



European
University
Institute

Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies

POLITICS AMONG ARAB MIGRANTS IN AUSTRALIA

Paul Tabar

CARIM Research Reports 2009/09

**Cooperation project on the social integration
of immigrants, migration, and the movement
of persons**

Co-financed by the European University Institute
and the European Union (AENEAS Programme)



EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTE, FLORENCE
ROBERT SCHUMAN CENTRE FOR ADVANCED STUDIES

Politics among Arab Migrants in Australia

PAUL TABAR
Lebanese American University

CARIM
EURO-MEDITERRANEAN CONSORTIUM FOR APPLIED RESEARCH ON INTERNATIONAL
MIGRATION
RESEARCH REPORT, CARIM-RR 2009/09
BADIA FIESOLANA, SAN DOMENICO DI FIESOLE (FI)

© 2009, European University Institute
Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies

This text may be downloaded only for personal research purposes. Any additional reproduction for other purposes, whether in hard copies or electronically, requires the consent of the Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies.

Requests should be addressed to forinfo@eui.eu

If cited or quoted, reference should be made as follows:

[Full name of the author(s)], [title], CARIM Research Reports [series number], Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, San Domenico di Fiesole (FI):European University Institute, [year of publication].

THE VIEWS EXPRESSED IN THIS PUBLICATION CANNOT IN ANY CIRCUMSTANCES BE REGARDED AS THE OFFICIAL POSITION OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

European University Institute
Badia Fiesolana
I – 50014 San Domenico di Fiesole (FI)
Italy

<http://www.eui.eu/RSCAS/Publications/>
<http://www.carim.org/Publications/>
<http://cadmus.eui.eu>

CARIM

The Euro-Mediterranean Consortium for Applied Research on International Migration (CARIM) was created in February 2004 and has been financed by the European Commission. Until January 2007, it referred to part C - “*cooperation related to the social integration of immigrants issue, migration and free circulation of persons*” of the MEDA programme, i.e. the main financial instrument of the European Union to establish the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. Since February 2007, CARIM has been funded as part of the AENEAS programme for technical and financial assistance to third countries in the areas of migration and asylum. The latter programme establishes a link between the external objectives of the European Union’s migration policy and its development policy. AENEAS aims at providing third countries with the assistance necessary to achieve, at different levels, a better management of migrant flows.

Within this framework, CARIM aims, in an academic perspective, to observe, analyse, and predict migration in the North African and the Eastern Mediterranean Region (hereafter Region).

CARIM is composed of a coordinating unit established at the Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies (RSCAS) of the European University Institute (EUI, Florence), and a network of scientific correspondents based in the 12 countries observed by CARIM: Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine, Syria, Tunisia, Turkey and, since February 2007, also Libya and Mauritania. All are studied as origin, transit and immigration countries. External experts from the European Union and countries of the Region also contribute to CARIM activities.

The CARIM carries out the following activities:

- Mediterranean migration database;
- Research and publications;
- Meetings of academics;
- Meetings between experts and policy makers;
- Early warning system.

The activities of CARIM cover three aspects of international migration in the Region: economic and demographic, legal, and socio-political.

Results of the above activities are made available for public consultation through the website of the project: www.carim.org

For more information:

Euro-Mediterranean Consortium for Applied Research on International Migration
Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies (EUI)

Convento

Via delle Fontanelle 19

50014 S. Domenico di Fiesole

Italy

Tel: +39 055 46 85 878

Fax: + 39 055 46 85 762

Email: carim@eui.eu

Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies

<http://www.eui.eu/RSCAS/>

Abstract

The research paper examines the dynamics of Arab diasporan politics and how diaspora communities reconstruct and reinvent their multiple identities and identities as well as political allegiances in the origin and sending countries. It specifically tackles political activities and socio-political associations among four basic communities living in Sydney, Australia. These communities are: the Lebanese, the Palestinians, the Egyptians and the Iraqis. After shedding light on the various forms of diasporan politics amongst Arab-Australians, it raises theoretical issues about the nation-state and associated forms of political behaviour.

Résumé

Ce papier met en exergue les dynamiques politiques des diasporas arabes et comment ces diasporas reconstruisent et réinventent leurs identités multiples et appartenances identitaires et politiques dans le pays d'origine et dans le pays récepteur. Le papier analyse plus spécifiquement les activités politiques et les associations sociopolitiques de quatre communautés arabes vivant à Sydney en Australie : Les libanais, les palestiniens, les égyptiens et les irakiens. Après avoir mis en lumière les différentes formes de ces politiques diasporiques au sein des communautés arabo-australiennes, l'auteur pose quelques questions théoriques relatives à l'Etat nation et aux comportements politiques qui s'y rattachent.

Introduction

The aim of this research paper is to examine political activities and socio-political associations among four basic communities living in Sydney, Australia. These communities are: the Lebanese, the Palestinians, the Egyptians and the Iraqis.

The choice of Sydney as a specific field for this research has several reasons. Firstly, Sydney is the largest city in Australia (around 5 million inhabitants), and it generally attracts the highest number of migrants coming to Australia. This is mostly true of the communities we intend to examine in this research whereby more than 70% of their members finally settle in this city (except for the Egyptian community as we will see in due course). Secondly, it is expected that the findings of research on political activities among Arab migrants and their descendants in Sydney will reflect more or less what is encountered in other major cities in Australia, for these cities (i.e. Melbourne, Adelaide, Brisbane and Perth) are smaller versions of Sydney, as they house less than 30% of these Arab migrants (Melbourne is by far the largest city next to Sydney and has the vast majority of this percentage living in it). Finally, the sheer demographics of Sydney make this city the prime location where major political activities, ethnic and otherwise, would take place.

In this paper, the concept of politics and political activities is defined to include a wide range of practices which are sub-national, national and transnational. However, these distinctions are not mutually exclusive and, as this study will show, they overlap most of the time. More importantly, political activities examined here are not necessarily party politics in the strict sense of the word. In addition to this type of politics encountered in our research, we note an abundance of *public* activities carried out by religious and social, village-based organizations, which is indicative of the historically weak states in the homelands of some communities (especially Lebanon) and of the peculiar social policy of community relations based on multiculturalism found in the host state.

Research methodology

This paper relies on a number of research methods needed to obtain the data needed for its completion. First and foremost, the author conducted semi-structured interviews with a number of people (19) involved in political activities as defined above. Four respondents out of this sample preferred to provide the author with written answers which were read by the latter and handed back to the informants for further clarifications and additional comments on several occasions. The data collected for this paper was also drawn from various publications, either put out by the respective groups online or in hard copy, or published in locally produced Arabic newspapers. Lastly, this paper benefited greatly from the author's personal experience and direct involvement in the political activities of the Arabic-speaking community in previous years. Several years after his immigration to Sydney in 1971, the author joined a political group and many other social organizations that played an important role in the varied aspects of the political activities of the Arab community. Then, more significantly since the early 1990s, his involvement community affairs took a more professional turn by conducting many field research projects for various studies on the communities of an Arabic-speaking background. This field experience gained over the years resulted in the accumulation of ample amount of information relevant to this study and aided the author in developing an indispensable ability to empathize with the present research field. These are the methods utilized in this research to obtain the information upon which this study is firmly based.

