# Mapping census data for difference: Towards the heterogeneous geographies of Arab American communities of the New York Metropolitan area

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**Acknowledgements**

**ABSTRACT**

This article examines how 2000 U.S. census statistics serve to reproduce Arab Americans as a social body with specific political possibilities. Its first goal is to show how the conventionally used census data acts as a source of statistical and, furthermore, social and political marginalization by rendering Arab Americans, who poorly fit into its racial classification, either invisible or lacking in internal heterogeneity. The result is absent viable political identity for Arab Americans, general ignorance of their experiences in the United States, and negative stereotyping. Because in the post-9/11 United States, Arab American advocacy groups have turned to statistics, among other means, to forge positive visibility, our second goal is to suggest innovative and practical ways to make a more informed use of the existing census statistics despite that their categorical and numerical inconsistencies relative to Arab American identities. Instead of a quantitative analysis, we thus offer a feminist inspired method of

"mapping for difference" three census datasets— Arabic language spoken at home, place of birth in an Arab nation, and Arab ancestry, which involves applying a primarily qualitative analysis to these variables while contextualizing them by immigration history. Our result is a set of heterogeneous Arab American geographies, not intended for better quantitative description but serving to counter practices of marginalization by broadening public imagination and knowledge about this diverse community. Throughout, we suggest that while the designation *Arab American* maybe practically and politically useful, the recognition of the heterogeneity of Arab community along multiple dimensions of difference must be built into the methods of analysis. We demonstrate our major points with selected empirical maps from our larger research project on the census-based geographies of Arab Americans in the New York Metropolitan area, one of the largest and most under-studied communities in North America.

# 1 Introduction

In the United States, much of what constitutes academic and popular knowledge about different social groups as well as their political possibilities - from equal representation in the elections to government programs of minority empowerment and protection (U.S. Census Bureau 2008) - depend on their representation using the census data and its racial classifications. The contradictions related to fixed definitions of racial identity valued by the census are particularly evident in the case of Arab Americans. They poorly suit these definitions and over the course of their long immigration history were not systematically presented with an official and viable form of census-based identity.

The marginalization of Arab Americans within the census categorization and statistics, as we show, has contributed to their overall cultural and political marginalization within the United States. The current census classification of Arab Americans either effectively renders them statistically (and, by extension, politically) invisible or only partially accounts for the size and internal diversity of their population helping to result in their lacking political power and poor public knowledge about their experiences (see Benson and Kayal 2002, Bier 2008, and Gualtieri 2009 for historical examples). When they were publicly recognized as a group, this imposed identity has often been a result of stereotyping and targeting related to their perceived "non-white appearance" and uneasiness with U.S. interventions in the Middle East (Naber 2000; Read 2008). Instead of productive forms of recognition, it led to further marginalization.

In post-9/11 America especially, Arab Americans found themselves to be perceived as an exotic, homogeneous and allegedly hostile group that has served to justify, as widely noted, their discrimination and institutional harassment and made them vulnerable to hate crimes (Jamal and Naber 2008; Naber 2008a, b; Alsultany 2008; Joseph et al. 2008; Ayoub 2010; Said 2001).

1

In response, many in the community strive today to build positive visibility as Arab Americans, for recognition as a non-white ethnic minority (a controversial process in itself[1]), and against homogenizing representations (Naber 2000; Jamal and Naber 2008; Dallo, Ajrouch, and Al-Snih 2008; Gualtieri 2009; Ayoub 2010). Educational campaigns, self-identifications with the group by prominent individuals, and – of direct relevance here – factual information, often rooted in census statistics on Arab ancestry, are used to this end (AAI website, Arab American Institute, Demographics, accessed 3/16/09; Dallo, Ajrouch, and Al-Snih 2008). In this process, the census data is being transformed from a source of marginalization into a political instrument for empowering an oppressed group.

In light of such efforts to construct positive visibility, we draw on the feminist post-structuralist epistemology of questioning categories and "reading for difference" (Gibson-Graham 2000; Pratt and Hanson 1994; Nightingale 2003) to pursue two major goals in this article. The first is to examine how the conventionally used census data acts as a source of statistical and, furthermore, social and political marginalization by rendering Arab Americans either invisible or lacking in internal heterogeneity. In this double-bind, a lack of recognition as a viable identity group is complemented by the production of a fixed and rigidly-bounded Arab

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[1] The controversy stems from the fact that aspirations to positive visibility may require yet another fixing of the term Arab and Arab American contrary to diverse experiences and multiple definitions of group membership that operate in the everyday. At the same time, in a system organized around the recognition of political and social groups, visibility has distinct practical benefits in terms of electoral influence and government incentives.

identity (Naber 2000). The second goal is to move beyond the criticisms and explore an unrealized potential of the census variables related to Arab Americans by using this same census data against the grain as a means of visualizing their heterogeneous geographies. Our method of "mapping for difference" the existing census descriptors of Arab Americans is a mixed method that emphasizes cartographic visualization as an ontological practice along with primarily qualitative examination of the census data (Pavlovskaya 2006; Elwood and Cope 2009). The latter includes three main vectors: first, comparing census variables while focusing on differences as opposed to the numerical accuracy of individual categories; second, centering attention on discrepancies as sources of new knowledge; and third, developing explanations that are thoroughly contextualized by history and other relevant information. We interpret the results through the lens of the histories of Arab immigration to the New York City region, which represents our study area. Physically proximate to the World Trade Center site, these Arab communities experienced a particular surge in harassment after 9/11 (Orfalea 2006; Kayyali 2006; Friedman 2001; Ayoub 2010) and, being one of the largest and long-established contiguous Arab American settlements in North America, they remain drastically under-researched, especially with regard to census statistics.[2] Our result, however, is not intended to

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[2] To our knowledge, no systematic census-based analyses of this large, diverse, and long-established community exist at the time of writing with the exception of a stand-alone map of total Arab Ancestry by census tract for New York City and adjacent areas produced by Arab American Institute (AAI) (Samhan 2007). Historical and contemporary mainly qualitative studies include Miller (1969 (1911)); Aswad (1974), Bayoumi (2008), Benson and Kayal (2002),

3

provide a better quantitative description. Instead, we seek to demonstrate the internal spatial

heterogeneity of Arab American communities as a way to broaden and deepen public

imagination and counter the on-going practices of silencing and orientalism directed against

them (Said 2001; Foucault 1978). Ultimately, we aim to aid in the development of census-based

mapping practices that depart from their historical association with control and subjugation

(Edney 1997) and serve to empower marginalized populations by visualizing their experiences

and thus transforming them into social actors (Rundstrom 1995; Pavlovskaya 2006; McLafferty

2002; St. Martin 2009; Kwan 2008; Schwanen and Kwan 2009; Barnes 2009; Wyly 2009; St.

Martin and Pavlovskaya 2010).[3]

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Naff (1985, 2002), and Orfalea (2002). More historical as well as systematic studies examine

Arab communities elsewhere, mainly in Michigan (e.g., Abraham and Abraham 1983; Hourani

and Shehadi 1992; Abraham and Shryock 2000; Baker et al. 2004; Hassoun 2005).

[3] It has to be emphasized, however, that the question of visibility, including the

cartographic visibility, of such populations is very complex and has been dealt with at length

elsewhere (see Hannah 2001; Mountz et al. 2003: Baker et al. 2004; Foucault 1978; Harley 2001;

McLafferty 2002; McKittrick 2007; Brown and Knopp 2008). While we cannot fully address it

here, the consensus among the community leaders, advocacy groups, and researchers (e.g., AAI

website; Naber 2000; Read 2008; Jamal and Naber 2008; Ayoub 2010) seems to be that in the

case of Arab Americans (and American Muslims), the benefits of being positively "present" and

included into citizenship do outweigh the possible downside of increased visibility such as the

potential for greater surveillance and tracking. In addition, positive visibility, by encouraging

4

Although Arab American identities *per se* are not a subject of this article (see Naber 2008a for an overview), our analysis is steeped in the multiple histories of identity as a means of understanding its relationship to census categorization. Thus, rather than arguing for or seeking to develop an accurate definition of Arab Americans and reflect it in the statistics, we take a pragmatic approach. While we fully acknowledge that designation "Arab American" may be politically useful and practically necessary, we also urge for analytical recognition of the multiplicity of Arab American experiences that this designation may overlook. We hope to show that a more nuanced statistical awareness of the multiple definitions of Arab American identity holds the greatest promise, balancing between practical benefit and theoretical flexibility, given that no single variable or a composite index can act as the true or definitive marker of any identity.

In the next section we briefly examine the misunderstood identity and contradictory racialization of Arab Americans in the context of the history of their immigration to the United States and as related to their census categorization. Then, section three explains how the modern census, with a reference to census 2000 (census 2010 did not collect such information[4]) aids in

broader awareness and knowledge with reference to the full heterogeneity of U.S. society, may also indirectly discourage further tracking, by weakening tacit public support for government surveillance based the on racial profiling of particular groups.

[4] Research of the type we advocate is made all the more important now due to the fact that the long form that collects ancestry, place of birth, and language spoken at home data unfortunately will no longer be distributed in census 2010 (see Ayoub 2010). This makes the

political marginalization of Arab Americans. In section four we explore the possibilities that nonetheless are already present in the census data and describe our own method for using it more innovatively in production of new geographies for Arab communities of the New York region. We present our findings, one way of making visible their spatial heterogeneity at the scale of counties, in section five. The conclusion examines the contribution of this work and discusses the future potential and challenges of research on the politics of statistical representation and mapping while also outlining the need for a more detailed census-based analysis and qualitative research on Arab American neighborhoods.

