.

Cosmological Intimacies

The tensions within the affective and ethical commitments underlying the congregation's audible dismay found a clear expression in a pair of conversations I had later that year with Marta and Rebekah, the two college-aged choir directors from one of the local parishes where I had been conducting research. On a warm afternoon in the middle of June 2010, we sat in the television room on the ground floor of the St. Ephrem Monastery for formally recorded interviews (up until that point, our conversations had occurred spontaneously during and after choir practices at their church), because the young women felt it would be both cozy and fitting to record their thoughts and feelings about life in the Dutch-Syriac diaspora at its spiritual and

emotional center. As we talked, we were constantly interrupted by curious nuns and visiting families with rambunctious children, despite my having pre-arranged with the Father Abbott that we would have this quiet time for our talk. Indeed, the elderly Abbott himself saw fit to enter the room several times to ask Marta and Rebekah about their families, give us his blessings, and then finally to give us each a church-branded Jesus key-chain. Meanwhile, the Abbott's younger sister, the nun Sister Seyde, sat down to monitor our tea and cookie consumption and admonish us whenever she thought we were not eating and drinking enough. Despite the disruptions, though, I had learned by this point that the chaos of the monastery space, with its mix of ritualized, patriarchal authority and domestic, familial intimacy, would be the most comfortable context for my interlocutors to engage my questions. Hence amidst constant interruption, Marta and Rebekah and I discussed their work as political activists, how and why they were developing their secular "Aramean" ethnic identity, and their work leading the women and girls of the church choir in the weekly liturgical cycle. It was important, they told me, for Syriac Orthodox Christians to learn that they also have a secular, ethnic identity, not just a religious identity. In the modern world, they said, one cannot just be a Christian—one has to have an ethnicity. A person without an ethnicity does not exist politically. This is a problem for the effort by Suryoye to claim funding for culturally sensitive programs and services from the Dutch government, to assert land rights to their monasteries in southeast Turkey, and to gain global recognition for their experiences during the Armenian Genocide of 1915. Unlike some members of their church and their extended families

who claim to belong to the Assyrian nation, Marta and Rebekah identify as ethnically Aramean. As they described to me the tensions that come out of the fight to ethnicize Syriac Christianity, they reflected on the confusion and the grief they felt as they actively tried to split their sense of inherited, kinship-based Christian identity, which encompassed all of social and political life, into distinct, separable spheres. Marta spoke emotionally of the longing she felt for the kind of intimacy and community her mother, aunts, and grandmothers experienced by living, sharing, and caring for each other as an extended family. She thought that this was a way of life that the self-consumed, individualistic, Dutch nuclear family could learn from.

At the same time, Marta and Rebekah said, even as they want to learn how to have an ethnicity, they also want their church to teach them how to become better Christians. Specifically, they want to know the meaning of what they sing every Sunday, the reasons for the rituals and rules they follow, and the spiritual significance of the liturgical order that organizes family and community life. If their religious identity must lose some of its character, they would like it to be enriched in other areas. But it is difficult, they said, because the church is so entrenched in old habits and dominated by old men who do not speak Dutch and do not see the value in teaching these things. As we discussed the tension between communal identity and individual belief, I asked whether Syriac Orthodox experience was similar to Jewish experience. Rebekah paused and then said: “Yes, but there is a difference. You cannot be a secular Suryoyo yet, like you can be a secular Jew. In thirty years, yes; right now, no. If you stop believing in God, you just are not a Suryoyo anymore.”

Rebekah's comment suggests that a taken-for-granted link between kinship and theology is becoming increasingly *less* taken for granted in the Syriac Orthodox diaspora. The young women's sadness and anxiety suggest that the process of ethnicization, however politically necessary, destabilizes the sense of liturgically-mediated and kinship-based continuity fundamental to a Syriac Christian sense of community and identity. The idea that belief and identity can be separated is imaginable but not yet socially real. It has been perforated, but not yet split apart. Syriac Orthodox Christianity is something a person is born into, not something a person chooses to become. Christianity is, in classically anthropological terms, a kinship practice. Conversions to Syriac Orthodoxy are met with skepticism and derision. Marrying out of the faith, and thus out of the extended kinship network, is generally considered cause for disinheritance. The handful of people who defy these strictures eventually give up on maintaining their bond with the Syriac community, allowing themselves to become "assimilated" Dutch and thereby causing a traumatic rupture with their families.

Another choir woman pointed out the seriousness of this rupture to me. Elena, a pillar among the Syriac church's youth leadership, eschews Marta and Rebekah's secularizing political activism. She sees the debate over ethnic identity, and especially the fight over Arameanism versus Assyrianism, as deeply destructive. Instead, she dedicates herself to helping the archdiocese develop outreach and educational initiatives for young people in the church. According to Elena, these programs are meant to educate and help Syriac Orthodox become better Christians. Her mission

puts her at odds with many in the older generation who feel these sorts of educational initiatives disrupt the structure of gendered moral authority that ensures the continuous reproduction of Syriac families and tradition. It is striking that she shares with Marta and Rebekah the perception that the relationship between kinship and liturgical identity is growing increasingly tenuous and that this is cause to grieve. Elena tried not to cry when she told me the story of her aunt, who had left the Syriac Orthodox Church to join an evangelical Protestant church. Her aunt was no longer considered part of the family, and Elena had not seen her in years. She described her crushing sadness at the thought that the Syriac Orthodox Church was not enough for her aunt, but she knew, she said, that having left, her aunt simply was not Suryayto (a Syriac woman) anymore. Unlike Rebekah and Marta, who see the political necessity of developing a secular identity that can be disarticulated from liturgical tradition, Elena sees hope within the ecclesial community itself, if only it can be reinvigorated through education and spiritual guidance. But the three women agree that things cannot go on as they have; something radical must change in the way Syriac Christians go about being Syriac and Christian or they will disappear, either through violence or assimilation.

At the other end of the political spectrum is Semela, a Dutch Suryayto whose life is a testament to the disastrous effects of publicly admitting to losing one's belief. Semela is an elected official in the provincial parliament for Overijssel, and she has risen to international prominence among the global Syriac-Assyrian-Aramaean-Chaldean diaspora as an activist for Christians in the Middle East and as an advocate

of Assyrian nationalism, an identification for which few members of her own family and church have any sympathy. In one of our meetings at her office, Semela told me point-blank that if she could, she really would rather just be a regular Dutch woman living a regular Dutch life, but that she has a strong feeling of obligation to her community's history and feels responsible for preventing the disappearance of Syriac Orthodoxy from the world. In her early career, Semela relied on the Church establishment to help her accomplish her political aims, despite her own impatience with the premise of religious belief. She depended on the Church hierarchy's cooperation and support not only because they are primary source of authority and a means of communication for the Syriac Orthodox community itself, but also because they facilitated connections with local Dutch Protestant and Catholic advocacy organizations, as well as with local secular human rights organizations. Representatives from these local organizations have learned to see the Bishop as the community's de facto leader and representative. Although Semela recognizes that the Church is the "location" of her community's culture and the steward of its identity, she blames the ecclesiastical hierarchy for fostering the very lack of cultural and political awareness that threatens the community's survival.

Semela is very explicit in our conversations that a strong sense of religious identity is not enough to keep Middle Eastern Christianity from disappearing from the world because it cannot add up to a political identity. To compound matters, she does not particularly believe in God and she dislikes attending Mass (although I did witness her participate, with visible discomfort, at evening prayers at the monastery

after the Archbishop persuaded her, perhaps with more than one motive, to set an example for the children).

Semela is not discouraged by skeptical questions aimed at her efforts to lobby the European Union and the U.S. Congress for an autonomous Assyrian Christian homeland in Northern Iraq. She has read the relevant English-language social science and is equipped to answer any challenge. When I asked her to explain how exactly she links her Christian identity to an empire that was destroyed six hundred years *before* the birth of Christ, she threw up her hands and bellowed at me: “Everyone else gets to invent their tradition—why can’t we?” Unfortunately for Semela, by the end of my fieldwork, her lack of piety had been widely publicized and had incurred a massive backlash against her. She was cut out of the church and her organizing networks, and effectively banished. She married a fellow Assyrian and moved to the other side of the country, far away from the tight-knit Syriac Orthodox community in which she had been raised. Regardless of whether they claim Assyrian nationhood or Aramean ethnicity, as far as her constituents were concerned, when Semela publicly admitted that she did not believe in God, it meant that she was no longer Suryayto.