Furthermore, this paper is unable to discuss all the organizations encountered in the field due to their extremely large number (in the case of the Lebanese migrants alone, there are more than 150 associations) and the limited space provided for this paper. More importantly, from a methodological point of view, the author's empirical examination of these groupings (political groups, religious, village and welfare associations, etc...) revealed more or less a common pattern in the modes of their

political activities. This particular finding enabled the author to select certain organizations and to focus on them as typical case studies, revealing – in broad terms – the activities of others that belong to the same group.

Diaspora and politics

In an attempt to define the term ‘Diaspora’, Sheffer (2006) states:

[A]n ethno-national Diaspora is a social-political formation, created as a result of either voluntary or forced migration, whose members regard themselves as of the same ethno-national origin and who permanently reside as minorities in one or several host countries. Members of such entities maintain regular or occasional contacts with what they regard as their homelands and with individuals and groups of the same background residing in other host countries. Based on aggregate decisions to settle permanently in host countries, but to maintain a common identity, diasporans identify as such, showing solidarity with their entire nation, and they organize and are active in the cultural, social, economic, and political spheres. Among their various activities, members of such diasporas establish trans-state networks that reflect complex relationships among the diasporas, their host countries, their homelands, and their international actors (2006: 9-10).

This definition of ‘diaspora’ gives priority to the subjective act of defining one’s identity (self-ascription), and, in so doing, cuts across definitions that rely on objective, ‘quantifiable’ criteria that may or may not exist depending on the case examined. As such, Sheffer’s definition allows for a greater variety of conditions under which a particular diaspora may exist, ranging from being a social formation with an entirely lost sense of being diasporic (i.e. a dormant diaspora) to a very active one constantly involved in triangular interactions with the homeland and host country (Vertovec: 2005).

On the other hand, in his attempt to achieve a more conceptual clarification, Vertovec (*ibid.*), simply makes a further distinction between diasporas as people with a sense of ‘identification with the homeland and co-ethnic elsewhere’, and those belonging to ‘two or more societies at the same time’ and acting as transnational communities. ‘In this way’, he argues, ‘not all diasporas are transnational communities, but all transnational communities arise within diasporas’ (*ibid.*)

Despite the importance of this distinction, I would argue that identity-based diasporas can hardly be separated from transnational factors in this time and age of globalization – even when these diasporas are not actively engaged in transnational exchanges. Over the past two decades, many cases have shown that the identity of Arab diasporic communities in Australia has been shaped by transnational events that were happening in their homelands or affecting their co-ethnic counterparts elsewhere. An illustration of this point will be presented later on when discussing what I termed ‘identity politics’ and the Arab diasporic communities in Sydney.

Finally, I tend to agree with Peggy Levitt (2004) when she argues for a social field perspective in her analysis of ‘transnational social fields’. This perspective ‘emphasizes the multiple layers of transnational [read diasporan] social fields, not only their multiple sites...It is not enough, therefore, to look at the local-to-local connections. It is also critical to examine how these connections are integrated into vertical and horizontal systems of connection that cross borders. Rather than privileging one level over another, a transnational perspective holds these sites equally and simultaneously in conversation with each other and tries to grapple with the tension between them’ (2004: 3).

My major claim is that political engagement in the Diaspora is a complex phenomenon defined by several elements:

1. The political system of the host country
2. The political culture of the home country
3. The political situation and its development in the home country

4. The reciprocity between the host country politics and that of the home country. In fact, getting involved in transnational politics may lead to converting the 'social capital' derived from this involvement into local politics and vice versa.
5. The overlap between the transnational and the local mobilizations of Diaspora organizations, especially in the context of a host society committed to a multicultural policy in managing its cultural diversity or cultural plurality.

I also argue that the best way of making sense of the panoply of Arab migrant groups and their political engagements encountered in Sydney should entail the construction of a typology of Diasporan political activities. Based on my fieldwork, I inferred five basic types of diasporan politics: identity politics, community politics, transnational politics, assimilationist politics and multicultural politics. Although this typology is meant to put some order into the complexity of political activities in the diaspora, it is in no way intended to give an impression that these types are unrelated – for, as a matter of fact, they may feed upon each other depending on the case concerned.

In the conclusion of this study, and after examining the political activities of the Arab diaspora broadly defined to include engagements in public activities, I will further consider the theoretical aspect of my research by tackling the issue of diasporan politics and its implication on the question of polity, belonging and the emergence of non-exclusive national politics.

A brief historical account of Arab immigration to Australia

People from almost all the Arab region have emigrated to Australia, but in numbers, and under circumstances that differ considerably (see, for example, Price, 1981: 61-84). Arab migrants have come from every corner of the contemporary Arab world: the *Maghreb*, the *Mashreq*, the Gulf States and the Arab peninsula. However, our study will examine only four Arab communities (i.e. emigrants or their descendants coming from Lebanon, Egypt, Iraq and present day Israel and Palestinian Territories) for a number of reasons: their large numerical sizes compared to those of other Arabic-speaking communities, the longer duration of their settlement in Australia and most importantly, their active engagement in political activities pertaining to the host country as well as to their homeland.

Lebanese migration to Australia

Lebanese migration and settlement in Australia is the oldest compared to those of other Arab communities. It began in the second half of the nineteenth century and it is still happening today, though in relatively small amounts (around 1000 migrants per year). Historians have agreed to divide this history of migration into three phases: the first from around 1880 to 1947; the second from 1947 to 1975; and the third from 1975 onward (see, for example, Batrouney, 1992). Official census has shown that by the end of the first phase (in 1947), the number of Lebanon-born persons in Australia grew to 1,886, then reached 33,424 at the end of the second phase (in 1976) and amounted to 74,850 in 2006. However, official figures have shown that, over the years, their pattern of geographical distribution has hardly changed: historically speaking, the great majority of the Lebanese migrants and their descendants settled in Sydney, in the state of New South Wales. The latest census in 2006 recorded New South Wales had the largest number of Lebanese immigrants with 55,780 (74.5%) followed by Victoria (14,950), South Australia (1,530) and Queensland (1,250) (the lowest figure is found in the Northern Territory where 30 persons were recorded) (Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 2006). Conducting our fieldwork in Sydney, therefore, is not a choice that was taken randomly. Rather, it is selected for the fact that it has always received around $\frac{3}{4}$ of the migrant intake from Lebanon throughout the history of Lebanese immigration to Australia.

Furthermore, it is significant for the purpose of our study to indicate that a major shift in the religious composition of the Lebanon-born population in Australia has taken place since the beginning of the third phase of Lebanese immigration to Australia. This is rather important to note at this point in

our discussion so that later on our analysis of the political engagement of Muslim Lebanese in Sydney will be framed in its proper context, so much so because religious affiliations among the Lebanese still shape to a large degree their political orientations. As we shall see later on, this is also true of other Arab communities examined in this study.

With that said, it is worthy to mention that ‘The religious composition of this third wave of immigrants differed significantly from that of the two earlier waves. The major change was in the steadily increasing numbers of Muslim immigrants, mainly from Tripoli and the north, as well as others from the Bekaa valley and the south. Muslims accounted for 35.9% of all Lebanese immigrants in 1971-1976, which was higher than the 34.6% of Catholics (Maronite and Melkite) and the 14.4 per cent of all Orthodox’ (Batrouney, 1994). In the 2006 Census, the figures changed slightly whereby Muslims (including Shi`a, Sunni and Druze) accounted for 40.5% of the Lebanon-born and the Christians, Catholic and Orthodox, amounted to 49.1%.