## 2 Immigration history and heterogeneity of identity

Largely unrecognized for much of the 20th century, Arab Americans have been widely misunderstood when they came into the national spotlight in connection to the anticolonial movements of the 1950s and 1960s, the U.S. actions in the Middle East, and most abruptly in post-9/11 America (Jamal and Naber 2008). One of the older and affluent mainstream American immigrant groups, they have been largely seen as newcomers, confused with other Middle Eastern and Asian populations (see Naber 2000, 2008a; Read 2008, accessed 7/12/2010), and in

2000 data indispensible for producing base-line Arab American and other ethnic geographies. The American Community Survey (ACS) that collects yearly (for the inter-census estimates) the data specified in the long form will continue to do so but because it uses different sampling techniques, the already low resolution of the data is even further impaired: the results are often invalid for geographic scales below states—even at the county level.

6

the last decade have faced fierce accusations of anti-Americanism, Islamic fundamentalism, and terrorism (Howell and Shryock 2003; Salaita 2005; Shaheen 2002; Bakalian and Bowzorgmehr 2006; Read 2008, accessed 7/12/2010; Joseph et al. 2008; Naber 2008b). Being continually aligned with the worst stereotypes of the exotic, foreign, and threatening, the designation "Arab American" appears to be virtually an oxymoron.

The history of people of Arab descent in the United States stands in stark contrast to such widely held views. The first Arabic speakers to arrive in large numbers did so in the final decades of the 19th century as participants of the Chicago Centennial Exposition of 1878 and became the originators of what by 1890 would become a burgeoning Arab community in New York City (Di Napoli 2002). Coming from the province of Syria of the Ottoman Empire, they called themselves Syrian but by today's standards would be either Syrian, Israeli, Palestinian, Israeli, or Lebanese (Zabel 2006). By the 1930s, at the end of the turn of the 20th century immigration wave, Arab Americans numbered anywhere from 130,000 to 350,000 (Suleiman 1999) with a visible presence in Brooklyn and Manhattan (Di Napoli 2002; Naff 2002). The second, post-World War II, Arab immigration wave to the U.S. resurged since 1965 and continues to grow, albeit with a slight drop after the events of 9/11. Officially, the Arab American population reached 1.2 million in 2000 which is comparable in size to Greek, Czech, and Portuguese ancestry groups (U.S. Census Bureau 2003, p.1) while advocacy groups bring this number to 3.5-3.9 million (AAI website, Demographics, accessed 3/16/09). Although New York City continues to be the primary gateway for Arab immigrants, many move directly into surrounding suburban historically Arab neighborhoods. The long history of Arab immigration, however, is largely ignored despite that it took place alongside with, and in some cases predated, the celebrated Eastern and Southern European immigration, leaving Arab Americans with lesser

7

claims to "American-ness." [5]

Despite being highly differentiated in terms of religion, ethnicity, class, and national origin, Arab Americans are perceived as a homogenous group, another powerful trope of marginalization. They are commonly conflated with Muslims, for example, despite comprising only one-third of U.S. Muslims (D'Agostino 2003; Read 2008; Naber 2008a) and almost two-thirds of them being Christian (AAI website, Demographics, accessed 3/16/09). This is because the massive immigration from Lebanon at the turn of the $20^{th}$ century mainly included Christians (Orfalea 2006) while Muslims predominate among more recent Arab immigrants[6] (Naber 2000; AAI website, Demographics, accessed 3/16/09).

Ethnic ancestry of Arab Americans is highly mixed as a result of both the internal ethnic differences and high out-marriage rates. In this respect, the census recorded dozens of what it

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[5] Although this article focuses on the U.S., the phrase 'Arab Americans' is increasingly used to refer more broadly to people of Arab descent throughout the Americas, given that in the early 1900s there were also large waves of migration from Ottoman Syria to the port cities of Central and South America as well as the Caribbean (Karam 2007; Zabel 2006). The term 'Arab' likewise has no stable definition (Bishara 1914; Khater 2001), although by convention it is taken to refer to those who trace their descent to one of the 22 member nations of the League of Arab States, although there are several exceptions depending on religion and/or ancestry.

[6] As stipulated by the constitution, the census is not allowed to collect data for religion, making it even more important to turn, as we have, to the national, linguistic, and ancestral data for an exploration of cultural identities like "Arab Americans."

8

classified as Arab ancestries (see section 3.2 for details) and identified one quarter of Arab

Americans with mixed, and mainly European, heritage (U.S. Census Bureau 2003, p. 8; see also

Dallo, Ajrouch and Al-Snih 2008). The political boundaries and national loyalties within the

Arab world, differences based on culture, class, ethnicity, race, and gender ideologies, as well as

linguistic variation add further dimensions to Arab identities some of which we will attempt to

discern using the available census data later in the article (Read and Bartkowski 2000; Ajrouch

and Kusow 2007; Bayoumi 2008; Read 2010).

The negotiation of race, in particular, is of great importance to our subsequent discussion

of the census categorization. It has been a continuous issue since the beginning of Arab

immigration to the Americas (Jamal and Naber 2008) as the 19th century Syrians entered highly

racialized societies but had no set place in their hierarchies. Consequently, they experienced

semi-invisibility in regards to race (Samhan 1999; Gualtieri 2009): some individuals passed

racially as 'white' and some did consider themselves white by skin color and Phoenician by

heritage, while others were typed as 'Black' or 'Colored' as well as Asians, when recognized as

Arabs or Turks, and denied citizenship and legal rights reserved for "free white persons" (Naber

2008a; Gualtieri 2009). As a result, Arabs had to advocate for their whiteness, and thus their

right to U.S. citizenship, in a court of law, which they did in cases all along the U.S. Atlantic

seaboard in the early 1900s with mixed results (Gualtieri 2001, 2009). They also often claimed

whiteness when accepted among the masses of Eastern and Southern European immigrants in the

first quarter of the 20th century. While citizenship was slowly expanded to certain non-white

groups, the linkage between racial classification and eligibility to citizenship existed until the

1950s (Naber 2008a), making claims to whiteness to last as a way for counteracting legal racial

discrimination until half a century ago. Reflecting their historical struggles over citizenship and

9

whiteness, officially Arab Americans are classified by the current census as "white" (Gualtieri 2009).

In the aftermath of 9/11, however, when the question of Arab American identity has acquired new urgency, the community leaders strive to build positive visibility and explore, as we noted in the introduction, the possibilities of non-white politics and movements of people of color in the U.S. (Naber 2008a; Nagel and Staeheli 2004; Gualtieri 2009; AAI website, Demographics, accessed 3/16/09; Dallo, Ajrouch, and Al-Snih 2008; Ayoub 2010). Moving away from categorization as white, therefore, requires negotiating the internal heterogeneity in the face of an Arab American identity that could prove useful for group visibility and political consolidation. It is worth repeating that the politics of Arab American identity are beyond the scope of this article (see Jamal and Naber 2008; Gualtieri 2009) but we do examine its relation to how Arab Americans are represented in the census categories with the consequences for marginalization and possibilities for empowerment.

# 3   Census-based marginalization of Arab Americans

The marginalization of a group such as Arab Americans, is often a part of a complex ideological production (Naber 2000). Absence of information, including census-based knowledge, aids marginalization by making it easy to disregard or negatively stereotype group identity. In this section we analyze the ways in which, at times, the census can serve to marginalize Arab Americans by failing to provide viable and inclusive categories for their self-identification. But first it is necessary to introduce the broader social and political impact of U.S. census data.

## 3.1 CENSUS AND THE CONSTITUTION OF SOCIAL BODY

Taken every ten years, the U.S. census is to ensure equal political representation of racial minorities as well as provide the factual basis for government programs promoting equal employment opportunity and access to health care, education, and other social services (Nguyen 2004; Hannah 2001; Carter 2009). Foundational to the census, racial categorization has been in use, with modification, since 1790.

It has been noted that as part of colonial practices of counting and mapping, "censuses do not simply augment governmental power over preexisting social bodies, they actively construct the social bodies they purport to describe" (Hannah 2001, p. 517). The U.S. Census has similarly affected the American society. As a single most authoritative and freely available source of systematic knowledge about the American population, it does not just reflect its character but constitutes social actors by defining majority and minority groups and their political possibilities. As we have noted, being classified as white has been a prerequisite for accessing full benefits of citizenship until the middle of the 20th century. In addition, the census categories have an ontological effect on the designated groups. The racialization of Americans into "black" and "white" and, more recently, into linguistic (and quasi-racial) "Hispanic" and "non-Hispanic" groups[7] has occurred partly through the use of these categories in censuses and their subsequent

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[7] A different variable, Hispanic origin has been collected since 1970 (U.S. Census Bureau 2008). Like Hispanics or Latinos, Arab Americans as a group would not directly map on to the U.S. black/white racial hierarchy.

retrenchment in scientific, political, and public discourses (Kasinitz et al. 1998; Foner 2005). Furthermore, inclusion of a group in informational flows that originate in the census data provides an entry into what Hannah (2001) calls "statistical citizenship" that in the American context defines political possibilities and access to benefits (Carter 2009).