Rupture-thinking

The destabilization of Syriac kinship and liturgical life yields important insights for recent discussions in the anthropology of secularism and in the anthropology of Christianity concerning the affinity between secular political understandings of *what religion is* and a particular genealogy of western Protestant Christian thought. These discussions engage the premise that Christian identity entails

a paradoxical entanglement of continuity and rupture: the entanglement of the historical family of the church with the solitude of the soul seeking God. As scholars such as Austin-Broos (1997), Cannell (2006), Coleman (2006), Keane (2005, 2006) and others have argued, a genealogy of western Protestant Christianity, particularly that which has been influenced by Calvinist and Arminian theologies, emphasizes the private, individual and interior process of *becoming Christian* over Christianity's embodied and communal character.⁴⁹ Anthropologists working on the globalization of evangelical and other Protestant forms of Christianity have documented an array of possibilities in how the rupture of conversion can be understood and experienced, but there is a shared sense among scholars of the centrality of conversion to Protestant notions of Christian identity.⁵⁰ In the meantime, scholars working on different branches of Eastern Orthodox Christianities have examined the centrality of continuity in Orthodox self-representations, often in order to explain the frequent correlation between ethnic identity and national orthodox churches (see also Hann and Goltz 2010). This is not, however, to suggest an easy characterization of the

⁴⁹ What is less clear in Keane's analyses in particular is the tension among and across modern Protestant denominations between Calvinist doctrines of unconditional predestination and Arminian doctrines of conditional election and justification contingent upon the individual's decision to believe. This debate among seventeenth century Dutch Reformed Protestants continues to be among the most globally widespread of doctrinal debates over free will versus divine will. This debate has characterized western Christianity since Augustine argued against the Pelagians. The tension between Calvinist and Arminian doctrine is thus of a different character than the tension between Protestant concerns for the faith of an individual and Orthodox concerns for the hereditary, kin-based formulations of religious community.

⁵⁰ See especially Cannell's introduction to her edited volume *The Anthropology of Christianity* 2006.

“Latin” / “Orthodox” split as an oppositional binary between rupture and continuity. Fanella Cannell’s study of Mormon genealogy is instructive in how it has cast light on the labor involved in creating and recreating the links that constitute continuity, and the ways in which spiritual temporality can be reworked so that conversion or spiritual recommitment reveal an always-already spiritual-genealogical relationship (Cannell 2005). What I seek to illuminate are the implications of Cannell’s insight for the politics of recognition and of religious pluralism in Europe. Christian identity entails a paradoxical entanglement of continuity and rupture in many different possible configurations. The questions to be answered are: What manner of relationship *is* this entanglement in any given time and place? What kind of human subject and what kind of divine subject are thus entangled? These questions are not only at the heart of Syriac Orthodox anxieties over secularization and ethnicization, but they also constitute the core of European debates over religious pluralism and the ethical stakes of “really living with the Other” (Derrida 2007; Jennings 2006). Syriac encounters with a modern Protestant emphasis on radical rupture and the private interiority of the soul bring Christianity’s paradoxes and their attendant anxieties to the forefront of consciousness. When this encounter between Christianities occurs within the context of political debates about secularism and the proper relationship between religious identity and political identity, the obscure object of Europe’s pluralist anxieties—whither and whence the ethical self—is brought into focus.

For Syriac Christianity, continuity in the twenty-first century global diaspora is mediated and reproduced by building churches and monasteries and reconstituting

village communities around them. Christian identity and its *habitus* are experienced as continuous from the earliest centuries and sustained by church-regulated rules of kinship that are governed in principle by patrilineality and cross-cousin marriage. The survival of Middle Eastern Christianity in the twenty-first century is also, for many Suryoye, explicitly dependent on the moral behavior and choices of young people submitting to the patriarchal authority of church and family. An intimate overlap between home and church was, in my informants' view, an ethically necessary and distinctive part of Syriac Christian life both before migration to Europe and after.

And yet the Protestant emphasis on “rupture-thinking” exerts an increasing force, pushing Syriac Christians into uncomfortable conversations about the paradoxical relationship between rupture and continuity, between *becoming Christian* and *being Christian*. Church members who otherwise do not overly concern themselves with abstruse theology identify this paradox as a knot, as theological as it is sociological. However, one development which causes many of my Syriac Orthodox interlocutors to furrow their brow is the case of Dr. den Biesen, a native-born Dutchman who was raised devoutly Roman Catholic in the south of Holland. Dr. den Biesen taught himself classical Syriac as a young man, and he has written books about the poetry and theology of St. Ephrem, the fourth century poet-theologian who was credited by later Syriac writers with establishing the earliest women's choirs.

A middle-aged, soft-spoken man of gentle humor, Dr. den Biesen writes widely on mystical poetry, from Ephrem to Dante to Blake. In addition to his University teaching and publishing schedule, he works part-time for the monastery to

develop an educational program for the diocese. Dr. den Biesen is also distinguished as one among a tiny handful of outsiders who have converted to Syriac Orthodoxy, despite the insistence among many in the community that conversion to Syriac Orthodoxy simply is not possible. He frequently introduces himself, with a mischievous laugh, as “a Suryoyo from the village of Maastricht.” At this, even his closest friends in the church raise their eyebrows.

And yet no one has ever said outright, at least not in front of me, that Dr. den Biesen is kidding himself. The reason for this is that he is in possession of one thing that is in short supply and that conveys a status of moral authority akin to the highest ranks of the priesthood. Dr. den Biesen is a *malfono*—a wise teacher of the church. He knows St. Ephrem better than almost anyone else, and therefore his claim of conversion carries a certain weight and opens up a space of uncertainty because of his privileged scholarly access to the founding saint’s writings and wisdom. His intellectual authority serves as a bridge, offering a potential strategy for addressing the complex question of freedom and obligation that so confounded the audience members of the New Year’s event described at the beginning of this chapter.

Later in that very same New Year’s lecture, Dr. den Biesen also addressed the audience, presenting them with his interpretation of Ephrem’s symbolic thought. According to Dr. den Biesen, the path out of the morass, the path to becoming a whole person—a fully integrated, ethical human being, which is to say, a real Christian is to return to the founding texts with an open mind and a creative spirit. “Christianity is like an atlas,” he told the audience:

You can decide where you want to go—it is not a closed system. The church, and our Christian identity, exists to help us to grow in responsibility. Yes, we go to church because our parents did, but we also have the responsibility, now, to decide what that means for us. The church is there to help us grow into adulthood. Western culture has lost the capacity for culture, and so it fails to cultivate mature adults. Mor Ephrem’s message is that the church enables us to be faithful in our own unique way, and to help us make our faith personal. We have to learn how to discern the difference between things you cannot choose, and the possibilities you can choose from, and we have to learn how to handle freedom and cultivate ourselves to learn to live with other people with freedom [*leren omgaan met vrijheid*].

Thus, in Dr. den Biesen’s view, the church is a school. Western countries are in the midst of a massive identity crisis because of a breakdown in upbringing and in education [*opvoeding en onderwijs*]. The question of what to do with ancient tradition is resolved by true spiritual maturity. The goal is not to reject the past, but to use the past in a creative way to give form to the future and the present. His words left an impression on his audience. When I spoke with some of my friends and acquaintances after the event, I discovered that some were overwhelmed, but others were intrigued and expressed interest in hearing more of what Dr. den Biesen had to say.

At the time of my research, it was too early to know whether Dr. den Biesen’s ideas would be taken up by members of the church community, but his theologically and historically grounded approach addresses head-on the anxieties over textual authority that I discussed in chapter one. Dr. den Biesen’s approach to thinking about the relationship between freedom and ethical cultivation suggests possibilities for recuperating the pastoral and educational role of the church and the liturgical tradition in the relations of care and authority in the community while reconfiguring them to be more flexible, inclusive, and less authoritarian. Implicitly, his approach nods to the

growing sense that the tightly-knit relationship between kinship and ecclesial identity is a problem for Syriac Orthodox participation in European pluralism and requires an ethical reconfiguration of the bonds of relatedness, their moral and spiritual underpinnings, and the patterns and principles of social obligation and authority.