Migration from Egypt

The migration of Egyptians to Australia also started towards the end of the nineteenth century. Early census figures show that the number of Egypt-born persons in 1901 was 108, which then increased to 803 in 1947. It is thought, without hard evidence, that ‘most of the several hundred Egypt-born persons who settled in Australia in the early part of the twentieth century were of European descent’ (Goldlust, J. and Doherty, 1995:2). Statistical evidence shows that most of Egypt-born persons currently living in Australia arrived in the years between 1947 and 1971. By 1971 there were 26,226 Egypt-born persons in Australia, and in twenty years (1991) this figure increased to 33,140. In 2001, the number of Egypt-born in Australia increased by a few hundred (33,370) and hardly changed (33,490) during the last census carried out in Australia.

Another interesting feature of the Egyptian migration to Australia is that, historically speaking, a substantial number settled in Victoria (34.7 and 34.6% in 2001 and 2006 respectively), leaving the state of New South Wales with nearly a constant percentage of settlers around the figure of 50% of the total Egypt-born population in Australia. What is more significant is the religious composition of this community, which is totally inconsistent with that of their country of origin. Whereas most citizens in Egypt are Muslim Sunni (around 90%) and around 8% are Christian Coptic, the Egypt-born persons in Australia have always been predominantly Christian. This is due to their ethnic diversity (for example, in 1966 10,000 Egyptian migrants were of Italian and Maltese descent, 8,000 of Greek and Armenian origin, over 1,000 Egyptian Jews and about 1,000 of Coptic origin) and the strong sense of alienation these ethnic and religious minorities have felt under the successive governments that ruled Egypt since 1952 (ibid.: 2-4). The latest census in 2006 recorded 33,490 Egypt-born people in Australia, with their religious composition as follows: 32.2% were oriental Orthodox (Coptic), 25.6% were Catholic, 16.9% Eastern Orthodox and 10.3% Muslim. Most certainly, this demographic reality will have a strong impact on the character and identity of political engagement amongst the Egypt-born community in Australia (Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 2006).

Palestinians in Australia

The history of Palestinian immigration to Australia goes back to the 1900s when a few Palestinians arrived on Australian shores as ‘single men or women married to British or Australian soldiers’ (Abu Duhou and Tesse 1992: p.9). However, it is thought that succeeding waves of Palestinian migrants really started to arrive in Australia after the first Arab-Israeli war in 1948: ‘The first wave of Palestinians arrived in early 1950s. The second wave of Palestinians arrived in early 1960s when Australian immigration officers were recruiting migrants from the Middle East.’ (ibid. p.9) This period witnessed a third major Arab-Israeli war in 1967 whereby more Palestinians were forced out of their homeland as a result of the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The clashes in Jordan in 1969 between the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) and the Jordanian army, the breakout of the civil war in

Lebanon in 1975 followed by an Israeli invasion in 1982 and the occupation of South Lebanon until 2000, combined with the second Gulf war in 1991 and the expulsion of 300,000 Palestinians from Kuwait, all ensured a continued flux of Palestinians into Australia. Although the number of Palestinians in Australia is difficult to identify for reasons related to their status as stateless people (for more details on the statistical difficulties pertaining to the counting of Palestinians in Australia, see, *ibid.* pp. 8-9), it is estimated that their numerical size, including those who are descendants of at least one parent born in Palestine, exceeds 20,000 persons. More recently, after the Declaration of Principles in 1993 and the establishment of the Palestinian National Authority, the census authority in Australia was able to accurately count Gaza Strip and West Bank-born people. Accordingly, the latest census in 2006 recorded 2,640 people born in the Gaza Strip and West Bank, with more than half of them (1,420) residing in NSW followed by Victoria (810), Western Australia (160) and Queensland (100). It is also established that the early arrivals were largely Christians, and those who arrived since the 1970s have had a significant proportion of Muslims among them. This is clear in the latest census which indicates that 35.2% of the Gaza Strip and West Bank-born Palestinian immigrants were Muslim and 44.2% were Christian (Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 2006).

However, despite the relatively small figure of the Palestinian community in Australia, they are known to be very active politically, and any examination of Arab diasporan political activities in Australia must cover their contributions as well.

Iraqi settlement in Australia

The Iraqis are the fastest growing Arabic community in Australia. According to the latest census figures in 2006, 29.7% of the Iraqi-born population arrived between 1996 and 2000 and 33.6% arrived during 2001 and 2006. In 1976, when they were first recorded by the Australian census, the Iraqi-born persons came up to 2,273. By 1996, the number had jumped to 14,019 and more than doubled in 2006, reaching the number of 32,520 persons. This fast increase in their number is tightly related to the political developments in Iraq since the second Gulf war in 1991. The Gulf War and the subsequent quelling of the uprisings of the Shi'a and the Kurds in Iraq resulted in a massive increase in the numbers of Iraq-born coming to Australia after 1991. Extra places in the Refugee and Special Humanitarian programmes were allocated to Middle Eastern refugees and, during 1991 and 1992, Australia accepted about 200 Iraqi refugees. The number of Iraq-born settler arrivals in Australia in 1996 rose to 2,617. A significant proportion of later arrivals came to Australia under the Family migration and Skilled migration categories.

The 2001 Census recorded 24,760 Iraq-born people in Australia, making up 0.6% of the overseas-born population. Once again, the latest Census (2006) showed that New South Wales had the largest number with 20,530 followed by Victoria (8,610), Western Australia (1,680) and South Australia (770). Most importantly, Iraqis in Australia are highly multicultural. They include major groups of Assyrians/Chaldeans (13,150), Iraqis (11,050) and Arabs (3,170), and many other minorities such as the Kurds, the Turks, the Turkmens and the Jews. The three largest religious affiliations amongst them are Catholicism (12,240 persons), Islam (10,040 persons) and Assyrian Apostolics (4,310 persons) (Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 2006). It is not surprising that our research findings indicate that these groups and the Kurds were the most active groups in diasporan Iraqi politics.

Arab identity politics

As mentioned previously, I intend to distinguish between five types of Arab diasporan politics by way of making the field more intelligible. The first type that I will examine in this section is what I call 'Arab identity politics', a type of politics that is mainly concerned with maintaining Arab identity/ies and protecting them from racism and discrimination as previously experienced in Australia.