Therefore, census categories not only characterize but constitute political, cultural, and economic experiences of Arab Americans including their marginalization and potential for empowerment.

## 3.2 STATISTICAL MARGINALIZATION OF ARAB AMERICANS

The marginalization of Arab Americans that we take, as noted in the introduction, to refer to the pattern of alternating stereotyping and invisibility (Malek 2010; Naber 2000) is enabled by their statistical marginalization resulting from lacking viable and inclusive census category (or categories) for self-identification. Below we proceed to show how the current census classification encourages statistical invisibility, numerical underestimation, and homogenization of this population.

### 3.2.1 The short form of census: statistical invisibility

**Figure 1 around here**

Distributed to the entire population, the major short form of the census provides the major bulk of social statistics which are commonly organized by major predefined racial groups with which people are directly asked to self-identify (Figure 1). Ethnically and racially diverse Arab Americans, however, do not fit either of these groupings and there is no separate "Arab"

12

category on this form. Their formal inclusion into the dominant white population brings obvious benefits but has ontologically negative effects. It renders Arab Americans invisible in most statistics as a group. In contrast to "black," "Asian Indian," or "Hispanic" populations, they do not "exist," statistically speaking, even in the areas of highest concentration.[8] As part of the "white" majority, they are ineligible for federal loans, benefits based upon minority status, and protection from hate crimes (Kayyali 2006; Ayoub 2010). The desire for a different identity among Arab Americans appears in that one fifth of them did not choose "white" race or marked it in combination with another race on the 2000 census form (U.S. Census Bureau, 2003, p.8).

### 3.2.2 The long form of the census: numerical underestimation and homogenization of ancestry

With the major census form not being useful for Arab Americans, it is the ancestry data from the supplementary long form distributed in 2000[9] to a sample of one in six households that has become a major pathway to measuring and finding out about their population. An open-ended question on this form asked the respondents (see Table 1) to simply write in up to two ethnic ancestries of their choice. Afterwards the U.S. Census Bureau coded the answers as either

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[8] For example, City-Data.com, a popular website which claims to have "collected and analyzed data from numerous sources" to construct "complete and interesting profiles of all U.S. cities," presents statistics on racial make-up of Dearborn, MI, home to one of the most prominent historic Arab communities, without ever mentioning Arab population that today constitutes one third of its population (www.City-Data.com).

[9] See footnote 4 on the discontinued use of the long form in the future censuses.

specific Arab ancestries (e.g., Lebanese, Egyptian, or Moroccan) or broader "Arab" category in case of general responses such as "Arab" or "Arabic," "Middle Eastern," or "North African." It then estimated the total Arab American population by counting the individuals with at least one such ancestry.

**Table 1 around here.**

While the ancestry data is indisputably valuable (including for our own purposes, see sections four and five), there are several pitfalls to using it as a quantitative measure. Most importantly, Arab ancestry does not directly identify those who may consider themselves "Arab Americans." It concerns a loosely defined ethnic background and, therefore, lends Arab American identity to multiple definitions depending upon self-defined ethnicity and ethnic lineage as well as the U.S. Census Bureau's notion of which ancestries constitute the "Arab American" population. While the question whether it is valid to merge the disparate ancestries into a single notion of "Arab American" is beyond the scope of this paper; we would like to highlight the marginalizing effects of its current use (by the census, the researchers, and advocacy groups themselves) as a backdrop for our reconstructed approach.

One such effect is that the Arab ancestry category suffers from a "differential undercount" and numerically underestimates the Arab American population. In the United States undercounting minorities translates into lesser political power on the part of the groups being counted (e.g. the ability to propel candidates in elections and draw the attention of politicians to community needs) and an unequal access to federally mandated benefits and programs (Nguyen 2004; Hannah 2001). In contrast to racial minority groups, it does not affect the official political representation of Arab Americans (who are counted as whites), but it weakens the community

14

effort to advocate for greater representation and build positive visibility that come with larger numbers and socio-economic descriptors.

Undercounting occurs because, like other immigrants, they may avoid responding to the census because of the suspicion of the government gathering personal information and as a response to targeting. When Arab Americans participate in the census, they tend to underreport their ancestry for the same reason as well as because of the confusion related to the wording of the question and limit to two ancestries. Undercounting has become a major concern of Arab American advocacy groups which feel compelled to publicize the alternative figures that far exceed the official statistics while steering the community to greater participation in the census (Hannah 2001; Baker et al., 2004; Samhan 2007).

Another effect is that in combination with sampling limitations for relatively small populations and spatial resolution of the data (Hannah 2001; Nguyen 2004), the factors cited above make Arab American community appear less heterogeneous. Similarly, merging many self-defined ethnic identities under the umbrella of Arab Americans further reduces their heterogeneity. This deepens the already noted contradiction between the analytically and politically useful unity, on the one hand, and the internal heterogeneity that is typical of this community and represents a major challenge to orientalizing stereotypes, on the other hand.[10]

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[10] Following Spivak (1996), it is useful to think about the deployment of the statistical category of 'Arab American' as a *strategic essentialism* that is adopted temporarily by heterogeneous actors in order to assert pragmatically useful political unity. We thank Michael Samers for this observation.

# 4  Producing geographies of difference: methods and data

As follows from the above, the numerical and categorical problems of the ancestry category marginalize the Arab American population in terms of its size and heterogeneity. Yet, leaving the ancestry data unused, whatever its flaws, would continue to marginalize this group through statistical invisibility that comes with the inclusion into the white racial category. Confronted with this dilemma, we decided to use the Arab ancestry data but in a way that would be less affected by its numerical flaws.

Our alternative analytical strategy, therefore, emphasizes the qualitative examination of the data (as opposed to its quantitative analysis) in conjunction with the historical narratives of immigration.  Instead of measuring Arab American communities, we focused on revealing their spatial heterogeneity and for this purpose complemented ancestry data with information about country of birth and language spoken at home. In this section, we first describe the study area and how we used the available census variables. We then explain our analytical approach which we call "mapping for difference."

## 4.1   STUDY AREA AND VARIABLES

New York and New Jersey are among the five states in which half of Arab Americans reside (U.S. Census Bureau 2003, p.4) while New York City is home to their largest urban concentration in the U.S., more than twice the size of the well-known Arab American communities in Dearborn, MI or Los Angeles, CA (U.S. Census Bureau 2003, p. 7). It bears repeating that the combined Arab population of the neighboring states of New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut is the largest and least studied in the nation (we calculated it as 206,811 based

16

upon 2000 census and almost 700,000 if using alternative numbers).

Because the existing studies tend to focus on Manhattan or New York City as a whole, they neglect the historically and numerically significant Arab American neighborhoods directly across the Hudson River in New Jersey and in Connecticut. Within commuting distance by public transportation, many of these neighborhoods partly serve as bedroom communities for New York City while also supporting substantial ethnic economies. To include as much as possible the full Arab settlement of the region, we broadened our research site to the greater Metropolitan area as defined by the Combined Statistical Area (CSA) of New York, New Jersey, Connecticut and Pennsylvania. Within this CSA, we selected twenty counties with the highest totals (1,500 and greater) and/or percentages (0.4% and greater) of Arab population (U.S. Census Bureau 2003; SF4 census file) as well as four more counties close to these thresholds and for continuous coverage (Figure 2). On all figures, counties are marked with unique numbers that are also indicated in parentheses in the text. For three census variables – ancestry, country of birth, and language spoken at home we extracted from SF3 census file the census tract values describing Arab Americans and linked them to digital maps of census tracts and counties.

**Figure 2 about here.**

Because our larger research project required working with fine census-tract resolution but the U.S. Census Bureau released its Arab American population and ancestry figures only for counties, we calculated our own variables using available census tract level data. The first is

17

Total Arab Ancestry (A) calculated as a sum of first and second ancestry counts.[11] Total Arab

Ancestry shows *declarations of ancestry* per census tract (e.g., it counts twice a person with two

Arab ancestries) as opposed to *individuals* with at least one Arab ancestry (as counted by the

census that had access to individual responses). Using Total Arab ancestry was fully appropriate

for our purposes because only a small portion of Arab Americans declared two Arab ancestries,

making our measure and census estimates very close nationally (U.S. Census Bureau 2003, p.8)

and within the study area (Table 2). This also allowed for examining separate Arab ancestries at

the fine spatial resolution of census tracts. For the analysis at the level of New York City

metropolitan area reported here, we aggregated census-tract values to counties.[12]

The other two variables are (B) or persons Born in an Arab Country, and (L) or speakers

of Arabic Language at home. Both are write-in categories on the long form and count individuals

(see Table 1 for details). By noting the country of birth, B highlights the fact that Arab

Americans come from various national origins, with Lebanon and now increasingly Egypt being

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[11] Our logic for defining "Arab" ancestry somewhat differed from the Census Bureau's

but we were as inclusive as possible in our determinations and, in addition to groups originating

in the 22 member nations of the League of Arab States, included ancestries based on popular

usage, documented history, and existing literature on identity. Because of space limitation, we

cannot discuss the selection process further here. Details are available from the authors.