One key area of contention, for example, is the role of village associations in building churches in the diaspora. Through such activities as fund-raising and orchestrating construction of churches, members of these associations gain prestige in their own community. These activities also facilitate the expansion and reproduction of the diaspora. At the same time, these activities are fraught with generational fights based on profound disagreements about where and with whom authority resides. The moral, intellectual, and political authority of priests and grandfathers—the patriarchs—is undermined by the younger educated elites who learn in European universities that to have a legible and audible minority identity is to be *ethnic*. The erosion of patriarchal authority also has to do with the perceived pastoral failures of the ecclesiastical hierarchy (perhaps with less sympathy than is deserved for the political precarity of having the Patriarchate located in Syria). This is accompanied by a creeping, nagging sense that the church is an ossified institution that fails to cultivate the souls under its care. But these anxieties are nebulous and diffuse. Far more concrete is the explicit project by the Dutch state to intervene in the relations of authority and care that currently shape the ethics of Syriac Orthodox liturgical identity. Any form of patriarchy that evokes Middle Eastern village life and social structures and thus, by mnemonic association, Islamic (by which is assumed “non-

secular”) forms of authority, must be excised from Syriac identity in order to participate comfortably in the Dutch public sphere. But there is an awkward ambiguity here because of the church’s mediating role in producing and reproducing the historical continuities of Syriac liturgical life. This relationship between church and community is experienced as one of the only unambiguously “Syriac” properties of being Suryoye. The experience is one of an impossible choice between becoming politically “tolerable” within Dutch secularism and losing key pieces of what makes Syriac Christianity recognizably *Syriac* and *Christian*.

‘Ashirto and the ebb of village politics

Syriac kinship is the work of crafting a diasporic collective subjectivity, and the work of kinship is mediated by not only the physical structures of churches, but also by the church’s institutional authority. This work is an ethical necessity for maintaining Syriac Christian identity in diaspora, an ethical imperative rooted in a sense of moral obligation to two thousand years of Christian history in the Middle East. At the same time, this ethical imperative is a political liability according to Dutch integration discourse. But this entanglement of kinship and *ecclesia* is not the only image-problem that Syriac Orthodox Christians have in the context of Dutch multicultural politics. Village identity remains noticeably meaningful and problematic for many church members throughout the diaspora. For example, Elena, the liturgical singer whose aunt converted to an evangelical Protestant Church, finds that the politics of village identity are the bane of her life. A quietly earnest twenty-four-year-old, Elena lives with her parents, works for a Dutch bank, and spends the bulk of

her free time volunteering as a youth organizer for the Mor Ephrem Monastery. Elena's commitment to serving the church and her community developed after a visit several years ago to the monasteries in Tur Abdin. Rediscovering her family's homeland, and the homeland of Syriac Christianity, was like a born-again experience for her. Elena reflected that before her experience in Tur Abdin, she had no interest in doing things for the church; but after she spent time with the nuns at the *Deyr El-Zafaran* Monastery, learning from their loving, sisterly sense of community, she was inspired to recommit to her Christian identity. After several years of being the only woman on the board of her town's Syriac Orthodox cultural association, where she regularly encountered overt hostility from the men around her, Elena gave up on working for her local community beyond simply singing in the choir every Sunday. Instead, she joined the monastery's youth committee, where she was able to work with a more eclectic mix of members from parishes around the country, under the reform-minded auspices of the newly installed Bishop, to brainstorm ways of providing new services for the community's youth, which in practice means anyone under the age of fifty. Elena explained to me that the reason she gave up working in her local parish was because her fellow churchgoers in Rijssen were also from her village in Turkey, which was religiously "mixed," meaning populated by both Christians and Muslim Turks and Kurds. They were, in her words, "very sexist" and did not believe that women should do anything in or for the church or take on any leadership role in the community. She contrasted the men from her own village with the new young Bishop at the monastery who, aside from busily working on his Ph.D.

from Princeton Theological Seminary, grew up in an exclusively Christian village in Turkey, which in her mind explained his liberal and accepting attitude toward women's visible and audible participation in church.⁵¹ "He is respectful and supportive," she told me. "He even says thank you! But when the men from my village see me at the monastery, they sneer at me and tell me off...like, it is one thing if I go to a disco, that is fine, but I should not be here at the monastery, so close to the bishop, so close to power."

Village identities remain central enough to the practices of memory and identity in diaspora that Dr. den Biesen knew to call himself a "Suryoyo from the village of Maastricht," while many of my friends maintain email addresses like, for example, arboyo1978@email.com, in which *arboyo* refers to a person from the village of Arbo. At the same time, village identity remains problematic enough that Elena struggled against the disapproval of her fellow villagers in her Dutch parish and categorized the moral distinctions among the community according to whether they were from religiously mixed villages or not.

During my fieldwork, when I started to perceive the enduring importance of the village of a family's origin even among third-generation individuals who had

⁵¹ The first Mass I attended at the Mor Ephrem Monastery, which I described in chapter three, coincided with the Bishop's introduction to the community. The Mass I attended was the first time a young female liturgical singer was asked to stand in front of the congregation and read a passage from the Bible in Dutch. Despite expressed dismay from older men in the community, the Bishop has made it a habit to ask a woman from the *gudo* to read from the Bible in Dutch whenever he visits a parish church. Such audibility is novel but taken by many young women to be an encouraging sign that there is hope.

never seen their grandparents' villages, I began to ask my friends about village identity more directly. Often, my questions drew angry or dismissive sneers, but a handful of friends admitted to me that participating in village associations in the diaspora was still somewhat common. One evening after dinner with a choir friend's family, I discovered that my friend's brothers and father were at a village association meeting. When they returned, I asked them about what they had done there. As they reported back the meeting's proceedings, they sighed and rolled their eyes about the other members who were trying to spend money re-buying and building houses in their old village back in Turkey. My friend's father laughed and shook his head in exasperation: "What do they think they are going to *do* there? Sit on a pile of desert rock with a bunch of Kurds staring at them?" One of his sons responded, "Well, yes, for some of them that is the point. People want to say to the Muslims, you may have driven us off, but it made us stronger and wealthier than you!" There is an emotional push and pull effect here, as the villages and churches and monasteries of *Tur Abdin* constitute a moral geography of memory and longing that is central to the reproduction of liturgical life in the diaspora. At the same time, the majority of Syriac Christians are convinced that returning to the Middle East is impossible and that maintaining strong ties attracts the suspicion of Dutch integration discourse. Notably, the bonds that some Dutch Muslims maintain with Turkey and Morocco are viewed by many Dutch commentators as tantamount to treason (Arab and de Jong 2011). This awareness makes publicly visible attachment to village identity a political liability in the public sphere. Nonetheless, village affiliations are sticky and laden

with moral identities that continue to color interpersonal interactions throughout the diaspora, as Elena's story attests. These interactions are reinterpreted, however, through the lens of Dutch multicultural discourse with its particular forms of moralizing. According to Elena, moral attitudes were shaped by one's village, and one's village's moral attitudes were shaped by the village's Christian homogeneity (better) or its Muslim-Christian diversity (worse). From Elena's point of view as a young woman who grew up in the conservatively Dutch Reformed town of Rijssen, in Europe a person has an easier time in straightforward, homogenous, Christian circles. European diversity and secularity thus become narrated as a moral problem for Syriac Christians, not just because this side of European culture equates "immoral" behavior as a sign of progressive social emancipation, but also because the moral "problems" of European pluralism are a resonant, yet inverted, echo of the moral "problems" of mixed villages.

One specific dimension of the moral problem of a "mixed" village identity, as it has been interpreted through Dutch integration discourse, is the concept of *'ashirto*, or the powerful extended family. *'Ashirto* is the Aramaic cognate of the Arabic word *ashira* and the Kurdish word *ashirat*, which specifically designates the clan as a political structure (Bruinessen 1992). Syriac *'ashirto* was traditionally entangled in the politics of the institution of Kurdish *ashirat*, as Christians occupied a dependent position in Kurdish-dominated villages, but it does not bear *ashirat's* formal political features. Instead, *'ashirto* refers to any extended family network that has particularly strong influence and authority within the broader community, usually because of the

family's wealth and connections with a church. These are the men who tend to be heavily represented on church governance boards. One cannot become a priest, it is said, without a village association or powerful family network behind you. While Naures Atto (2011) points out that 'ashirto is less strong in the Netherlands than in Sweden, which is the specific location of her study, because the lines of migration to Holland created more mixed communities. Despite this, there remain hints that 'ashirto continues to be present in Syriac social life in the Netherlands. Throughout my fieldwork, when I asked my interlocutors about 'ashirto, I encountered a curious wall of silence that was broken every so often by outbursts of anger and innuendo, only to be hushed up with anxious glances in my direction, about the goings-on of a particular powerful family in the south of Enschede and their hold over the board of their parish church. When I was finally warned off poking my nose into this topic during an interview with a local Dutch police officer, I grasped why my friends and interlocutors who were none too eager to expose me to this side of their community. Therefore I decided to keep my distance. The intensity of my interlocutors' anger and embarrassment, however, suggests that the 'ashirto remains a significant element in Dutch-Syriac diasporic social life, for good or for ill.