In the early days of Arab immigration to Australia when few Lebanese/Syrians managed to arrive (in 1911 they were 1,527 persons), neither the numerical size of these early settlers nor the policy of

the newly emerged federated government (the federation of the Australian States was founded in 1901) – which was committed to preserving Australia as a ‘White’ nation – enabled the early ‘Arab’ immigrants to maintain their ethnic identity and protect it from being subjugated to discrimination and assimilation. During the First World War, the Lebanese/Syrians were considered to be enemy aliens as the Ottoman rule prevailed in Lebanon, and as such they were required to report weekly to police stations. More significantly, early Lebanese/Syrian arrivals were denied the right to apply for citizenship as they were classified to be Asian. Even after the passing of the Nationality Act 1920, which allowed people who had been residents in Australia for five years or more to become naturalized, this specific group was not allowed to enroll and vote in elections because of their classification as Asians. After the removal of the racial disqualification from the naturalization laws, we learn from historical evidence that ‘religion remained an important indicator of acceptability’ (Mansour, 2005). Faced with this reality, the early Lebanese/Syrian settlers did not remain passive. In fact, community leaders protested to the authorities and one of them from Melbourne wrote a letter to the second Prime Minister in Australia, Alfred Deakin, in 1911, urging the entry of his countrymen to Australia on the grounds that “Syrians are Caucasians, and they are as white a race as the English. Their looks, habits, customs, religion, blood etc. are those of Europeans but they are more intelligent” (Yarwood, 1964). It is obvious from this incident that first the protest manifested by early Lebanese/Syrian settlers was the outcome of individual rather than group action. Secondly, it is true that it was a recorded protest against racism but it took place within the context of inventing a racial identity presumably similar to that of the host country. This double move was caught succinctly in the words of Anne Mansour:

Despite their Eastern origins, Syrian/Lebanese immigrants in Australia were, in contrast to other Asians, eventually considered suitable candidates for citizenship. While, at the official level, they had gained qualified acceptance, to achieve this, Syrian/Lebanese immigrants denied their Eastern characteristics and insisted that they were, in fact, white and European. Furthermore, as being ‘Christian’ was obviously essential in their bid for naturalization, they de-emphasised their Eastern Rites (Maronite, Melkite and Orthodox) and, described themselves simply as Christians. Hence, while the eventual acceptance of Syrian/Lebanese has the appearance of tolerance, viewed in the wider context, it was really a victory for prejudice and bigotry. Evidently, because of their appearance and religion, it was decided Syrian /Lebanese were more likely than other Asians to become totally assimilated. Using this evidence, it can be assumed that, if these first Middle Eastern immigrants had been predominantly Muslim, the outcome regarding their acceptance as citizens would have been quite different. (ibid. p.103)

During these early days of ‘Arab’ presence in Australia, the family was the primary site in which identity was protected and preserved. This has been manifested in the family traditions that the Lebanese/Syrian migrants brought with them and preserved in the fields of cooking, social visits, marriage practices and the like. Of course, the lack of a large number of co-ethnics, their isolation and dispersion in different areas in the countryside and the absence of community resources made the struggle of these early pioneers to preserve their identity hard to win in most cases, but surely their struggle to maintain their identity was primarily conducted within the private sphere of the family¹.

The continuous arrival of more Lebanese immigrants after the end of the Second World War, and their concentration in particular suburbs in Sydney and Melbourne as well as the development of community associations –whether political, religious or social – has made the battle to maintain Lebanese identity and shield it from racial attack more resourceful to say the least. Without a doubt, the period between 1950 and 1973, the date when the newly elected Labor government of Gough Whitlam initiated multiculturalism as a new policy to manage and regulate migrant settlement and their cultural diversity in the country, witnessed significant developments pertaining to the politics of identity: Christian Lebanese grouped in different denominational organizations and managed to build their own churches and their schools, and soon afterward, their Muslim counterparts followed suit; in

¹ For a good case study on the role of the family in this regard see, Batrouney, 1979

addition, many political and social-cultural groups were founded reflecting the political and social divisions in their home country. Although these community developments were not encouraged by the host state and society, they have nevertheless played a major role in reproducing the identity of the community alongside the private domain of the Lebanese family. During this period, however, religious institutions and religious leaders played a pivotal role. It is sufficient to mention at this stage that the establishment of separate Maronite, Melkite and Orthodox church institutions has resulted in the rejuvenation of the Eastern characteristics of their congregations and prevented them from being Latinised and Anglicanised by local church institutions.

This process of creating public/communal sites for the protection and the maintenance of Arab identities has continued to develop even further after the implementation of multiculturalism in the 1970s, not only amongst the Lebanese but also amongst the Egyptians, the Iraqis and the Palestinians. The most important development with regards to this phenomenon happening in the host country was the bi-partisan commitment to multiculturalism by the two major parties in Australia: the liberal/National Coalition Party and the Labor Party. This meant that, for the first time in the history of Australia, non-Anglo communities became legally protected against discrimination. Ever since then, more policies have been devised to ensure equity and justice in the treatment of ethnic communities and to respect their cultural identities. As a result of this crucial development, a new political opportunity structure was created, which encouraged Arab communities to further uphold and protect their cultural identities with the official support of the state in the host country. Arab academics, journalists, radio broadcasters, artists, individual activists, women groups, and religious, social and political organisations have all been mobilised on several occasions when Arab identities (Lebanese, Egyptian, Iraqi, and Palestinian identities) become subjected to racial attack and discrimination. Evidence to this first appeared when the Palestinians, and by implication all Arabs, were described as terrorists at a time when the PLO and various Palestinian political organisations were conducting attacks on Israeli civilian and military targets in the 1970s. Then the second Gulf war against Kuwait took place, followed by the harrowing attack on the twin towers in USA on September 11, 2001, and the subsequent invasion of Iraq. In between these two events, people of Middle-Eastern appearance, with particular emphasis on the Lebanese-Australian youth, were racially attacked as a result of the emergence of some criminal activities amongst a tiny minority of young people of Lebanese background. In 2001, the Iraqis were subjugated to a severe racial attack by mainstream society and politicians in the wake of some Iraqi refugees seeking asylum in Australia and more significantly, the children overboard affair which developed in the course of this process. And finally, the Cronulla riots in 2005, and the development of worldwide terrorist acts by some Muslim groups targeting some Western countries, including Britain, Spain and the USA, have, on different occasions, triggered responses by individuals and community organisations and ethnic media in defense of Arab identities, including the staging of public demonstrations and the exertion of some government lobbying to protect these identities against racism and discrimination (For a good coverage of these episodes and the response of community leaders and community organisations, see, Collins, J., Noble, G. Poynting, S and Tabar, P. 2000, and Poynting, S., Noble, G., Tabar, P. and Collins, J. 2004 and Tabar, P. [forthcoming]).

Before concluding this section, it is important to indicate that Arab identity is heterogeneous and highly contentious amongst the Arab diaspora itself. This is reflective of its status in the countries of origin, though it can at times develop independently from home politics and become responsive to factors emanating from the politics of the host country. Thus, Arab migrants in Australia and their descendants would identify themselves with a hyphen to declare their composite character of their identity as Arab-Palestinian or Arab-Lebanese, etc. However, the complexity of self-identification does not end here: some migrants prefer to drop the Arab tag completely and call themselves purely Lebanese, Assyrian or Egyptian. And to complicate the matter even more, some prefer to declare that they are Christian Lebanese or even Maronite Christian Lebanese, Coptic Egyptian or Assyrian Iraqi depending on the context. Furthermore, in recent times people of Muslim background are increasingly

foregrounding their Islamic and even Islamic denominational identity at the expense of the pan-Arab identity and the national identity of their country of origin.

Looking at Arab identity in Australia from the perspective of the host country, the matter becomes even more complicated. Here Arab-Australians are lumped together and hailed as Middle-Easterners, Muslims and Lebanese interchangeably. During the Lebanese gang crisis (1998-2000) and the Cronulla riots (2005), for instance, the usage of these terms in the racial targeting of the Arab diaspora resulted in forging a sense of solidarity amongst them, transcending for a while their divisions along religious and national lines (For more details, see *ibid.*)

The Rise of Community Politics

Community politics amongst Arabs in Australia is a mode of politics that is broader than identity politics, though the two may be articulated in synergy. It is a form of politics that aims to build associations and institutions which are primarily concerned with helping the migrants to settle and integrate comfortably in the host society and for the community as a whole to help in the public expression of their culture. This requires a lot of effort and sacrifice on the part of the community concerned, let alone the hard process of bargaining with the state for financial and policy support.