[12] While spatial patterns may change with the scale of the data, in this case, the high

census tract values tended to cluster heavily within the county borders, making county scale

analytically appropriate for the region-wide exploration presented here.

the largest sources (U.S. Census Bureau 2003, p.2). It excludes, however, Arabs both in non-Arab Middle Eastern countries, Latin America, and other places from the Arab diaspora. Conversely, not all those born in Arab nations identify as Arabs in terms of ancestry but census is unable to separate them out. Variable L identifies Arabic speaking individuals but excludes, for example, the Arab Americans who no longer speak Arabic and includes ethnic non-Arabs who may speak Arabic (e.g., Jews from Libya, many of whom would not identify as Arabs). While these considerations present difficulties for conventional measurement, the comparison between variables A, B, and L, however, becomes a parameter of our analysis.

**Table 2 around here**

### 4.2    MAPPING THE CENSUS DATA FOR DIFFERENCE

In addition to numerical and categorical inconsistencies that prevent accurately measuring the Arab American population using census data, it is also important to note that one cannot unambiguously define this population using the above variables. This is because the three characteristics they represent (ancestry, national origin, and language) are not fully shared by all Arab Americans. They overlap to varying degrees and do not add up to a single population. For example, not all individuals with Arab ancestry speak Arabic at home and many are U.S. born. Or, not all who were born in Arab countries are ethnically Arabs, even if they speak Arabic. In a particular county or even census tract, the three variables do not depict the same group of individuals. Clearly, developing a single measure for the Arab American population based upon these variables would be unrewarding in terms of numerical assessment and potentially damaging in terms of identity definitions.

19

Therefore, we proceeded by developing another method for analyzing the census data called "mapping for difference" because it operates by analogy with feminist and post-structuralist epistemologies of reading for difference. Reading for difference involves using particularities instead of consistencies as analytical entry points and emphasizing context in explanation (Gibson-Graham 2000; Pratt and Hanson 1994; Nightingale 2003). In combination with scholarship on feminist visualization and critical and qualitative GIS (Schuurman 2001; Kwan 2002, 2008; Pavlovskaya and St. Martin 2007; Elwood and Cope 2009), we applied this approach to the seemingly unrelated, yet potentially ontologically rich, sphere of census data cartography. With mapping being central to the analysis and dissemination of census data as well as scientifically authoritative and visually powerful especially when assisted by modern geospatial technologies such as GIS (Geographic Information Systems), our intention was to infuse its ontological power to constitute populations and the landscapes of their experiences with a feminist concern for the intricacies of difference.

Firstly, our strategy of "mapping for difference" involved mapping these variables in relation to each other in order to reveal where they not only coincide, as when looking for a fuller depiction of a single population, but also diverge. We did not treat this discrepancy in representation as an error, annoyance, or analytical weakness but a research opportunity for understanding the social processes that produce or result from it (cf. Nightingale 2003; St. Martin 2001; Robbins 2003; Cieri 2003). That is, the discrepancy between the variables served as an entry point into understanding the spatial heterogeneity of Arab Americans. Secondly, in line with mixed methods approaches (Elwood and Cope 2009), we analyzed the resulting maps and graphs interpretively rather than statistically. Quantitative differences between each pair of the variables (their subtraction) have primarily served to enhance the visual examination of the

20

resulting maps and we relied upon qualitative reasoning to thoroughly contextualize these maps and graphs by knowledge of Arab American immigration history that we briefly outlined in the beginning of the article.

# 5 Towards a better understanding the heterogeneous geographies of Arab Americans

The following sections present the selected findings from our research in order to exemplify our strategies for contextualizing and contrasting the census categories for Arab Americans. Although at this stage preliminary, the findings serve as informative brushstrokes that we hope will make clear the potential of this methodology and the need for more similar and ethnographic research at finer neighborhood scales while also furthering debates over Arab American identities and geographies in the New York City region.

## 5.1 CONTEXTUALIZING ARAB ANCESTRY

**Figure 3 about here.**

We begin by mapping of the distribution of total Arab ancestry (A) that reveals the overall importance of this community in the geography of the study area (Figure 3). Prominent concentrations are visible in the Brooklyn borough of New York City (also called Kings County, #23 on all maps and graphs), a hub for Arab Americans in the region as well as in the boroughs of Queens (#22) and Manhattan (#20). The usually overlooked concentrations in New Jersey counties like Hudson (#7), Bergen (#4), Passaic (#3), and Middlesex (#10) also stand out. While this geography makes Arab Americans of New York region immediately visible and prominent

21

throughout, it says little about differences among their communities. The differentiation by ancestry in the context of immigration history dramatically widens the potential range of spatial heterogeneity.

The ancestry composition of the study area shown in Figure 4, for example, reveals that Lebanese (20%) and Syrian (16%) descendants of earlier turn of the 20th century immigrants still constitute the backbone of its Arab population. At the same time, the diverse post-1965 immigration wave also landed in the study area, over a quarter of which is represented by Egyptians. In comparison, nationally the Lebanese account for 37% and Syrians for 12% while Egyptians for only 12% (U.S. Census Bureau 2003, p.3) which suggests that both waves of Arab immigration have mixed in the New York region to a larger degree than elsewhere in the United States.

**Figure 4 around here.**

Carefully examining ancestry composition by county (graphs are not shown here because of limitation of space) while keeping references to the historical context brings out new dimensions of spatio-temporal differences among Arab communities not visible in the distribution of Total Arab Ancestry alone in Figure 3. We found that older immigrant populations of Lebanese and Syrian ancestry, for instance, stand out in Brooklyn (#23) and are also significant in Manhattan (#20), suburban New Jersey (e.g., Passaic, #3 and Bergen, #4) and Connecticut (Fairfield, #1). Of these neighborhoods, only Bay Ridge in Brooklyn has received considerable scholarly attention. Despite being well-known locally and quite large in terms of the

22

Arab American population, the communities in New Jersey that formed around silk factories at the turn of the 20th century and those in Fairfield are almost unmentioned in the literature.[13] The first Arab colony in Manhattan, Little Syria, no longer exists as a result of an ongoing shift to Brooklyn. This shift sped up first with a series of building demolitions in the 1940s to make way for the Battery Tunnel (Peterson 1988), and second in the 1970s to free up space for the World Trade Center. The contemporary concentrations in Manhattan, however, also remain under-researched and poorly identified on a scholarly level.

**Figure 5 about here.**

The further insight into differences between the newer groups, of which Egyptians and Moroccans are the largest (Figure 5), makes it clear that the post-WWII Arab communities have also formed unique ancestral geographies. For example, Egyptians settled in both the traditional urban destinations such as Brooklyn (#23) and Queens (#22) and suburban counties of Middlesex (#10), Bergen (#4), and, especially, Hudson (#7). Moroccans, in contrast, avoided the suburbs while moving to Queens (#22), Brooklyn (#23), and Manhattan (#20). These patterns could be related to economic background and employment, but to our knowledge no corresponding studies of these neighborhoods have been conducted. Among other significant post-war (WWII) immigrant groups, Palestinians settled in Bergen (#4), Passaic (#3), and Hudson (#7) in addition to Brooklyn (#23); Jordanians mainly concentrated in Westchester (#16)

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[13] With the exception of brief mentions, for example, in Benson and Kayal (2002) and Orfalea (2006).

23

while Iraqis settled more broadly in Nassau (#21), Manhattan (#20), Queens (#22), and Brooklyn (#23).

## 5.2    MAPPING THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN VARIABLES

Having contextualized the distribution of Arab ancestry, we now turn to differences between variables A, B, and L. It is worth noting that because the variables L, speakers of the Arabic Language, and B, persons Born in an Arab nation, have significantly lower overall counts and their spatial distributions appear similar to that of Total Arab Ancestry (A) in Figure 3, most quantitatively-minded approaches would likely stop here because these variables do not add much in quantitative terms to what variable A has already shown. In our view, however, the general distributions mask the dispersed, yet extensive, differences that far outweigh the similarities and bring out new dimensions of time-space heterogeneity among and within Arab American neighborhoods involved.

We proceed by mapping three such dimensions (Figures 7, 8, and 9, respectively) derived by subtracting one dataset from another at county level: The National Origin Gap (ancestry minus birthplace A-B), The Linguistic Gap (ancestry minus language A-L), and The National Origin/Language Nexus (birthplace minus language B-L). Because the absolute counts of variables L and B are significantly lower than those of total Arab Ancestry (A), we expressed the first two dimensions (A-B and A-L) in percentage points and the third (B-L) in simple counts. Since the difference values, depending on a county, can be consistent across all dimensions (e.g., Brooklyn, #23 and most suburban counties) or vary from one dimension to the next (e.g., New

24

York's Queens, #22 or New Jersey's Passaic, #3), we believe the maps reveal the genuine and otherwise invisible differences between communities.[14]

As before, contextualizing the results by Arab immigration history helps to narrow down the potential explanations to those supported by both the data and the available historical narratives. For example, since Lebanese and Syrians dominated the turn of the 20th century immigrant wave, these ancestries would be markers of the historic Arab neighborhoods in combination with lower counts of Arab nationals (B) and speakers of Arabic (L), Most individuals declaring Arab ancestry there would be the U.S. born descendants of earlier immigrants who may no longer speak Arabic. In contrast, speakers of Arabic language are more likely to claim Egyptian, Palestinian, or Moroccan ancestry associated with more recent post-1965 (or post-World War II) immigration and be foreign born. We draw on these considerations to explain the emerging patterns of difference. As it will become clear, they sufficiently explain the situation in some counties while in other places the results push for new explanations and insights.