Freedom, Obligation, and the Allochthonous Family

About seven months after the New Year's lecture, I was present for another public event that has been organized by the Abbot's niece, a prominent local jurist who was concerned that her community was having problems with integrating into Dutch society. Titled "Living Between Two Cultures," this event presented a panel of

experts that included an alderman from the nearby city of Enschede, where Syriac Orthodox Christians are the largest and most visible minority, a city police officer responsible for liaising with the Syriac community, the monastery's resident theologian, and a senior researcher from a non-profit policy, research, and training organization located in the far-away city of Utrecht. This researcher, Dr. K, was the keynote speaker. It was her speech, and her audience's outraged response, that triggered an association with the New Year's event that had taken place in the same location several months before.

Dr. K introduced herself to the at-capacity crowd as an academic criminologist-cum-pedagogue, who was a project leader at a Youth Care organization's Study Center on Migrants and Refugees. She explained that the Abbott's niece had brought to her attention the growing problem of young Suryoyo boys causing trouble on the streets of Enschede, and had invited her to speak to the community to help them deal with it. These "menacing" Suryoyo adolescents were a growing problem for criminologists, she said; and she was there to help the Syriac Orthodox community understand the behavior of these "so-called street terrorists." Dr. K explained that the roots of young male Syriac crime and aggression were as much cultural as they were social and psychological. Based on studies conducted by her organization among Turkish, Moroccan, and Surinamese youth in the cities of central Holland, she said, it had been scientifically established that young migrant boys are susceptible to developing a problematic image of masculinity as "lacking empathy," which leads to problems with drugs, alcohol, the wrong friends, and eventually street violence. The

source of this unhappy version of masculinity is the “coercive dynamic” of many allochthonous families.

And so, Dr. K explained to her Syriac Orthodox audience, allochthonous families are not alone in experiencing problems with physical and verbal abuse, but the susceptibility of their young men to grow into the criminal element has everything to do with cultural resistance to receiving help from professional care-givers. Addressing the audience with great emphasis on the English phrase: “*er is absoluut geen* case management [there is absolutely no case management],” she began to plead: “Let the professional care-givers do their job—let them intervene in all the problems that arise in your family!”

By the time her speech ended, the churning anger in the audience was audible. People were appalled. The audience’s questions and comments betrayed varying degrees of indignation and skepticism on several grounds: *We are not the ones who need to hear this—and the people who need to hear it would not come to something like this anyway! We are not Turks, we are not Moroccans, we are not Surinamese, what does any of this have to do with us? How can you come say all this to us without knowing the first thing about who we are?* One audience member, a trained schoolteacher from Syria, made a trenchant point: “You cannot deny that more and more there are ‘black’ schools and ‘white’ schools. Discrimination and exclusion really happen here, and that makes it hard for people like us to even want to integrate. It would make a huge difference if Dutch people could work on integrating themselves a little too [*een beetje mee integreren*]!” A rare moment of audible

approval and visible head-nodding finally occurred when the theologian, Dr. den Biesen, spoke up: “So why have we not brought up the most important question of all yet? What does it mean to be a Christian in all of this?” But, despite the audience’s approval, the panel of experts veered off in another direction. When the meeting finally ended, I asked several of my Suryoye friends what they made of it all, and they shook their heads in frustration, sharing a general sense that the event had been something of a failure and a wasted opportunity.

The offense expressed at being asked to open up Syriac Orthodox family life to direct intervention from pedagogical social workers resonates with the distress expressed at the first public event. The concept of coercion was flagged as a problem in both stories. The problem with this is that the speakers never acknowledged the possibility of a situational distinction between coercion and obligation, which made their audience extremely uncomfortable, although the language to express that discomfort was difficult to find. Obligation to church and family can look either like coercion or like responsibility, depending on what sorts of assumptions and values are brought to the analysis. As it is, family dynamics, and their relationship to religious identity, authority, freedom, and responsibility are already fractious within the community. This dynamic calls for closer attention.

Maryam and the Saint

I was first alerted to the dynamics of religious freedom, obligation, and authority in pious Syriac Christian conceptions of kin-relatedness by Maryam, the wife of the priest at the parish church in central Enschede where I conducted research

with the women's and men's choirs. After Holy Mass one day, I sat with Maryam on the women's side of the coffee hall (*koffiezaal*), where she told me the story of how her son Gabriel was conceived. Like many Christians and Muslims in the area around the Mor Gabriel Monastery in Tur Abdin,⁵² she once held an all-night vigil praying to the saint in hopes of conceiving. She was successful, as is everyone who talks about their experience, and with proper gratitude eventually named her child after the saint. She explained to me, with fervent animation, that you cannot just name your child "following your fantasy...you have to honor the saint, or he will be angry." She knew a woman who did not name her son after the saint, so St. Gabriel took him away in a car accident when he turned eighteen. To Maryam, this was a sad but predictable outcome.

From a secular perspective, there is a complicated entanglement of kinship, authority, and moral obligation built into the ritual structure of St. Gabriel's role in Maryam's family life that highlights a point of tension between Syriac Christian and western Christian, particularly Calvinist, conceptions of the religious subject. This tension turns on differently conceived notions of transcendence and immanence as constitutive of the relationships among Christians and the divine. Keane reminds us that the problem of transcendence, as defined and refined by Calvinist Christians, has come to haunt the very condition of secular modernity: the modern subject desires "a self freed of its body, ...meanings freed of semiotic mediation, and...agency freed of

⁵² See also Dalrymple 1997 for further accounts from Muslims and Christians who have made use of Mor Gabriel monastery for these purposes.

the press of other people” (2006: 320). The problem of transcendence assures an eternal paradox and ambiguity in the status of subjects and objects, of words and things, and all material mediations of the ontological gap between the invisible and the visible worlds (Keane 2006: 312). This Protestant distinction between human subjects and non-human objects is fundamental to modern conceptions of personhood (see also Cannell 2006: 14-22; Mauss 1985). But Keane’s formulation does not describe *all* Christian ontologies, and Maryam’s relationship with St. Gabriel makes sense within Syriac Christianity. In Syriac tradition, there is no ontological gap between the visible and invisible world, as long as the Christian subject has the capacity for poetic thought necessary to grasp this unity (see also den Biesen 2010; McVey 1989). This is captured in Syriac liturgical theology by the notion of *rozo*, which means “mystery,” which suggests, as Dr. den Biesen explained to me one day when I visited him and his wife for dinner, a symbol that materializes the mystery and makes it accessible to human experience. This is a notion, he said, of immanent transcendence, in which “now” becomes “eternity,” and the visible reveals the invisible (see also Varghese 2004). Such a principle operates in a universe in which there is no opposition between sacred and profane, and in which holiness is a condition of moral personhood conveyed in the notion of *kadisho*⁵³.

⁵³ In this same conversation, Dr. den Biesen explained that liturgical singing itself is meant, formally, to be an emotional state of participating in this mystery. Such a view of the immanence of singing derives from eastern Orthodoxy’s holistic approach to thinking about cosmological salvation, in contrast to Western Christianity’s view, influenced by Augustine, that the body and the senses are depraved. Such official

Maryam's understanding of the relationships among herself, her children, and the saint thus rests on the assumption of the invisible's immanent presence in the visible world: a single, unified reality in which interaction between humans and angels is possible, albeit within a certain asymmetrical structure of authority and obligation. This ontological unity gives a different valence to the "value" in exchange than that bestowed by the logic of transcendence. For Maryam, a name quite rightly bears the same value as a life: its value is in the way it symbolically materializes her submission to the immanent power and moral authority of the saint. For this reason, the materiality of the name, Gabriel or Gabriela, matters.

The historically Dutch Calvinist Christian discourse of materiality and interiority, which posits an opposition between material value and social value (i.e., the worth of the human subject over and against the worth of objects), looks askance at the relation of exchange between Maryam and the saint. The structure of authority is wrong, both from a secular humanist point of view and from a Calvinist Christian point of view. The modern subject must be the source of her own value, and of her own authority, authenticated by the *sincerity* of her individual will. The moral authority of the modern Christian subject's will derives from a sincere relationship with its own interiority (Keane 2006: 315-316; see also Seligman 2009). Maryam repudiates this logic of will as a "fantasy," and she warns of its lethal consequences for the Syriac Christian family.

meanings and explanations were not, however, something my interlocutors in the liturgical choirs were aware of, as I explain in chapter two.

Such are the theological and cosmological underpinnings of the Syriac Orthodox view that Christianity itself is a kinship practice. Such a view of kinship is inscrutable to secular Euro-American notions of kinship as biological relatedness (Strathern 2005). This poses a problem for the Dutch politics of religious pluralism because, as I have shown in chapter three, kinship belongs in the public domain where it can become the object of state biopolitical intervention, whereas religion is a matter of private (and thus optional) ethics. Yet Maryam is ethically entangled with the divine through her non-optional kin relations, in complete transgression of the categorical distinctions of modern secular and western Christian thought.