In reality, the politics of community building passed through two stages: the assimilationist, pre-multicultural stage and the multicultural one. During the first stage, Arab communities formed their own associations and religious institutions despite all the pressures that the host society was exerting on them in order to disregard their cultural baggage and totally assimilate into mainstream culture and society. In this process, they totally relied on their own resources and were occasionally supported by their home countries. They founded their own churches and mosques, published their own print media and founded their own Arabic schools. They also established many small village, cultural and political associations².

During the second stage, not only did a greater number of institutions and associations emerge and the older ones become more developed as they grew in terms of scale and influence, but also, more importantly, during this stage the politics of community building as previously mentioned evolved in a conducive environment where the state took an active part in supporting them due to its commitment to multiculturalism. In fact, the state provided them with funding to support their after-hour language schools and other welfare activities directed at servicing the settlement process of these communities. In addition, on some occasions the state took the initiative to encourage the formation of umbrella organisations in order to centralise its support of the community concerned and make the work of these organisations more financially and organisationally viable (e.g. the role of the Federal government in creating a Lebanese umbrella organisation in the late 1970s called 'The Lebanese Community Council' [LCC]).

The number of Arab associations and institutions is so huge so that it would take a lot of space to write about their aims and objectives, let alone their activities and the historical context of their formation. This means I will be brief in this part of the study and will focus more on a sample of organisations that would best represent other similar organisations. But first, I should indicate that the diversity and resources encountered in each of the Arab communities examined in this paper would largely depend on the numerical size and the duration of each community in Australia. In fact, the larger the community gets, the greater the number of organisations it would produce, and the longer the community has been in Australia, the more resourceful it would be. Moreover, the formation of community organisations and their mobilisation would also depend on the political development in the homeland as well as their treatment by the host country.

² the political associations reflecting the politics of the home country will be addressed separately in the next section

Our research indicates that there are a large number of Arab organisations in Sydney. Some date back as far as 1947, and others were founded more recently with the arrival of new waves of migrants. These community organisations can be divided into religious and non-religious (i.e. village- and family-based, cultural and political) groups. There are also several Arab media outlets which, in recent years, have grown in number and have improved in quality service due to the globalisation of the Arab media and easier accessibility to it in Australia. These outlets not only provide audio and print coverage of the activities pertaining to community politics, but also would often champion their cause. More significantly, their work can also include aspects relating to what I called identity politics, transnational politics and integrationist politics.

Our empirical findings show that the number of Lebanese organisations in New South Wales is at least 100, the majority of them village and regional groupings, which are often affiliated with larger religious organisations. Out of these groupings, in Sydney there are five umbrella organisations which are funded by state and federal governments: the Australian Lebanese Association of NSW (ALA), The Lebanese Community Council of NSW (LCC), The St George Lebanese Joint Committee (SGLJC) and Arabic Council Australia (ACA). More importantly, the Lebanese have developed strong and well resourced religious institutions (The Maronite Eparchy of Australia, The Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese of Australia and New Zealand, the Melkite Catholic Church in Australia and New Zealand, the Lebanese Muslim Association (LMA), The United Muslim Women's Association (UMWA), Al-Zahra Muslim Association (AZMA), and Al-Zahra Muslim Women's Association Inc. (AZMWA)) which, along side few well-organised non-religious associations, have managed to build a strong and viable community infrastructure. It is argued that this infrastructure is an institutional manifestation of the norms and values of the Lebanese community who has struggled over the years to carve a place for their own in an environment which, on many occasions, was not hospitable towards them. This process of community building involves what I call community politics; it is the politics of acquiring a place in the public sphere and obtaining recognition from members of the community concerned and the state authority of the host society³. Werbner refers to this as the process of creating a 'diasporic public sphere' (Werbner:2002).

I will examine in further detail ACA as an umbrella organisation, a religious organization (i.e. LMA) and the Assyrian community in the Fairfield area to show the diversity of community politics and how it is practiced in the Australian context. Undoubtedly, these case studies bespeak how similar cases in their type of organizations would function, too.

ACA was founded in 1979, four years after the outbreak of the civil war in Lebanon (1975). It was driven by a group of young Arab migrants, mainly Lebanese, who believed that creating a unified interagency of Arab welfare and community workers would better serve the settlement needs of the Arabic community whose number was growing significantly in the aftermath of the 1975 civil war. The founders of this group were politically on the left as well as pan-Arabist. They defined their mission as representing the interest of all Arab-Australians⁴ regardless of religious or national divisions. This stance is still reflected today in these words, which one may find on the ACA official website: 'Arab Council Australia is committed to promoting Arabic language, culture and heritage'. Since its inception, the ACA grew in size and became highly resourceful. Currently, it employs no less than ten full-time workers, and its current membership 'ranges from individuals to organizations interested in the successful settlement of Arab Australian'. Its income 'is derived from membership fees, sponsorship, seminars, special project work, and donations'. However, regular funding from the Federal and NSW government departments constitute the major source of its income (in 2006, six government departments provided funding for the ACA, and its annual budget exceeded AUD 637,000).⁵

³ For more details on the struggle over community representation and state recognition, see, Tabar, Poynting, and Noble, 2003

⁴ In this paper we use the term 'Arab-Australians' to refer to all ethno-national, ethno-religious, and national groups living in the Arab region.

⁵ Retrieved from www.arabcouncil.org.au on Oct 17, 2008

ACA is currently leasing a large centre for its operation in the Bankstown Local Government Area, where a large number of Arabic speaking migrants are settled (32,867 out of a total population of 170,490 according to the 2006 Census). Its current objectives demonstrate the extent of its involvement in community politics, and more importantly, they give us a clear illustration of what community politics would entail and how it may overlap with what I previously called 'identity politics'. The aims of ACA's work are basically to facilitate the settlement of Arab migrants in the host country; to address their identified needs and make sure that they exercise their duties and enjoy their rights as Australian citizens; to act as a representative of all Arab migrants in Australia and seek to have relations with different members of Arab diaspora; and finally to fight discrimination and promote collaboration and joint action between Arab-Australian communities (ibid.)

Moreover, ACA's annual budget and the support it receives from its constituency and the six government departments indicate the extent to which it has succeeded in obtaining recognition for its leadership from both the Arabic-speaking community and the host society. It is not surprising, therefore, that a great deal of ACA's effort is spent on maintaining its leadership role in the community and securing the government's support (whether Labor or Liberal) for its work and services. In so doing, ACA has to compete with other groups which are sectarian and constrained by regional and village divisions, and has to strike a balance between representing the interests of its body of supporters and keeping the support of the state departments for its projects. As a result, a lot of community politics is also exercised to achieve the objectives just mentioned.

Our analysis of ACA's community politics applies to those of other umbrella and community organizations, but with one important difference relating to the constituency of each grouping. Apart from this difference, all these organizations strive to assist in the settlement process of newly arrived migrants, and they seek to address their housing, health and educational needs, etc. They also try to have their own community centres and seek the financial support of their members and more importantly, that of government departments. In times when the identity of the community is attacked or racially vilified, they may join forces with other organizations in defense of the larger community. But apart from these moments of unity which are induced by the racial hostility of the host country, the community politics of these organizations would differ dramatically in terms of their constituencies; some are defined as Arab, others as Christian or Muslim, and still, others are identified as members of a particular religious denomination or a particular region, city or a village.