**Figure 6 about here.**


The first dimension "The National Origin Gap" in Figure 6 that represents the difference

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[14] Although not numerically valid, the differences are not a function of the poor sampling or size of Arab population because their magnitude does not depend of the size. However, counties with especially small recorded Arab populations such as Rockland, Staten Island, or the Bronx do not provide an adequate picture.

between ancestry and birthplace (A-B) in each county makes visible the role of the two immigration waves (the turn of the 20th century and post-World War II/post-1965) in the make-up of the communities. The large difference (darker shades), as in some suburban counties, points to sizable older Arab communities with fewer first generation (e..g., foreign born) Arab Americans. The small difference (lighter shades), as in Queens (#22), suggests significant contemporary immigration (e.g., those claiming Arab ancestry are likely to be foreign born first generation immigrants of the post-war immigration wave). Where the differences are within the average, like in Brooklyn (#23), the two waves of Arab immigration are likely to be mixed.

**Figure 7 about here.**

Figure 7 showing the second dimension "The Linguistic Gap" is the difference between ancestry and language (A-L). In this figure, older Arab neighborhoods without recent immigration (e.g., many suburban counties) demonstrate larger discrepancies (dark color) between those claiming Arab ancestry and speakers of Arabic language suggesting that, in these counties, there has been a lower retention of Arabic language over time. In contrast, where Arabic remains in everyday use, the mapped differences between ancestry and language values are smaller (lighter shades) such as in neighborhoods with recent immigration (Hudson, # 7 and Queens, #22) or where old and new immigrants mix (Brooklyn, #23). This observation is consistent with our previous analysis of ancestry composition and The National Origin Gap that showed that both Hudson and Queens have large numbers of Egyptians, Moroccans and other groups who are likely to be recent arrivals. At the same time, many suburban counties have proportionally larger Lebanese, Syrian, and general "Arab" ancestries typical for pre-war communities. Brooklyn, however, combines both old and new Arab populations.

26

The third dimension "National Origin/Language nexus" portrayed in Figure 8 represents the difference between birthplace and language (B-L). The interplay of these two variables brings to light the particularly unexpected properties of Arab American communities in need of further research. While their close overall totals suggest the same populations (assuming that people born in an Arab nation are more likely to speak Arabic at home), their joint variation reveals surprisingly noticeable positive and negative differences.

The positive differences occur where the first generation immigrants from Arab countries (B) predominate over the speakers of Arabic (L) and may indicate a significant presence in areas like Queens (#22) of non-Arab minorities from Arab countries who do not speak Arabic at home Negative values characterize areas where there are more Arabic language speakers than the first generation immigrants born in Arab nations. This may happen if Arabic survives as a language of everyday communication in the neighborhoods in which an already significant population of second or third generation Arab Americans continues to mix with newer immigrants (e.g., Hudson, #7 and Middlesex, #10). Alternatively, negative values point to large numbers of Arabic speaking new immigrants with origins in non-Arab countries. Palestinians of Passaic (#3) whose country of birth is coded by the census as being in Israel (according to the current political borders recognized by the U.S. government) may be a case in point (see Cohen and Tyree 1994; Cohen and Haberfeld 1997).

The middle values (e.g., no large negative or positive differences) indicate that the number of individuals who were born in Arab nations is similar to those who speak Arabic at home. But this seemingly "normal" situation (e.g., new immigrants speak their native language)

27

may also have several explanations. In the suburbs, for example, where a significant older Arab population may no longer speak Arabic, recent immigrants from Arab nations do and birthplace and language data indeed describe this same new immigrant population. These counties also yield large Linguistic Gap values (A-L), since Ancestry data includes multiple waves of immigrants and some of them no longer speak Arabic. In contrast, a large and mixed Arab population of urban Brooklyn (#23), as we already mentioned, may include older and newer immigrants who both speak Arabic (also resulting in moderate Linguistic Gap) while Arab nationals by birth may include non-Arab minorities (e.g. Jews from Arab countries). The small magnitude of the National Origin/Language nexus for Brooklyn thus may indicate that here the close values of B and L do not map the same foreign born and Arabic speaking population as they do in the suburbs. Instead they likely refer to statistically different populations of Arabic speaking U.S. born individuals and immigrants from Arab nations who may speak non-Arabic languages at home. Further inquiry into differences between the variables at the scale of census tracts and in combination with archival research will provide more definitive answers.

## 5.3 CONTRASTING SPECIFIC ANCESTRY GROUPS AND PLACES OF BIRTH

Our reading of maps above shows that counties with significant new immigrant populations better conform to the expectations that place of birth and language data are roughly correlated while the older Arab communities are less likely to do so. Further inquiring into the discrepancies in the data continues to deepen our understanding of the internal heterogeneity of the Arab American population around New York City. Below we gain further insights by contrasting specific ancestry types and related national origin.

The ancestry category itself, as a write-in category, contains diverse groupings whose

28

names and composition have changed over time. The same is true for country of birth because political borders change and the same places have culturally and historically specific names. For example, in contemporary usage, a foreign-born Syrian person would be someone born in the modern country of Syria instead of the much larger historic province of the Ottoman Empire also referred to as Syria. Syrian ancestry, however, can be claimed by both the modern post-1965 migrants and descendants of those who came from historic Syria, which, as noted, included parts of Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Israel, and the Palestinian Territories. Counties in which Syrian ancestry significantly prevails over foreign-born Syrians point to the historic cores of the first wave of Arab immigration. Monmouth county (#11) in New Jersey, for example, has 1,800 Syrian ancestry claims and only 200 foreign born Syrians. Similarly, Manhattan (#20) has almost a thousand Syrian ancestry claims with only 200 born in Syria which suggests that parts of the first Syrian colony in fact may have resettled elsewhere in Manhattan. But Brooklyn (#23) most clearly has the largest long-standing Syrian community because here almost nine thousand Syrian ancestry counts stand against half that many claims of Syria as a birthplace. Overall, specific ancestry counts most often exceed the number of individuals born in a related country because immigrants tend to settle among their former compatriots. People of Lebanese ancestry also considerably exceed those born in Lebanon in Brooklyn (#23), Manhattan (#20), and Fairfield (#1), another historic suburban enclave. At the same time, Bergen (#4) in New Jersey has the number of Lebanese-born second only to Brooklyn and much larger than in surrounding areas, suggesting significant modern Lebanese immigration into this suburban county.

While the discrepancy of interest above points to historic and specific Arab ancestral communities, other forms of the interplay between ancestry and national origin suggest different processes. Jordanians, for example, curiously display similar overall totals in both types of

29

claims. In Westchester (#16, Figure 9), the two numbers indeed match (with about 1,300 each)

which suggests a strong ethnic and national Jordanian community there. In Hudson (#7), Bergen

(#4), and, especially, Passaic (#3), however, there are many more Jordanian-born individuals

than those claiming Jordanian ancestry. This could result from a situation where other ethnic

Arabs claim Jordan as a place of birth. Because roughly half the population of Jordan is

ethnically Palestinian, with many of them born in refugee camps in Jordan proper after 1948

(Orfalea 2006), consistent with our earlier observations regarding Palestinians, New Jersey

counties may have a considerable number of Palestinian Jordanians. This kind of insight is not

possible without careful comparison of the finely grained categories of ancestry and national

origin as well as contextualizing the emerging differences by historical information.


**Figure 9 around here.**


Another related example is a unique distribution of individuals born in Israel (Figure 10).

While most of them settled in Brooklyn (#23), Manhattan (#20), and Queens (#22), there are two

more spikes in Bergen (#4) and Nassau (#21). Although Arab Israelis could realistically claim

Palestinian ancestry (Cohen and Tyree 1994; Cohen and Haberfeld 1997), it is impossible to

estimate how many of these immigrants have Jewish ancestry because it was eliminated from the

census data as a pointer to religion. Interestingly, Palestinian ancestry is well represented in

Bergen but is virtually absent in Nassau. Thus, it is possible that (to be confirmed by further

research) Nassau is more likely to have an Israeli Jewish population while Palestinians claiming

Israel as place of birth (or coded as such if claiming Palestine) are more likely to live in Bergen.

It is notable, however, if not entirely unexpected once economic and other factors are considered,

that in many neighborhoods the Palestinian and Jewish Israeli immigrant populations generally

30

overlap.

<p align="center">**Figure 10 around here.**</p>

**5.4    CONTRASTING COUNTIES**

In addition to diversity within categories, in the final section of this preliminary analysis
we proceed by contrasting individual counties within the study area in order to highlight their
diverging spatial histories that transpired across the three analytical dimensions. The three
boroughs of New York City, for example, – Brooklyn (#23), Manhattan (#20), and Queens (#22)
– could not be more different from each other in terms of their Arab populations. The largest
cluster in Brooklyn combines the turn of the 20th century (e.g., mainly Christian Syrians and
Lebanese) and the current immigration waves (e.g. mainly Muslim Egyptians, Palestinians, etc.).
Such a layering of immigrants helps to maintain Arabic linguistic viability among both the
descendants of earlier immigrants and recent arrivals. Neighboring Queens, however, is home to
primarily a post-war (WW II), largely Muslim, immigrant community, represented, among
others, by Egyptians and Moroccans. Queens is also known to have significant non-Arab
minorities from Arab countries. Manhattan, interestingly, is mixed ancestry-wise and combines
both immigration waves despite the loss of the first Arab colony in the 1960s. Its current Arab
American population appears less traditional and more assimilated, at least language-wise and
probably includes rather affluent segments of the Arab community.