But Maryam lives in the Netherlands, so the saint coexists uneasily with other powerful forces and logics. Maryam inhabits the interstices of competing and overlapping authorities. The lines run right through the middle of her everyday family life. She is pious and concerned for the preservation of the spiritual community according to correct norms. Her husband, soon to be promoted to the highest rank in the ecclesiastical hierarchy available to a married priest, is a widely admired paragon of moderate Syriac conservatism. At the same time, she is extremely proud of her daughter, Philippa, a law student at a Dutch university, who is clearly living a life unrecognizable to Maryam in a world governed by logics that classify her own cosmological common sense as superstitious and absurd. Maryam sighs and shakes her head over how hard Philippa has to work. Maryam cannot imagine Philippa's life herself, but she beams with pride touched by sadness when she speaks of her daughter. "So many big books! All of the time!" she tells me. Sometimes Philippa is

so busy studying that she cannot come to church on Sundays, even though she was for a long time a core member of the young women's choir. The logic of Maryam's ritual relation of obligation to the saint is, in part, a reflection of her full-bodied and wholehearted habitation of Syriac Orthodox liturgical life, which organizes social and familial relations. But this ritual obligation is mingled with her love and respect for her daughter, and her recognition that her daughter *must*, for the sake of Syriac political viability and visibility in the Dutch public sphere, fulfill her ambitions for a career practicing Dutch law, even though this requires submission to other structures of authority (none the least the textualized authority of academic credentials) that make an almost all-consuming claim on Philippa's time and energy. The ambivalently proud yet tearful expression on Maryam's face and the catch in her throat as she says: "so many big books!" suggest her uneasy acceptance of a competing authoritative claim on her daughter. The bridge between liturgical kinship and secular biopolitics is Maryam's affective labor.

The Subject of Responsibility

Such is the entanglement of liturgical kinship and divine authority in the Syriac Christian subject. Very little is written, however, about West Syriac liturgical theology to inscribe the character of Maryam's kin relations with any textual authority (the 2004 tract by a Syriac Orthodox seminary professor in India cited on page 267 is a rare exception), rendering it mostly illegible within the secular episteme, a condition that is exacerbated by Maryam's weak literacy and difficulty speaking Dutch. These relations are instead embodied in practices: her all-night vigil,

her conception, giving birth and raising her child, naming her child after the saint, caring for the priest who cares for the parish. When I described Maryam’s theory of and relationship to the saint to a Calvinist Dutch family member of mine who had studied theology at seminary, he was astonished.⁵⁴ He said (in English): “That’s not Christianity—that’s animism!” To Maryam, these practices make her Christian. To my Calvinist kin, they are unrecognizable as Christian. Maryam’s liturgical subjectivity is only as partially audible to Dr. den Biesen as it is because he has spent his life immersed in the theological poetry of St. Ephrem. To mainstream secular and western Christian audiences, Maryam is entirely inaudible, illegible, and incomprehensible. The inaudibility of her liturgical subjectivity makes dialogical recognition for her generation all but impossible.

The absence of dialogical recognition blocks Suryoye efforts to engage the Dutch state and its proxies in their efforts to “integrate” them. In the examples I have provided so far, the failure of dialogical recognition turns on differently understood conceptions of responsibility in the secular Dutch citizen-subject and in the Syriac liturgical subject. In the New Year’s public lecture, Syriac Orthodox were asked to adopt a western Christian view of taking individual responsibility for *becoming Christian*, which would, if adopted, potentially produce a rupture with a deeply

⁵⁴ This family member also happens to be an adamant supporter of inclusive multiculturalism policy and for many years worked professionally to fight Islamophobia and help the Muslim community in his city gain access to improved employment opportunities. It is central to my argument that sympathy for religious minorities (or its lack) is not the key problematic in the politics of pluralism.

cherished sense that their Christian identity is primordial and immutable. It would also require reconfiguring the ethical entanglement with saints and divine authority. Yet because this dimension of Syriac subjectivity is imperceptible to Dutch interlocutors it never comes up for explicit discussion. This leaves an open, unspeakable wound of anxiety and perplexity among second- and third-generation Syriac Orthodox. This is why the intervention proposed by Dr. K in the second event was especially upsetting to them: Syriac Orthodox were being asked to share responsibility for domestic matters with secular professional experts, thereby entering into a relationship with the state that would effectively displace the role of God, his saints, and the church as the authorizing axis of responsible kin relations.

It is also striking that the “successfully integrated” allochthonous citizen-subject is produced by the social pedagogical project of learning to speak in ways that will cultivate a particular sense of responsibility. In 2011, Dr. K’s organization stated in the mission statement published on its website that it was under mandate from the Ministry for Youth and Family to address the problem that allochthonous families made far less use of “preventive parenting support” than autochthonous families⁵⁵. As of the services provided by social pedagogues, preventive parenting support mostly takes the form of parenting classes. Classes include lessons on how to speak to and respond to children, when to feed them and put them to bed, how to discipline them,

⁵⁵ See <http://www.pharos.nl/programma/jeugd/83>. Accessed October 26, 2011.

and generally how to raise them to be independent and responsible individuals. The organization's mission statement also points out that the discrepancy between allochthonous and autochthonous use of preventive parenting support is one of the contributing factors to the overall higher rates of criminality among the allochthonous population. Consequently, Dr. K's research and outreach programs focused on helping allochthonous families to overcome the cultural barriers that prevent them from making use of the expert pedagogical care available to them so that they will not become a criminal problem for the state.

Syriac Christians deeply resent being included in the broad category of *allochthony*, not only because it confounds Syriac-Assyrian-Aramean claims to recognition as a distinct ethno-religious community, but also because of a strong sense that research conducted on Turkish, Moroccan, and Surinamese communities is profoundly inapplicable to the moral and spiritual struggles of being a Middle Eastern Christian in Dutch society. The public lecture on Syriac identity was being held in the monastery for a reason, and yet the entire panel, with the exception of the resident theologian, was indifferent or oblivious to the centrality of the Church's responsibility for the total well-being of the Syriac community. Kinship and ecclesial identity are intimately entwined and are perceived as being under threat of absolute cultural annihilation within the next twenty years. The trouble is not that Syriac Orthodox are being asked to integrate per se, it is that what is being targeted for integration, that is, the relations of authority and care within the mutually embedded structures of family and church, is understood as a matter of fundamental spiritual significance. This is a

matter of responsibility to God, to family, and to the body of the church, all of which coincide within the ethical Syriac self, explicitly reproduced and reconfigured by participation in the liturgy, either as singer or listener. For most people in the community, the unity of religious identity and kin relations is the ethical core of being Syriac, and it is already under threat from consumer capitalism, from the failure to achieve recognition as a legal minority in Turkey (and having shared the fate of Armenians in the early twentieth century), and from having no safe place in the world where they can ensure that Aramaic will not soon be a dead language, as is indeed already generally assumed. If, in addition, Syriac Orthodox are required to reconfigure the coterminous relationship between kinship and liturgical identity by integrating into Dutch society according to the principles laid out by the speakers in both events, they fear that two thousand years of Middle Eastern Christianity will disappear despite the supposedly multicultural inclusiveness of Dutch society and its respect for differences.

The distress triggered in both events hinges on the complexity of the notion of responsibility implicit in secular Dutch integration policies as well as in the modern Protestant strands of western Christian theology favored by intellectually-inclined Dutch Christians today. In the first story, responsibility is invoked through a notion of freedom understood as the burden of an individual's relationship to the divine—or phrased even more precisely, freedom is the individual's *chosen relation to their obligation* to the divine. In the second story, responsibility is understood in secular bureaucratic terms as a shared burden distributed among state-authorized actors.

These actors are also conceptualized as individuals, although with common interests as citizens of the state. Secular citizens freedoms exist in relation to their obligations to live and behave in a manner conducive to society's well-being. In both these stories, the Syriac Orthodox audience is audibly resistant. They do not necessarily reject these conceptions of responsibility outright, but they do react with dismay rooted in their own historical experience and common sense view that Christianity is a kinship practice built upon its own set of relations of responsibility.