The Lebanese Muslim Association (LMA)

I will now move to examine a Sunni Muslim association, the LMA, which has been playing a major role in the domain of community politics. The story of LMA and its pivotal role in community politics (identity as well as transnational politics) is not much different than those of other religious institutions that have emerged in Australia to serve the various needs of their communities⁶. As it has been noted by an Australian anthropologist (Humphrey, 2001), the highly noteworthy role that religion still plays in the dynamics of family and community lives of Arab communities eventually translated itself in the Australian context in the gradual development of religious institutions reflecting the religious diversity of these communities. There are, of course, other relevant factors which relate to the lack of secular politics in the home countries and its continuing impact on Arab migrants in Australia. Also, it is significant in this vein to mention the experience of Arab migrants with integration in the broader society, particularly after the second Gulf War in 1991. As mentioned previously, this experience has been marked by opposing tendencies which further enhanced the emerging role of religious associations among Arab-Australians; on one hand the state endorsement of multicultural policies since the mid-1970s assisted in the expansion of the social, welfare and educational activities of these religious institutions, and on the

⁶ For a detailed analysis of the Maronite Church in Australia, see, Tabar, 2006

other, the growing settlement needs of Arab communities (including the need to fight racism) required the presence of these institutions to tackle these needs even more.

The LMA was founded in 1956. In an interview with one of its founders, *Haj Adib Ma`arbani* revealed to us that even though the Sunnis from Lebanon were small in number at the time, they felt the need to have a place to pray and to secure proper burial facilities required by their religious beliefs (e.g. an Islamic cemetery, an Islamic funeral parlour (interview with Mr. Ma`arbani on August 7, 2006). Soon after, 'a de facto mosque, a converted house in Lakemba, was established in the early 1960s [1962]', and was 'subsequently redeveloped as the Imam Ali Mosque and completed in 1976.' (ibid.) At the moment, the LMA is a huge organisation with a total equity of AUD 18,427,356. According to the president's yearly report dating December 2007, the LMA made a net profit of AUD 1,284,845. It has a wide range of activities covering the domains of welfare and settlement, education, counselling, youth services and funeral and pilgrimage services. More recently, the LMA announced the acquisition of cemetery land in South West Sydney designed, in the words of its vice president, 'to secure [the] community's burial needs well into the 21st century.' In that same speech, the deputy president stated that a youth centre will open shortly 'with major plans afoot for a college, restaurant, library, bookshop, gymnasium and physiotherapy centre'. He also declared major plans to expand the Lakemba mosque, build a private Islamic school, a childcare and a care centre for the aged. Currently, the LMA has an education committee which runs Saturday schools for teaching the Arabic language to more than 1400 students, covering most of south-western and western suburbs in Sydney⁷ ().

What is very apparent here is that the LMA is at the centre of community politics relating to Sunni Lebanese in Sydney. It delved deeply into the process of building a strong infrastructure, and successfully developing a large and expanding social, welfare and educational institution. More significantly, it has considerably grown in confidence when dealing with the local authority. This has recently been reflected in the words of its vice president when, in the context of commenting on the LMA's financial strength in August 2008, he said: 'We will challenge the long established notion that our community can only achieve its goals and aspirations through government's handouts. Whilst we welcome government assistance and support, we tonight proclaim that we are no longer beholden to/or reliant upon government handouts to achieve our goals and aspirations' (speech delivered by Khaled Kheir, LMA vice president, on the occasion of launching the new Islamic cemetery, August, 2008). This is a typical statement by an organisation, which has managed through its engagement in community politics to wrench its growing independence from the tight control of the state of the host country.

More importantly, since 2002, the LMA has managed to accommodate the representative of the Lebanese Republic, Sheikh Yahya Safi, to look after the personal status laws of the Lebanese Sunnis in Australia. This measure has certainly conferred more legitimacy on the leading role played by the LMA in the community politics of the Sunni migrants and their descendants in Australia. Furthermore, the LMA's central role in the community enables it to take a paternalistic approach to the divisions affecting the state and national Islamic councils (The Australian Federation of Islamic Councils, The Islamic Council of New South Wales, Muslim Council of NSW and The Australian National Imams Council [ANIC])⁸. More particularly, through being a central Islamic association in Sydney, the LMA is able to afford criticising other umbrella Islamic councils, such as the ANIC, despite its sponsorship by the federal government: it recently showed serious concern about the system of community representation within the ANIC when the latter refused to take into account the difference in numerical sizes of its constituent members (the point here is to put a case for more voting influence for the LMA in the ANIC due to the large number of its constituency compared to other members)⁹.

⁷ For more details on the activities of LMA, numbers of full-time and part-time social and youth workers and its revenues including state funding, see, The Lebanese Moslem [sic.] Association: Annual Report 2008 and its website on <http://www.lma.org.au/index.php>

⁸ See, Morris, 2003

⁹ Interview with Sheikh Yehya Safi conducted in Sydney 10/7/2008

The Assyrian community in Australia

The paper will now focus on the Assyrian community in the Fairfield local government area, Sydney, to show how, in this case, an ethnic minority who originated from Iraq engages in community politics. This time, I am tackling the whole community and assessing its practice in community politics at large. But first, I will briefly discuss the history of Assyrian settlement in Australia. The Assyrians in Australia are predominantly from Iraq. Their migration to this country dates back to the 1960s. According to the 1996 census, a vast majority, if not all Assyrian-speaking people in Australia (11,762) were living in the states of New South Wales and Victoria. In the 2006 census, their total number in Australia increased to 13,150 as identified by their ancestry. However, this number is challenged by a recent study on the Assyrians in the Fairfield area where 80% of all Assyrians in NSW have settled. This study argues that in 2005 there were 20,000 Assyrians living in this area alone. Moreover, what is peculiar about this community is its diverse organisational structure and the large number of organisations that it has developed since its arrival in Sydney. Furthermore, Assyrians in Australia are reputed for being organisationally divided among themselves. In the city of Fairfield, they 'have four churches (as in church buildings), two Federations and several cultural and social organisations. There is no lack of diversity among the multitude of organisations which cover the spectrum of religious, political, social, cultural, sporting, humanitarian/welfare and educational enterprises' (Gow, G. et al 2005). The Assyrian Australian National Federation (AANF) is a peak body made up of representatives from a number of community organisations, but it 'does not have the support of the different segments of the community'. Nevertheless, the Assyrian churches still have the strongest influence over the various segments of the Assyrian community. It is argued that the community churches 'have a major input into the shape of the community' and provide 'places where people gather and connect with their past and celebrate life stages (births, marriages, deaths etc.)' There are at least five churches in the city of Fairfield: the Assyrian Church of the East, the Ancient Church of the East, the Chaldean Catholic Church, the Syrian Catholic Church, the Syrian Orthodox Church and a number of Protestant Assyrian churches scattered across the Fairfield area. The Assyrian Church of the East is the most popular church in the Assyrian community. It has the largest membership base and is probably the most active in terms of programs and projects to serve the community's settlement needs. It has two church buildings and four parishes. In 2005, the church commenced an English-speaking Parish which targets second and third generation Assyrian-Australians. In addition, the church has a youth group and runs a bible study group which is popular among the Assyrian youth. It also established a primary school. The Ancient Church of the East (an off shoot of the Assyrian Church of the East) and the Chaldean Catholic Church are also popular and have their own buildings in the area (ibid).