The virtually unknown (on the scholarly level) communities in NJ are also strikingly
different from one another. The counties farther away from New York have the overall smaller
and older Arab populations with a varied but often relatively small new influx (e.g. Monmouth

31

County, # 11). The most interesting, however, is the well visible on the maps contrast between the three neighboring NJ counties with the largest Arab populations – Passaic (#3), Bergen (#4), and Hudson (#7). Hudson is dominated by the post-war (WWII) immigration from Egypt which makes the differences between counts of Arab ancestry, national origin, and language relatively small suggesting that the data describes first generation immigrants from Egypt who speak Arabic at home. Passaic County, where the historic Arab community is very strong (hence the large difference between ancestry and national origin variables), also has some recent immigration, predominantly from Egypt, Jordan, and the Palestinian Territories. Like in Hudson, the Arabic language is widespread but, in contrast to Hudson, it is used by both older and newer immigrants, creating the largest in the area excess of the Arabic speakers over origin in Arab nations. In addition, Passaic has many self-identified Palestinians who would be classified as having Israel, not included here as Arab country, as their national origin, thus contributing to the above excess of Arabic language counts over birthplace in Arab countries. Bordering Hudson and Passaic, Bergen County combines more evenly both waves of immigration and often displays moderate discrepancies that somewhat resembles Brooklyn and the study area as a whole. However, in contrast to Hudson, Passaic, and Brooklyn, but similar to Queens, in Bergen immigrants from Arab nations prevail over daily speakers of Arabic. Perhaps like Queens, that emerged in our analysis as a locus of recent immigration from Arab world, Bergen stands out as a NJ home to non-Arab minorities immigrating from Arab countries, —including, for example, Copts, a Christian minority from Egypt (Orfalea 2006)— a hypothesis to be verified by further research.

32

# 6 Conclusion

In this article we have critically examined the potentially marginalizing effects of the census categories for depicting Arab Americans and, moving beyond the critique, suggested a method for "mapping for difference" the census statistics as a way that allows researchers to take into account the variety of definitions of Arab American heritage instead of homogenizing or making it invisible.

We have contended that the inclusion in the "white" category of the census has served to make Arab Americans invisible in mainstream census data and, consequently, absent from the American statistical landscape as a social body. This situation has variously assisted and disempowered them throughout their immigration struggles. In the public spotlight since 9/11, lack of public knowledge about their experiences has been damaging to their struggle for positive visibility that highlights their achievements and contributions to the society and culture in the United States. We also showed that in the absence of a direct and quantitatively reliable census category, the usefulness and even possibility of which remain highly contested, the information from the census 2000 for Arab ancestry, Arabic language, and place of birth in an Arab country is still indispensible and can be made useful by, for example, devising an alternative approach to mapping such as the one presented here. The new geographies that we constructed with this data literally put Arab Americans of New York metropolitan area on map as a group and at the same time revealed the internal heterogeneity of their communities.

The greatest potential of "mapping for difference" is to take the statistically unusable (because of numerical and categorical inconsistencies) quantitative information and make use of it by qualitative examination. The qualitative examination may take a variety of forms but, in our

33

view, involved comparing the variables (as opposed to estimating them numerically), using discrepancies in the data as analytical entry points, and, contextualizing the differences that emerge from the data by historical and other qualitative knowledge. In this way, mapping for difference led to construction of the space-time narrative – in our case, of Arab American immigration to New York metropolitan area - by closely interweaving census data with broader immigration history. The resulting geographies incorporate changing patterns of immigration, race, ethnicity, national origin, and, to some extent, class and religion, and, therefore, counter the assumed homogeneity and singularity of this population. This approach, we believe, could be used to construct further inspiring spatial and historical narratives at the scale of Arab American neighborhoods for which investigation at the census-tract level combined with ethnographic and detailed historical research will be necessary.

The second greatest potential of our approach is to keep the dialogue between the census categories relevant to Arab Americans and the complex identity politics of this community. As we explain throughout, although the contestation between single or multiple "Arab American" identity is not our primary concern in this article, we wanted to create a statistical space for such contestation by opening up and making explicit the link between the statistical and socio-political marginalization as well as between the statistical difference and political empowerment. While marginalization works through practices of numerical and cultural invisibility and homogenization, the reconstruction of the population as diverse, both in the data and public knowledge, assists political empowerment. Thus, the goal of mapping for differences is not to depict a single "Arab American" population but to bring to light those dimensions of spatial heterogeneity of Arab American communities that can be reflected in the current census data (although by no means all of the dimensions can).

34

In the end, our account of Arab Americans' depiction by census data demonstrates that modern narratives about social groups are constituted in multiple ways, among which social statistics and numbers play a fundamental role. It is hoped, that along with making explicit the relevance of politics of "statistical citizenship" (Hannah 2001) to Arab Americans, the heterogeneous geographies of their communities that we have produced will help their eventual political empowerment and assist in the development of questions for further and more in-depth research. Methodologically, this approach can be used to construct geographies of other statistically and politically marginalized communities. Although the ancestry and much of other data is no longer part of the U.S. census, census 2000 data can provide useful and detailed base-line geographies. It would also be worthwhile to examine how the American Community Survey data, despite its limitations, could be employed for their updates and similar analyses.

Lastly, recent research in geography has shown that the practices of mapping can generate subjectivities that empower communities in such a way that they expand their involvement in practices and economies of solidarity (Rundstrom 1995; McLafferty 2002; St. Martin 2009). As a counter to broader processes of marginalization which, as noted, have wavered between invisibility and stereotyping, we therefore argue for the innovative production of further heterogeneous mappings of Arab American communities. Such work, however, should proceed together with in-depth fieldwork and related research on identity. Furthermore, it must take into account the potential pitfalls of further visibility, and this requires developing long-term professional relationships with community leaders and organizations, and otherwise working to strengthen Arab American communities. We hope that seeing themselves "on the map" of American history, economy, and politics, will assist Arab Americans in their task of reconstructing themselves as empowered citizens.

35

**Table 1. Constructing the Arab population using Census 2000 categories.**

| Category | Total Arab Ancestry (A) | Place of Birth in Arab nation (B) | Arabic Language (L) |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Census definition | A write-in category with two blanks for two separate ancestries of the respondent's choosing. | A write-in category, but all answers were coded according to current political boundaries. | Language spoken at home. Also a write-in category. |
| Census question from the long form | "10) What is this person's ancestry or ethnic origin?" | "12) Where was this person born?" "In the United States -- Print name of state." "Outside of the United States -- Print name of foreign country, or Puerto Rico, Guam, etc." | "11) a. Does this person speak a language other than English at home?" "b. What is this language?" |
| Included in "Arab" | Ancestries coded as specific Arab or | Countries of Western Asia and | Arabic |

| based on SF3 | general Arab ancestries, with certain | Northern Africa, members of Arab |
|---|---|---|
| categories:[a] | differences from U.S. census | League |

Source: U.S. Census Bureau. 2007. Summary file 3, Technical documentation. 2000 Census of Population and Housing. Issued July 2007; Arab league entry Encyclopedia Britannica (http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/31483/Arab-League, accessed 6/21/2011).

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[a] The precise list of categories is available from the authors. It is not included here because of space limitations.

**Table 2. Arab population in the study area as represented by selected variables.**

| Variable | Total for study area as sum of county-level totals, persons |
|---|---|
| Census-estimated Arab Population (AP), SF4 | 164,603 |
| Total Arab Ancestry (A) | 168,434 |
| Persons speaking Arabic Language at home (L) | 107,153 |
| Persons Born in Arabic nation (B) | 106,305 |
| Difference between A and AP | 3,831 (or 2%) |
| Difference between A and L | 61,281 (or 36%) |
| Difference between A and B | 62,129 (37%) |
| Difference between B and L | -848 (-1%) |

Source: Calculated by authors based on Census 2000 data, SF4 and SF3.