This discussion raises two questions about religious pluralism in the secular episteme. In *The Gift of Death* (2008), Derrida devotes a chapter to the "Secrets of European Responsibility," in which he argues that the history of sovereign power in Europe is bound up with the joint history of (western) Christianity and of the free self as the subject of responsibility (Derrida 2008: 4). The management of life that animates modern biopower is—in this perspective—rooted in a submerged religious history of subjecting the subject of responsibility "to the wholly and infinite other that sees without being seen" (Derrida 2008: 5), such that secular discourses of political responsibility echo western Christian discourses of religious responsibility. Another way to put this is that the Christian soul is answerable to God for the caring management of earthly life: though free, the soul is responsible, because it is ultimately subject to God's sovereignty. Similarly, citizens are free, although responsible, because they are ultimately subject to the sovereign state. Thus, political arguments in Europe over the incompatibility of religious traditions with secular democracy would emerge from a fundamental uncertainty over the quality and

character of the “unseen other” that shapes cultural and political conceptions of the relationship between the free self and sovereign power, what Derrida describes as a relationship of responsibility (Derrida 2008: 7-8). Thus the tensions that Syriac Orthodox Christians experience as they contemplate the effects of integrating into Dutch society reveal two key questions underlying public debates over the limits of religious pluralism in secular societies: 1) What constitutes a legitimate relationship of responsibility, and 2) What do we need to know in order to know it when we see it?

These questions call for closer examination of the European construction of “Christianity” as a shaping influence on modern personhood and the politics of religious pluralism in secular modernity. Cannell recounts the lasting influence of Hegel’s interpretation of the Christian mode of being religious “as being fundamentally about a ‘radical separation’ between man and God” (2006: 17-18). Further, “the struggle over the mediation of divine power is one of the aspects of local Christianities that has been best documented in ethnographic writing” (Cannell 2006: 17). Such presumptions recur as tropes (e.g., “the mediation of the power of a God withdrawn from the world of mortal men” and “spirit and matter as irreconcilable opposites”) throughout the anthropology of Christianity in the tendency to focus study on questions of mediation and asceticism (Cannell 2006: 18).

Cannell shows how this Hegelian definition of Christianity as determined by transcendence has influenced theories of modern personhood, such as Mauss’s theory that Christianity produces a definition of the self as “a sense of interiority connected

with morality” (Mauss [1938] 1985: 20). In this view, Christianity shaped the conception of modern personhood as a form of “psychological being”—a person made of “substance and mode, body and soul, consciousness and act” (Mauss [1938] 1985: 20; see also Foucault 1976). But to make a monolith of the Hegelian narrative of Christian personhood is to obscure the pluralism within western Christianity itself, not to mention eastern Orthodox and other global Christian conceptions of self.

Anthropologists such as Simon Coleman (2000, 2006) have shown the diversity of relations that can exist between even the western Christian person and the divine. He analyzes the Swedish Charismatic Protestant economy of salvation in which Faith Christians gave gifts to strangers not in order to create social bonds (which contrasts significantly with Mauss’s theory of gift exchange), but with the idea that the spiritual self would be materialized in the gift and sent out “into a world where the unknown other could be the apparent recipient of the donation, but where the greatest beneficiary would be herself (*sic*)” (Coleman 2006: 180). Thus, Coleman writes, “the charismatic self is constituted by becoming a materialized self through the agency of words and things” (Coleman 2006: 182). The agency of words and things in Swedish Charismatic Protestantism suggests a different configuration of subject-object relations, as well as a different attitude towards agency and materiality, than that of Keane’s Dutch Calvinist missionaries. Indeed, each of the contributions to Cannell’s edited volume on the anthropology of Christianity attests to the diversity of Christian relations with the divine and the manner of their mediation.

The Swedish Charismatic materialization of the self in the exchange of words and things (rendering the invisible visible) resonates noticeably with the materialization of *rozo*, or “mystery,” in Syriac thought, as exemplified in Maryam’s relation with the saint. The crucial difference is that while Protestants and other western Christians materialize selves, Maryam materializes a relation. There is an entirely different logic at work. Coleman already shows that there are different ways of conceptualizing the logic of exchange when he argues against Parry’s “*The gift, the gift and the Indian gift*” (1986), in which

Parry (1986: 467) notes that all major world religions stress the merits of gifts and alms, ideally given in secrecy and without expectation of worldly return. Unreciprocated gifts become seen as the means to a liberation from bondage to the world, a denial of the profane self, atonement from sin, and a means to salvation (Coleman 2006: 181).

By contrast, Coleman observes that Faith Christians take an economic view of gift exchange that nonetheless is vital to their spiritual identity: the benefit of a gift to unknown others is mutually dependent upon the giver’s spiritual self-interest. According to Coleman, Parry’s original argument holds that “world religions and capitalism produce an ideological split between the notion of the free gift and the notion of interested exchange: as the economy becomes disembedded from society, transactions appropriate to each become more polarized in symbolism and ideology” (Coleman 2006: 181). Coleman counters that Swedish Charismatic Christians deny

the possibility of creating an unbridgeable split between spheres of existence—all are united by being under the thrall of and therefore reflective of divine power. Free gifts to others are not wrong, but they miss the central point of

Christian action: ultimately, the individual person must cultivate a spiritual contract with God (Coleman 2006: 181).

The nature of the relation between Swedish Charismatic Christian and their God is *contractual*. This is a fundamentally liberal and capitalist conception that rests on a particular notion of personhood according to the model of possessive individualism articulated by Locke and other modern liberal thinkers (Locke 2004; see Macpherson 1964). This Christian self, like other modern selves, is first and foremost a property-owner whose primary property is his own individual self. This individual self elects to enter into relations with others and these relations are governed by the law and logic of contracts. In modern liberal states, a relation of legitimate responsibility is one that has been ratified by a contract. A contractual obligation is enforced by the law of the sovereign state. More importantly still, state sovereignty is a function of its status as enforcer and protector of property rights and contractual relations (Macpherson 1964). The subject of contractual relations is the self-possessing individual. Faith Christians, the Swedish Charismatics of Coleman's study, render their understanding of their relation to God in these economic terms. God may be sovereign but the person that exists in relation to that sovereignty is individuated and self-possessed.

Although the individuated and self-possessed person is ubiquitous in a world shaped by capitalism, Marilyn Strathern (1988, 2005) has shown in her work on Melanesian kinship that "the individual" is far from a universal model of personhood. A self may instead be understood, for example, as the intersection of multiple relations (2005: 13). The relations, in this configuration, produce the self, rather than

the pre-constituted self that elects to enter into relations with others. One of the only areas in which this is thinkable and translatable into liberal terms is Euro-American kinship. I do not elect to be a sister or daughter but the intersection of these kin relations produce vital parts of my sense of self. If I elect to become a mother, this too will produce a vital sense of selfhood that cannot be undone. There are a few things in modern liberal life that stick, though it is a testament to the limits of this life that these gendered and sexualized dimensions of personhood are not easy to square with the legal and public identity of the abstract, bounded, individual citizen-subject (Scott 2007).

However, the self implied by the Syriac conception of *rozo* and by Maryam's relation with the saint is different yet again. The Syriac Orthodox subject's relation with the divine and with others is produced by the logic of kinship rather than contract. It is possible to disrupt catastrophically the kin relations that produce Syriac selves by irresponsible behaviors. The immanent divine is also a powerful subject with the capacity to take away a parent's child if the parent does not materialize gratitude, respect, and submission in embodied practices. This is precisely why, when persons who are born Syriac Christian cease to believe in God, they cease to be Suryoye, no matter what else they have done for the community, as was the case for Semela. The entangled relation with God and kin produces the Syriac Orthodox self. Disrupting those relations destroys that self. To translate into Euro-American terms, the day I cease to be a daughter or a sister is the day I will have died.

Although Rebekah the choir leader foresees that in thirty years time this Syriac conception of self will have radically altered, for now, the sense of existential and political crisis is exacerbated by its inaudibility. The Syriac self is unlike secular *and* western Christian conceptions of self. Furthermore, the Syriac self is different in such a way that it does not register within the sensory regime of secular modernity. As a result, productive sonic practices like liturgical singing and naming one's child after a saint are misheard, misrecognized, and misinterpreted. The inadequacy of language to render this predicament in comprehensible terms befuddles the community itself.

When the perspicacious young man at the New Year's event invoked the figure of Henry Ford and his famous dictum "you can choose any color you like as long as it's black," he was laughed at and then ignored. I suggest this was because he was beginning to articulate something that is in fact very difficult and dangerous to articulate within the politics of religious pluralism in Europe, especially in the Netherlands where norms are explicit and overtly enforced. The laughter, I would argue, betrayed uneasiness rather than dismissal. The language of choice obscures the reality that there is really only one available model and one kind of relation to that model. The humorous way the young man formulated the question and the inability of his peers to engage him points to the polysemy—the excess of meanings—inherent in the problem he identified. For the Syriac self, there is but one God and one relation to that God, and one is born into it so there is nothing to choose. For western Christians of different stripes, there is but one model of personhood, even if the relations

between that person and the divine can be variously configured. One can choose one's relation to God, but monotheism entails an exclusive truth-claim and one cannot choose what is true in itself. One cannot choose one's own ontology. For the secular modern, there is but one model of personhood, shared with the western Christian model. The divine only comes into it as long as the subject's relation to God is private, unobtrusive, and entails no ethical challenge to state sovereignty. The language of choice and freedom of conscience implied by secularism obscures the impossibility of religious freedom written into secular definitions of *what religion is* and how it may figure into the lives of citizens. The impossibility of religious freedom is written into the definition of *self*. The impossibility of religious freedom is written into the ethics of being a person. The root of existential and political crisis for Syriac Christians is the monological conception of the human subject in secular and western Christian modernity. The implications of this difference in conceiving the self are immense for the politics of religious pluralism in Europe.