The close links between the Assyrian community and these churches have already been alluded to, and evidence indicates that they strongly support each other. First, it has been established that the Assyrian Australian Association (AAA) which was founded in 1969 played a major part in the establishment of the most influential church in Sydney, the Assyrian Church of the East in mid-1970 and the Assyrian School in 1974 (Jupp, 2001: 175). On the other hand, when the Nineveh Club established by the AAA went into a financial crisis mid-2008, the Assyrian Church of the East decided to lend its financial support to save the club. It was related to me by a member of the management committee of the club that the AAA has been looking after the Assyrian community since 1969, and 'now the church is coming to our aid because of our financial difficulties' (These words were recorded in a conversation with a member of AAA management committee in July 2, 2008 in Nineveh Club). Assyrian community politics has also resulted in the development of the Assyrian community's own media outlets: there are three radio programs that broadcast in the Assyrian language and at least one weekly newspaper. The AAA, as a major Assyrian organisation, 'has been the catalyst to develop the infrastructure within the Assyrian community. In this sense it has the historical legitimacy to be a representative body, and a local, State and federal Government authorities it does often represent the Assyrian community. For instance, DIMIA (the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs may approach AAA. The AAA is frequently called upon by government authorities to represent the Assyrian community at functions and events' (Gow, et al (2005), pp. 19-20). In a

meeting with Paul Gorgees, the coordinator of the Assyrian Resource Centre affiliated with the AAA, he revealed to me that in recent years, the association has been applying pressure on the Federal Government to make the immigration of displaced Assyrians due to the ongoing war in Iraq easier. He also identified other community issues addressed by the AAA, such as housing needs, language skills, unemployment, refugee settlement, recognition of qualifications acquired abroad, youth problems, generational conflicts between first- and second- generation Assyrian migrants, gambling and divorce¹⁰.

It is clear from this evidence that the Assyrian community is at the heart of community politics through the various activities of its organisations. All these organisations (there are at least over fifty, according to Greg Gow's study) are basically concerned with providing support to their community members to settle in Australia as well as to help those who are still experiencing hardship in Iraq or are displaced in neighbouring countries to travel to Australia and settle there. For this purpose, they organise themselves in groups, mobilise their resources and build their community centres including churches, schools and media organisations. They also approach the government to request its support in allowing more Assyrian migration to Australia and in providing financial support for the building of the infrastructure of their community. In the process, they compete with each other and, sometimes, their competition may lead to acute hostility and violence (Gow, et al (2005) p. 18). They are also overwhelmingly concerned with maintaining the identity and culture of their community. To this end, they build their own private schools, establish their churches and develop their own ethnic media. At the level of the 'private sphere' of the family, second-generation Assyrian-Australians are subjected to a strong process of socialisation into the 'Assyrian' culture including the encouragement of endogamous marriages, especially amongst the females.¹¹

Transnational Politics amongst Arab Australians

Arab-Australians are not only engaged in what we call 'identity and community politics'. They also show particular concerns in relation to their home politics. This type of political engagement exercised by migrants and their descendants across their home boundaries and directed at the politics of their country of origin is referred to as 'long distance nationalism' or 'transnational politics'. In this paper, I use the term 'transnational politics' to talk about not only political activities strictly addressing state politics and issues pertaining to political parties and the nation at large, but also, to speak of activities in the 'public sphere' concerning sending various kinds of aids (e.g. medical or financial) to the home country. It also covers various activities in the diaspora essentially aimed at serving the cause in the home country. This may include publishing a newspaper, running a radio station, founding a chapter of the mother political party and possessing a centre (bought or rented) to carry on most of the group political activities.

Transnational politics amongst the Lebanese, the Palestinians, the Iraqis and the Egyptians

In this section, I shall highlight the cases of The Party of Lebanese Forces (LF), the Australian Palestinian Cultural League, the Assyrian Democratic Movement and the Chaldean National Congress as examples of groupings exercising transnational politics.

The Party of the Lebanese Forces (PLF) represents the most organised group engaged in transnational politics in Australia. This is due to many factors of which the most important is related to the forced emigration of members of the PLF from Lebanon to Australia between 1990 and 2005.

¹⁰ Interview conducted in Fairfield, on July 25, 2009

¹¹ Interviews with Salah Kaena, the president of the Batnaya Australian Group Society, a village based Chaldean/Assyrian group, and Frederick Auraha, the president of the Assyrian Democratic movement, on August 29, 2008 and September 1, 2008 respectively.

During that period, the Syrian government was in full control of the Lebanese state and society and Samir Ja`aja`a, the leader of the (LF), sat in opposition to this. Given his resistance to the Syrian presence in Lebanon, he was accused of crimes against the state and sentenced to life imprisonment which was then reduced to 10 years imprisonment between 1994 and 2005. During this time, many members of the LF left Lebanon to various parts of the world including Australia. This is not to say there were no members of the LF abroad prior to this period. A leading member of the LF in Sydney revealed to me in an interview (23/09/08) that since the beginning of the 1980s, his party had what they call 'bureaus' in countries such as France, USA and England. But in 1994, the year their leader was arrested and sentenced to life imprisonment, this date was a considerable turning point in the organisational development of the PLF in the diaspora. Between this year and 2005, the PLF leadership was totally operating in exile and it was during this particular period that the political presence of the LF abroad was given a specific structure: from 1996-97, the LF in Australia became part of an international party structure representing the party members abroad. According to this new structure, the world was divided into 6 districts representing Australasia, Europe, North America (USA and Canada), Latin America, Africa and the Arab countries. Each district was divided into separate bureaus and as a result, Australia was assigned five of them in Sydney, Canberra, Melbourne, Brisbane and Adelaide. Moreover, each bureau is headed by a coordinator and an elected commission who are voted in every two years. The presidents of all the districts answer to the president of the Council of Immigration Affairs, and the latter in turn answers to the Executive Council of the PLF. Finally, at the bottom of this hierarchy lies what the informant calls the 'immigrant base' (*al-Qaida al-Ighterabiya*).

In an interview with the vice president of the Council of the Immigration Affairs (Beirut, 8/10/08), the said informant indicated to me that the emigrant (*al-moughtareb*) has a set of obligations and responsibilities: on one hand he/she has to first and foremost help his/her family and relatives (*ahlouhu*) and the LF (the informant mentioned that, in the USA, PLF members pay a monthly subscription of USD 20 dollars, USD 10 to the PLF in Lebanon and the remaining sum goes to the coffers of the Bureau abroad), and on the other hand he/she has rights including his/her right to vote in the general elections in Lebanon. The emigrants, he added, amount to 13 million worldwide and only one million of them are recorded in the electoral registry. This would require the PLF to apply political pressure on the state in Lebanon to give these emigrants and their descendants the Lebanese citizenship, and then, grant them the right to vote in absentia. The informant also indicated that Lebanese female emigrants should have the legal right to grant citizenship to their offspring. Lastly, during this interview, the informant related to me that although in recent times the Lebanese parliament approved to amend the electoral law in favour of allowing all Lebanese emigrants with proof of identity to participate in the general elections, the implementation of this law was suspended until the next general elections to be held in the year 2013. The informant attributed this decision to the political opposition (the March 8 Alliance) who are perceived to be against the right of the emigrants to absentee voting.