# 7 List of Figures

**Figure 1. Racial categorization on short form, census 2000.**

**Figure 2. Study area selection**
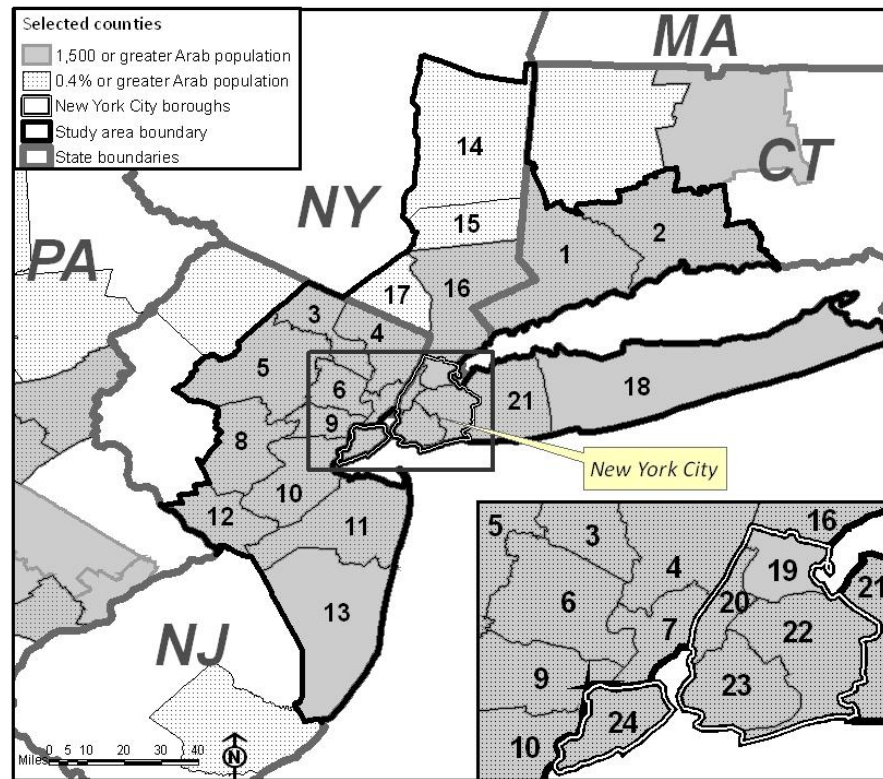


Key to counties:

1 - Fairfield, CT; 2 - New Haven, CT; 3 - Passaic, NJ, 4 – Bergen; NJ; 5 - Morris, NJ; 6 - Essex, NJ; 7 - Hudson, NJ; 8 - Somerset, NJ; 9 - Union, NJ; 10 - Middlesex, NJ; 11 - Monmouth, NJ; 12 - Mercer, NJ; 13 - Ocean, NJ; 14 - Dutchess, NY; 15 - Putnam, NY; 16 - Westchester, NY; 17 - Rockland, NY; 18 - Suffolk, NY; 19 – The Bronx (Bronx, NY); 20 – Manhattan (New York, NY); 21 - Nassau, NY; 22 – Queens (Queens, NY); 23 – Brooklyn (King, NY); 24 - Staten Island (Richmond, NY)

41

**Figure 3. Total Arab Ancestry by county**

Circles show Total Arab Ancestry counts by county.
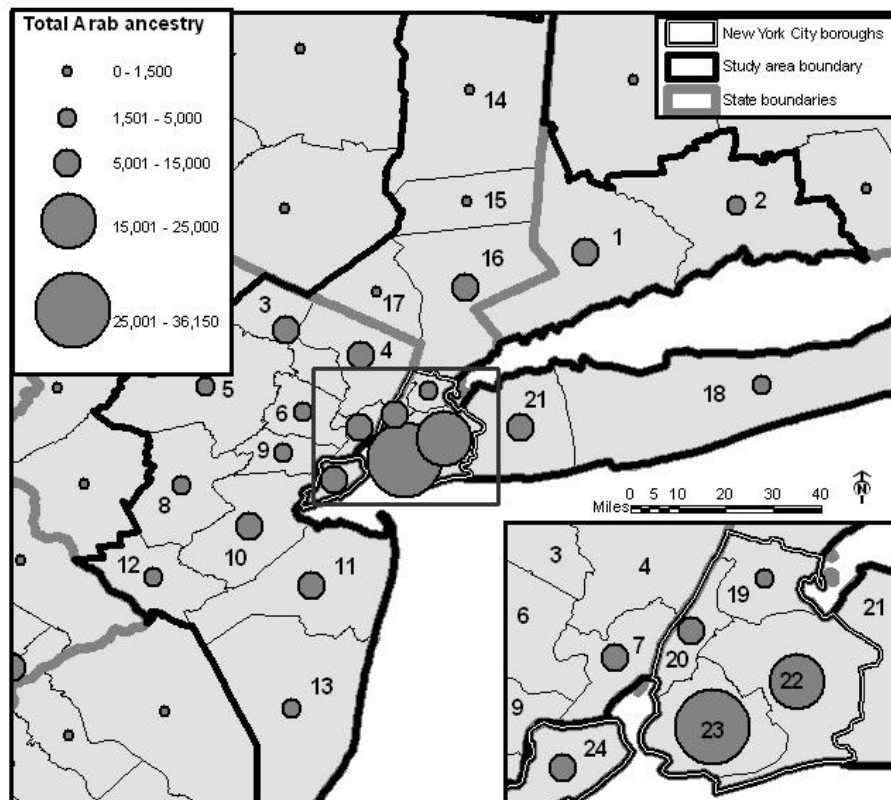
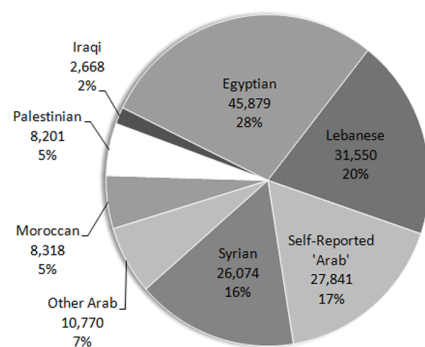**Figure 4. Arab ancestry composition in the study area.**

**Figure 5. Egyptian and Moroccan ancestry counts by county**

The horizontal axis shows the number of individuals who declared Egyptian and Moroccan ancestry. The scale varies to accommodate the largest county values for a particular ancestral group.
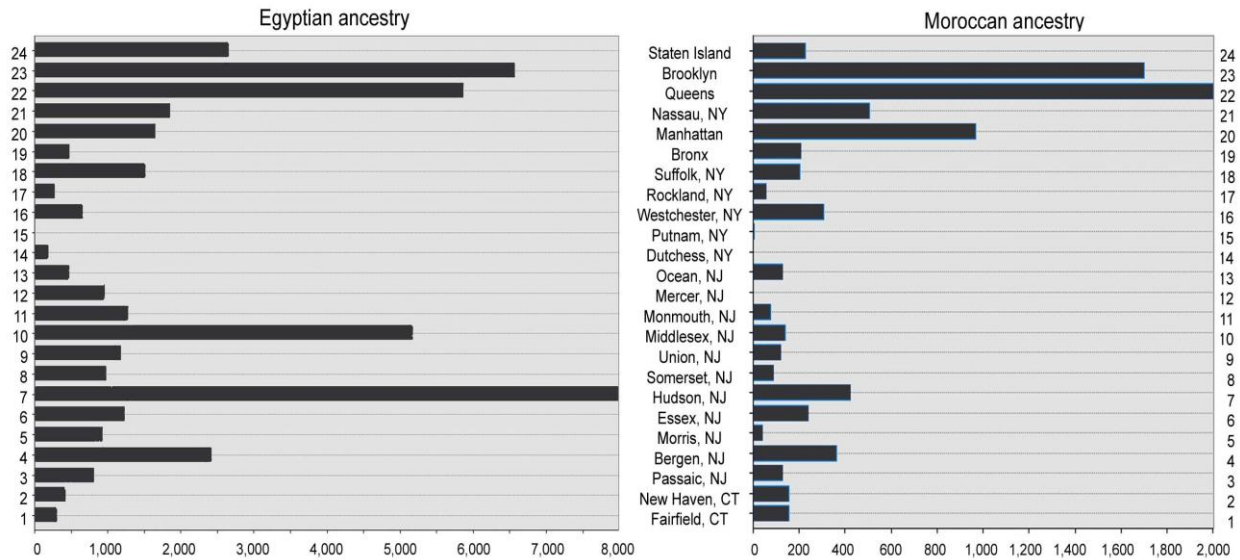
**Figure 6. The National Origin Gap: Total Arab Ancestry vs. Birthplace in Arab Nation.**

The variation in difference between variables A (Total Arab Ancestry) and B (Birthplace in Arab nation) is expressed in percentage points: (A-B)/A, %. Smaller values indicate larger presence of those born in Arab nations among Arab ancestral communities (typical of the post-1965 immigration wave) while larger values indicate their lower presence (typical of the U.S. born descendants of the turn of the 20th century immigrants or ethnic Arabs from non-Arab countries).
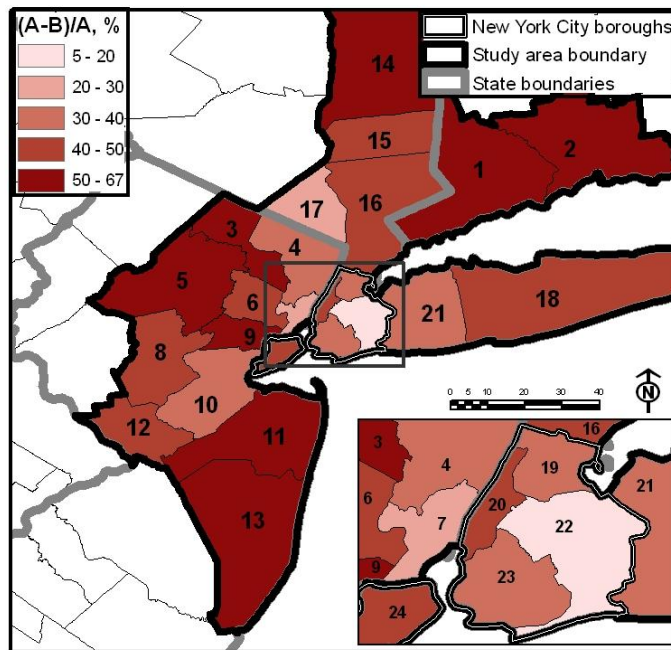
**Figure 7. The Linguistic Gap: Total Arab Ancestry vs. Arabic Language (A-L)/A, %.**