Conclusion

Broken Alliances

In Syriac churches, which are often housed in converted Catholic chapels, the strong smell of incense and the sound of bells, the vaguely-yet-not-quite Byzantine iconography, the continuous murmur of prayers overlapping with recitation of the Bible in ancient Aramaic and the sound of almost-but-not-quite Semitic singing are enough to transport even the most hardened post-Calvinist to the ancient desert caves and mountains of the Middle East, to a time before the Great Schism of Latin Christendom and Eastern Orthodoxy, before the Calvinist iconoclasts scraped out the faces of saints from Catholic cathedrals, before Christianity wrote itself into the history of empires, colonies, and free republics. While secularism in much of Europe is rationalized with historical references to centuries of denominational violence and the burning of heretics, the appeal to the past and the need to scour European history of religious strife is tinged with a pervasive sense of something hidden and submerged, but not completely lost. The Dutch secular, I am convinced, is a haunting, and the religious is much more than its constitutive other. It is the spectral projection of European history's bloody relationship with itself.

I wrote these words in the spring of 2009, shortly before I left for my year of fieldwork in the Netherlands. The hardened post-Calvinist in search of an ancient Christianity that might redeem the violence of European history was, of course, me. I have been concerned since the very beginning with the problem of religious histories and the selves that must live in the ashes of those histories. I sought out Syriac

Orthodox Christians in the Netherlands in the hope of finding the possibility of an ethical future for Europe. Led by Derrida, whose experience as a North African Sephardic Jew in colonial and post-colonial France shaped a lifetime of philosophical inquiry into the possibility of living ethically, of living an ethical relation with the unseen Other, of living with the Other without violence, I looked and listened for ethnographic evidence of such possibility.

I went to the Netherlands not only because it is my father's country and the place where I lived as a child, but also because more than any other country in the world the Netherlands has come closest to taking seriously, as an explicit, state-driven project, the problem of what it means to really live with the Other. That my research locates myriad limits, gaps, and fractures in this project does not mean I take pleasure from my findings or that all Dutch efforts at cultivating cosmopolitanism should be cynically dismissed.

In every possible way, I have instead found evidence of the problem Derrida describes of living with a religious history in secular modernity as living "without continuity but without rupture." He called it the broken alliance that continues to bind (Caputo 1997; Derrida 1993). The binding force of religious histories, however construed, result from entanglements of kinship, memory, longing, and trauma for secular Dutch atheists as much as for devout Syriac Christians.

What I also found is that there is a particular kind of preoccupation with history that is characterically European in the sense that it is produced by a textual

regime of knowledge-power within the secular episteme. For Syriac Orthodox Christians, the past is the source of existential and political crisis only inasmuch as the powers of the secular modern force it to be. The present-day and future survival of Syriac Orthodoxy thus depends on transposing the aurality of liturgical memory into legible text—unless the powers of the secular modern learn to listen in new ways.

But this transposition, already underway, effects a perforation. Distinctions between religious life and other forms of life become thinkable. For Syriac Christians what remains after the work of disarticulating religious identity from political and social identity is a contested discourse of Christian moral belonging inflected with a postcolonial notion of historical difference. This is a strategic response to the tensions of their encounters with misrecognition and the temporal construction of religion as a repressive form of silencing. Dutch Suryoye struggles to construct and historicize a culturally and religiously bounded moral identity are evidence of strategic negotiation with the pressures and perplexities of secularization and ethnicization within the discursive terrain of European pluralist politics.

When examined from another angle, Syriac Orthodox experiences shed light on a fundamental question in the politics of European pluralism: on what grounds and through what processes are religious identities politicized and de-politicized? I have argued that throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries in Turkey, Syria, the Netherlands, and the global secular episteme, Syriac Orthodox Christians engaged a de-politicization of one kind with the gradual perforation of Syriac Orthodox ritual

practice and belief from Aramean ethnicity and Assyrian nationality, at the very moment that their status as a non-western racial-religious minority, a matrix of categorical otherness captured by the term *allochtoon*, became politicized by Dutch discourses of moral citizenship.

As Syriac Orthodox Christians debate whether and how to reconstitute ethno-religious identity into separable spheres, contests over moral belonging and ethical behavior are placed squarely in the public sphere to be the object of scrutiny and power. This double-movement suggests that the politicization of religious identities in Dutch multiculturalism hinges on the question of who the ethical citizen-subject of a multicultural state is, how such an ethical person is to be formed, and under whose authority.

In the case of Syriac Christians doing their best to create a hyphenated Dutch-Syriac identity that can respond ethically to the demands of both their political and their religious obligations, answering this question entails a consideration of how audience, ethics, and scale are implicated in the formation of the body politic, while the body politic is constituted as a moral community by the cultivation of ethical persons. This is to speak of aesthetic formations, rather than bounded, static communities, for these are open-ended, material, and sensorial processes.

The category of “culture” effectively constitutes an ethical formation in the Dutch public sphere, such that the Dutch “multiculturalism” debates are fundamentally debates about the ethics of pluralism and the pluralization of ethical

personhood. The questions raised by these debates concern the moral identity of the nation and the state's role as pastoral care-giver to the nation. These concerns animate public discourses of Dutch national identity, which unfolded throughout the 2000s into three strands: that of the neo-patriots who advocate a hybrid of exclusive nationalism and progressive social norms; that of the cosmopolitan nationalists who believe it is distinctly Dutch to be tolerant, inclusive, and self-critical; and that of elite, professional skeptics who, in conversation with global critical theory, maintain that there is no "Dutch identity" and there never was (Lechner 2008). Each of these strands reflects a certain moral position on how to be Dutch in ethical terms that makes sense in light of the history of nationalization.

The history of Dutch nationalization is a religious history. More significantly, it is a history of managing religious difference. Older generations of Christian Democrats insist that Dutch moral identity should be predicated on the inclusion of Muslims in national Dutch self-imaginings, because respecting the integrity of another's religious-ethical commitments, within certain recognized constraints, is fundamentally—*morally*—Dutch. Geert Wilders and his right-wing, Islamophobic compatriots articulate a position that resonates with other Europe-wide claims that there is such a thing as a Judeo-Christian-humanist "culture" which, far from demonstrating any kind of category-error, in fact testifies to the coincidence of ethical, religious, and communal identitarian commitments in the history of Dutch *and* European political life. This is not only the very coincidence that secular thought insists upon making divisible, but also the grounds upon which Muslims are accused

of being illiberal and difficult to integrate. The confusion of this paradoxical claim frames Dutch-Syriac struggles over how to remain Christian in a way they recognize while making themselves politically “tolerable” to the Dutch nation, and it raises questions for their sense of ethical personhood. The project of transforming Syriac subjectivity into divisible spheres, in which the religious is private, while the ethical is political and public, runs up against the limits of the discourse of Dutch moral identity itself. These limits, visible in the invisible conflation of categories, are nothing less than the problems of freedom and authority which secularism is intended to resolve.

Ironically, Dutch Christian efforts to help Syriac Christians “become” Christian by disarticulating kinship from ecclesial identity and by surrendering moral authority over the pastoral care of the family to the welfare state and its proxies, suggests a reversal of Kierkegaard’s vision of Christian freedom. In this freedom, the ethical is subsumed within the religious, even when the religious demands an absurd conflict with the power and rationality of earthly institutions through submitting absolutely to divine authority (1968).

European Christianity’s inner divisions played a part in the formation of secular modernity, as did Calvinist theological precepts regarding the difference between subjects and objects. However Christianity’s historical relationship with the state’s sovereign power and the rise of nationalism and nationalist identifications blur our view of these distinctions and emergences. Competing visions of freedom and authority amongst Protestant and Catholic Christians in their engagements with each

other and with European nation-states are collapsed into generalized accounts of the modern subject as post-Christian. A Kierkegaardian religious freedom, to continue the example, leads to the prioritization of individual faith and conscience, but not to the docility of the religious subject to earthly regimes of power or socially acceptable moralities. This is a very different kind of Christian subject than, for instance, a devout Anglican member of the Church of England. Legal sovereignty of the state over the religious sphere, as Winifred Sullivan has argued (2005), makes Kierkegaard's kind of religious freedom impossible for Muslims *and* Christians in a secular pluralist society.