The variation in difference between variables A (Total Arab Ancestry) and L (Arabic language spoken at home) is expressed in percentage points: (A-L)/A, %. Smaller values indicate larger presence of speakers of Arabic in Arab ancestral communities (typical of the post-1965 immigration wave and mixed immigrant neighborhoods) while larger values indicate their lower presence (typical for descendants of the turn of the 20$^{th}$ century immigrants).
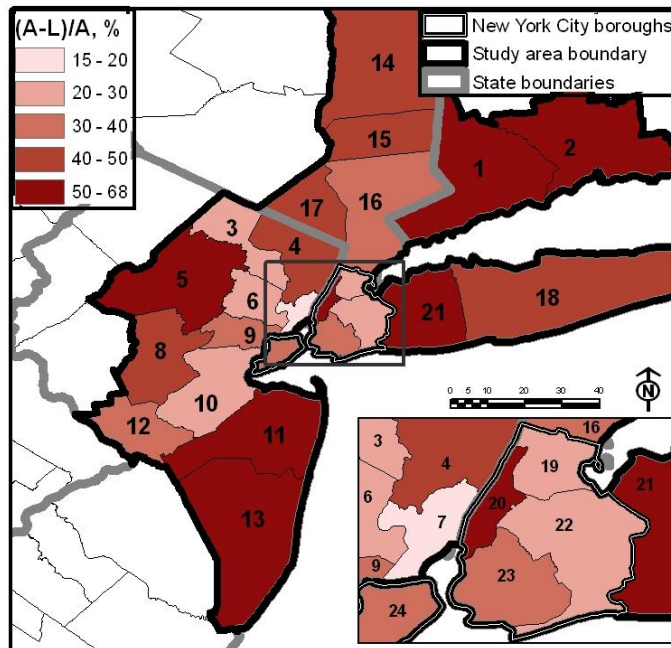
**Figure 8. National Origin/Language Nexus: Birthplace in Arab nation vs Arabic Language**

The variation in difference between variables B (Birth place in Arab nation) and L (Arabic Language spoken at home) is expressed in absolute counts: (B-L). Negative differences indicate prevalence of speakers of Arabic over those born in Arab nations while positive differences indicate areas where those born in Arab nations outnumber speakers of Arabic.
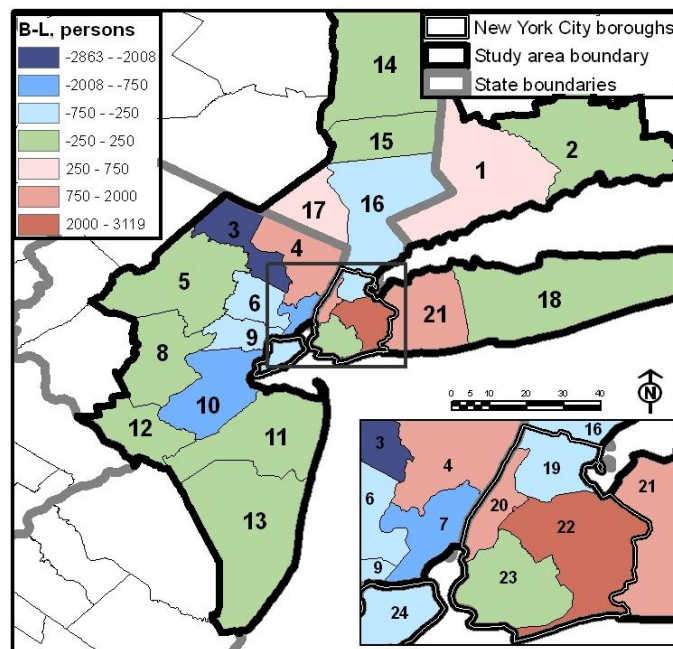
**Figure 9. Jordanian ancestry versus Jordan as place of birth by county.**

The horizontal axis shows the number of individuals who declared Jordanian ancestry and those who indicated Jordan as the place of birth.
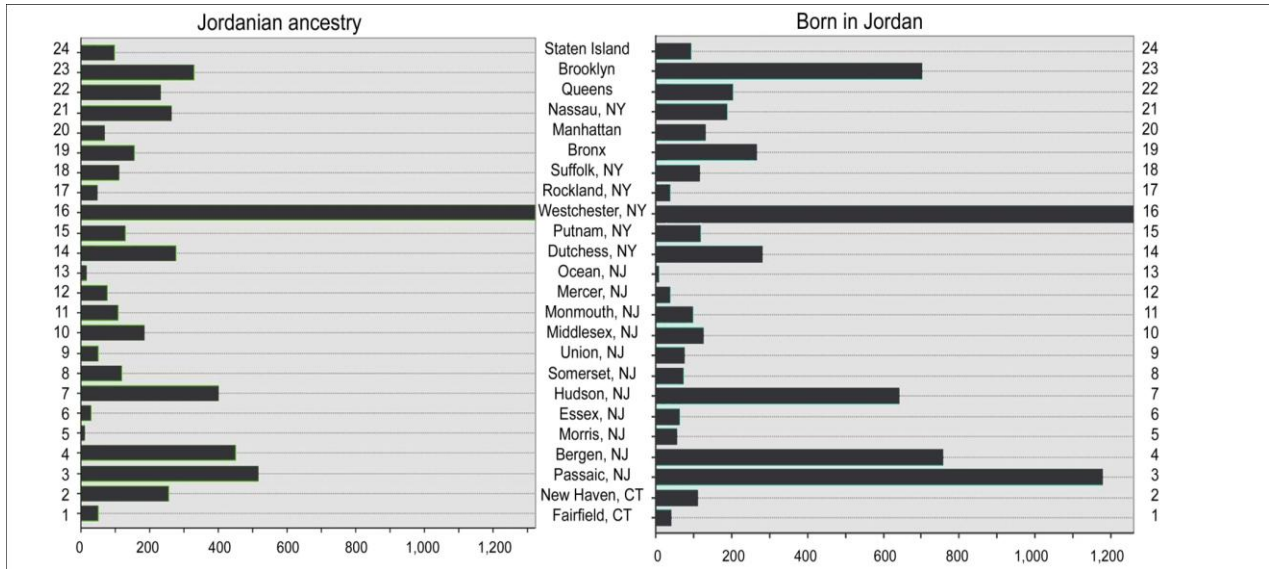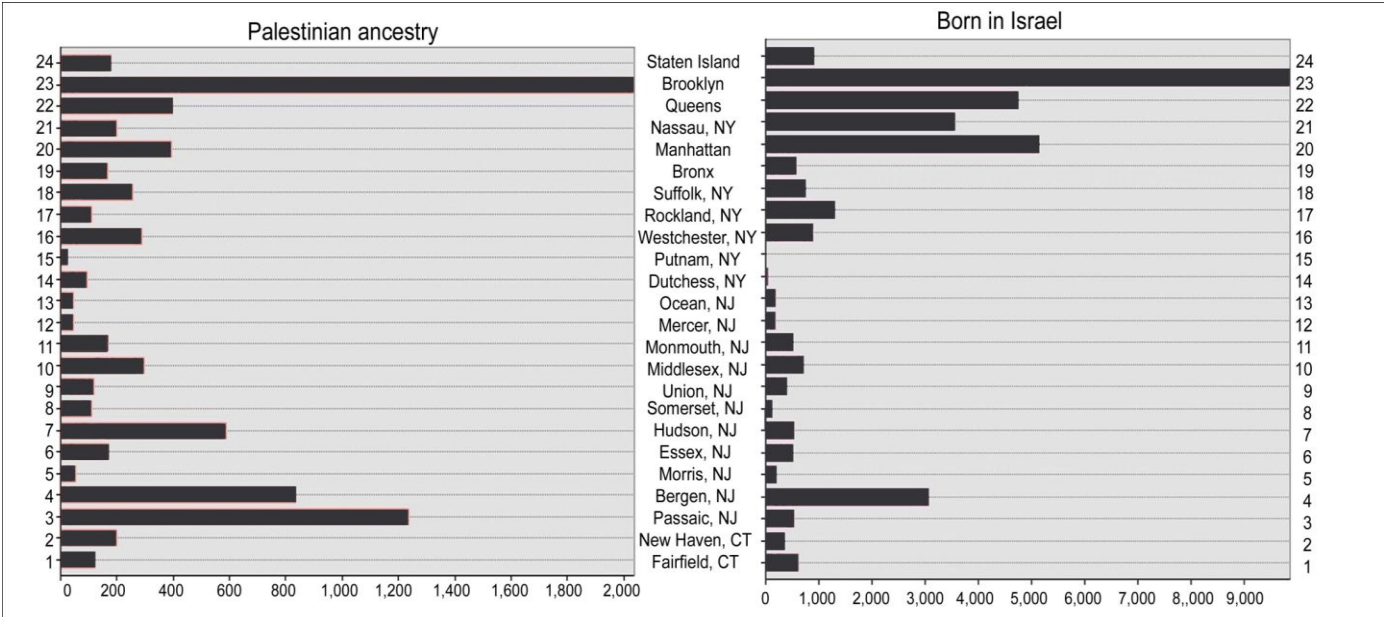
**Figure 10. Palestinian ancestry versus Israel as place of birth by county.**

The horizontal axis shows the number of individuals who declared Palestinian ancestry and those who indicated Israel as the place of birth. The scale varies to accommodate the largest county values for these variables.

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