The problem, as we have seen, is that the Syriac self is not the same as that modern self shaped by secular and western existentialist Christian conceptions of the individual. The driving question of my dissertation is thus same one that Derrida asks in his many writings on cosmopolitanism, violence, and sovereignty: Who is the person and what are the relationships that constitute a genuine pluralism?

Genuine pluralism is blocked by monological conceptions of the self. This is worsened by inattentiveness to the sensory dimensions of the politics of recognition. In secular modernity, the politics of recognition are conducted in a visual idiom, the key tropes of which are "legibility" and "textuality." The productive capacities of aural practices like liturgical singing are inaudible because their ontological status is imperceptible. This is not to say that listening does not feature in secular states. Listening to and being persuaded by political stump speeches, for example, bears the ontological status of political action. But this kind of listening is understood as

political *because* of an underlying correlation between speaking and writing. Politicians speak of social contracts and five-point plans—this is an idiom of textual documentation. A spoken political promise is persuasive because it evokes the binding force of a written contract. And yet, there remains a hierarchy of the senses at work when the memory of spoken political promises fades without fear of the force of law that would ensure delivery if those promises had been made in written contract.

Human subjects and the relations between them are shaped within sensory regimes. The importance of sensorial interaction to the politics of pluralism is underscored by a story told to me by one of my closest interlocutors from the liturgical choirs in our final weeks together. Elisabeta, the social pedagogue in training from chapter five, sat down with me to give me her life story, as she understood it. This documentary genre of reflexive self-narration was familiar to her from her training in social pedagogy.

In the course of the conversation, she described her experience with the problem of “really living with the Other,” although she did not frame it as explicitly as Nicme did in chapter three. Elisabeta had attended a Christian high school [*though you would never know it by what went on there, she said*], and in her third year she developed a close, small circle of friends. This group was made up of a Dutch girl who had no faith (*geen geloof*), an Afghan Muslim girl who came from an educated, liberal family, a Surinamese Hindu girl, and then Elisabeta herself. They worked together on class projects, calling themselves the “Multicultural Group.” She said,

We were very respectful of each other, and interested in each others' cultures. We had homework dinners at each others' houses. We shared lentil soup, Surinamese rice, Afghan rice, cauliflower with sausage.

The sense of taste is often the starting point for many an aspirational multiculturalism, but rarely does it suffice as a foundation for building a sustainable relationship. As the girls got older the relationships became more difficult to maintain. It began with Elisabeta's feelings about her Muslim friend. Elisabeta described a growing awareness of her own visceral reaction to her friend's practices and words. It was okay when they never talked about religion. Her friend and her family never even wore a headscarf but "when Ramadan came and my friend talked about it, I could not stand it!" She could not explain precisely what made her so uncomfortable but in the end she broke off the friendship. She says she not tolerate hearing about Islamic things. She remembers thinking to herself: "That religion is all about honor! [*Die geloof draait om eer*]." Then it became difficult with her Surinamese friend. She felt her friend was disrespectful about their differences. Elisabeta said,

She would come over to my house and make faces about how disgusting she thought our food is, even though I would carefully not say anything about how grossed out I was by her mother's approach to cleanliness in the house, cutting her nails and leaving the trimmings on the table.

Managing the differences with her friends became exhausting. Finally, she drifted away from her Surinamese friend because, according to Elisabeta, the girl became preoccupied with her appearance and becoming a model. For awhile, Elisabeta was interested in that too, but in the period of her ethical reflection when

she began to make serious decisions about how she wanted to live, she decided it was not a Christian way to be, so she stopped. The girl stayed behind a class, so their separation developed naturally, without Elisabeta taking any direct action. It was much harder with her Afghan friend: she actively told the girl she could not be her friend anymore.

Describing these memories to me with a tape recorder between us, Elisabeta heard herself and paused to think a moment. She said,

It was irritating. I was irritated. Even though she was not *hashe*, she was not from an extreme or strict family, but during Ramadan I just could not stand her. I could not handle it. Maybe it comes from growing up with the feeling that they were the enemy...it was irritating if she even talked about Islam. You get that view of the Turks yourself, even though you did not experience it first-hand [*Je krijgt zelf de opvattingen over the Turken*]. I can get funny looks if I tell other Suryoye that I do not hate Muslims. We generally do not have contact with other people...we stick to ourselves...but these bad feelings are so common in Dutch society. I think it will be better for my children, though, because they will be further removed from my parents' experiences and memories. We are Christians. We are not supposed to hate people.

In the course of the conversation, it never occurred to her to report on what became of her secular Dutch friend, nor did it occur to me to inquire. The unmarked category remains free from scrutiny or analysis.

But Elisabeta continued to tell me her thoughts about living with Muslims in the Netherlands. In the later years at her Christian high school where there were many Suryoye, a Syriac Orthodox girl went out with a Turkish boy. It was a scandal. Everyone had an opinion, she said, but no one did anything. The boy's parents, knowing the girl's family and community would have a problem with the situation,

went to the girl's parents and warned them about the relationship, but her parents did not want to believe it. Instead, they got angry and lashed out at the Turkish parents. This prompted Elisabeta to reflect on how she would feel if her future daughter became involved with a Muslim boy. She finds it difficult, she said, to approve of Christian-Muslim relationships. She would not be able to accept it in her daughter.

“They remain Muslims,” she said. “You cannot just change your thoughts. I have inherited it a bit from my parents. I do not hate Muslims, but it would be disloyal to my family. It would be perverse to do that to them.”

But then, shortly thereafter in the same conversation, she described her experiences as working as a cashier at the local grocery store after school. She wishes she did not have to, but she must earn money, she says with a sigh. So often, she said, white Dutch people will throw their money at her, and treat her like she is not human, because she is a store clerk. She hates it.

There is a troubling resonance between Elisabeta's rejection of her Afghan Muslim friend and her own rejection by white Dutch audiences. The resonance produces audible cracks in her self-narration. She struggles to be an ethical person and she knows it. Love and loyalty to her parents, which she defines explicitly in Christian terms and with full knowledge of the crisis of political recognition that amplifies their sense of historical trauma, have shaped her subjectivity strongly enough that her sensibilities are offended by the mere mention of Islam. Her multicultural friendship project failed not, she claims, because of hateful intentions but because of irritation, a subcutaneous residue of bitterness activated by encounters

with another's behavior. Elisabeta knows that she has no ethical justification for hating these behaviors. Hate, as she says over and over again, is not Christian. She knows that her irritation and her inability to maintain friendships with girls who were different from her are a problem for her desire to be both a peace-loving Christian and a progressive Dutch cosmopolitan. But her sensorial register mutes her capacity to apprehend her former friends' own ethical subjectivities as much as secular Dutch sensorial registers fail to apprehend hers. The original danger to pluralism is not hatred but the inability to grasp through the senses how Other selves are ethical too.

For Derrida (drawing on Levinas), an ethical relationship is a “nonviolent relationship to the infinite as infinitely other, to the Other” (Derrida 1978: 83; see also Levinas 1969). This is the recurring problem of European pluralism. The suggestion in this formulation is that what makes an Other “infinitely other” is that they exist beyond our sensory apprehension. And so how can we, the unmarked liberal subjects of secular modernity, cultivate a relationship with someone we do not fully perceive? This question is an existential crisis because identity emerges in the dialogics of recognition: Who are *we* in relation to this unknown Other (an oppressor, perhaps)? This question is also a political crisis because we have staked the operation of political life on the premise of textual legibility: When illegible Others have no recourse in the struggle for recognition, the violence of politics becomes explicit. Finally, this question is an ontological crisis because the categories of our experience—and thus our experience—prove unstable over time. These are the great

discoveries of twentieth century philosophical thought, from Wittgenstein (1967 [1958]) to Derrida (1976, 1978) to Taylor (1989, 2004).

Yet Spivak (1999) reminds us how much this is also a peculiarly postcolonial condition. The definition of the subaltern is one who cannot be heard in the languages of a world created by colonialism, capitalism, and state secularism. The subaltern's inaudibility is worsened by projects to transform moral citizenship into increasingly neoliberal terms. But *really living with the Other* is not only a problem of large-scale historical forces. As has been revealed in Elisabeta's account of her life and in the lives depicted in this dissertation, the problem of the ethical relationship is the question of how to live intimately with the imperceptible, unknown Other in ourselves and in everyone around us.

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