A leading member of the Australasian Bureau in Sydney (Sydney, 23/09/08) argued that their political activity abroad is twofold: on one hand, they read and analyse the international political situation and on this basis they take the appropriate political position in Lebanon, and on the other, they maintain regular communication with Lebanon to preserve 'the Lebanese spirit within the community'. Priority is given to one aspect of this political strategy over the other depending on the country in which the LF is present. In Europe and the USA, priority is given to the former aspect, whereas in Australia it is offered to the latter. In relation to the political engagement of the LF in the USA, the vice president of the Council of Immigration Affairs mentioned to me the political campaigns that the LF bureau in the States have implemented to lobby American politicians to promulgate bills and UN resolutions in favour of their political outlook on the political situation in Lebanon. He also added that their work involved getting members of the LF in the States elected to the Congress. In the present (2008) presidential election, he stated that the LF is supporting the Republican candidate, John McCain.

Furthermore, the LF in Australia has a special committee called the 'Committee for Australian and Diplomatic Relations'. Its objective is to keep in touch with Australian politicians and 'ambassadors of internationally influential countries', such as France and USA, and lobby them to support LF political demands in Lebanon. Finally, it has been related to me that in the forthcoming 2009 general elections in Lebanon, the LF is preparing a plan to politically mobilise the emigrants behind their own party's candidates and the candidates of their political allies in the March 14 Alliance. On this basis, they are offering the emigrants free flights to Lebanon to participate in the upcoming general elections and vote for their candidates. A census of their members and supporters is already under way to determine the size of their supporters, especially when it comes to the issue of highly competitive seats.

Similar to the Lebanese community in Australia, the Palestinian Arabs are highly political, with their political allegiances reflecting those that are present in their country of origin. Any change in the home political landscape of the home country will eventually lead to a similar change in the political behaviour of the Palestinian diaspora in Australia. In the 1970s and 1980s, the main political division was between left and right national groups. With the victory of the Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979, and the demise of the socialist ideology after the collapse of the Soviet Bloc in the 1990s, a new political division was formed among the Palestinians at 'home' and abroad. This time, the division revolved around Islamic and nationalist ideologies.

On the Australian scene, the Islamicist groups, particularly Hamas, do not work in public, and do not have their own organisations due to political and legal considerations in the host country. All other groups who are nationalist and leftist in their political outlooks are still in existence but have lost a large amount of their traditional popular support. However, despite this political fragmentation, many Palestinian groups are still active in the domain of transnational politics, and their activities are more or less the same, except that each group has its separate constituency.

The Australian Palestinian Cultural League (APCL) is a broad leftist and nationalist group. Its core leaders are supporters of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP). In recent years, its political activities have been reduced due to the rising popularity of the Islamicist groups. That being said, the League is a good prototype of the political engagements of other Palestinian groups (there are at least 15 Palestinian organisations in Sydney¹²). In times of political crisis encountered by the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip and West Bank or in the refugee camps in Lebanon, the APCL responds in different shapes and forms: it calls along side other Palestinian groups for public demonstrations and sit-ins (the latest was in protest against the July war waged by Israel against Lebanon in 2006); it sends letters and petitions to Australian political leaders – those who are in power and in the opposition – asking for their political support and meets with them requesting their political and in kind support (many medical equipment and drugs were sent to the West Bank during the war on the Jenin camp in 2002); it celebrates national days and organises annual parties to collect donations for their national cause; it hosts Palestinian leaders from the homeland, it organises public meetings and seminars to speak about the plight of the Palestinian people and their continuing struggle for autonomy and independence and, finally, it sponsors orphans from different camps whose parents have died and ensure the funding of their schooling. The APCL have historically nurtured good relationships with a number of Australian politicians to secure the support of their cause (e.g. they have a good rapport with the ex-labor Prime Minister, Mr. Gough Whitlam, the ex- State Premier, Mr. Bob Carr, local MPs such as the labor MPs Laurie Ferguson, Daryl Melhem and the Liberal MP Ross Cameron).

¹² These are: Council of Australian Palestinian Organisations, Australian Palestinian Cultural league, Australian Palestinian Club, Council of Australian Palestinians, NSW Australian Palestinian Association, Australian Palestinian Community Association, Australian Arabic Palestinian Support Association, Friends of Palestine, Palestinians in Australia, General Union of Palestinian Workers, Palestinian Association of Blacktown, United Palestinian Australian Workers Association, Australian Arabs for Peace, Palestinian Information Office and Palestine Human Rights Campaign (PHRC). I should mention here that PHRC is a mixed group of Anglo- and Palestinian-Australians who sympathise and support the Palestinian cause. More importantly, they are known to make policy submissions on Palestine to the Labor party, trade unions and other independent MPs (interview with one of PHRC activists, Ihab Chalhab, in March, 2004).

Iraqi-Australians: Diversity and political fluidity

In broad terms, the Iraqis in Sydney (where the majority is settling) are culturally and politically diverse. They are divided along religious and ethno-national lines. Basically, there are ethnically Arab migrants who are divided according to their religious affiliations (Shi'a and Sunni) and others who are secular in their political outlook, such as the Iraqi Forum and the Iraqi communists, and have their membership drawn from different ethnic and religious groupings. There are also non-Arabs who identify themselves as ethnically Kurdish, Assyrian/Chaldean, or Turkmen. Political groupings amongst the Iraqi migrants are constantly emerging, and some of them simply dissolve after a period of time. This political diversity/fluidity is an accurate reflection of the political situation in Iraq, and is partly a response to the hardship that newly-arrived Iraqis are facing in the host country. Even the earliest waves of Iraqi migrants to Australia, who were well established as they arrived in Sydney in the 1950s, are divided into many groups, as such: the Assyrian/Chaldean community as compared to the Iraqi Kurds and the *Shi'a* and the *Sunni* who began to arrive in the 1970s, with their number increasing notoriously after the second gulf war in 1991. Overall, there exists at least 35 Iraqi organisations, most of which engage in transnational politics in one shape or another¹³. This section will deal with a sample representing the Assyrian/Chaldean groups and the Islamic Shi'i community.

As mentioned previously, the Assyrian/Chaldean community has developed an elaborate community infrastructure (associations/federations, social/cultural clubs, five churches independent from each other, humanitarian/welfare centres, political groups, schools and media outlets), and its engagement in transnational politics is inexorably linked with their communal activities. A prime example of this linkage would be the case of the Chaldean National Congress (CNC). The CNC was established in 2000 to advocate for the cultural and political rights of the Chaldean people. Its headquarters is in Iraq and has branches across the world, including Sydney. Mr. Samir Yousif is the coordinator of the CNC in Australia and New Zealand, and is also the co-ordinator of all the the CNC branches around the world. More recently, he became the general coordinator of the Chaldean Federation of NSW. Apart from advocating with the Australian authorities for the assistance of the Christian Iraqis by allowing them to emigrate to Australia on the basis of their ethno-religious persecution in Iraq, the CNC has a clear transnational political agenda: to advocate for the national and political rights of the Chaldeans in Iraq,¹⁴ and to establish an autonomous region for themselves in the Plains of Nineveh within a federated Iraq and protected by the United Nations.

Samir mentions that the CNC branch in Australia and New Zealand works very closely with other branches across the world, especially the main one operating in USA. He also indicated that his organisation exerts a lot of lobbying on the Australian government, particularly to assist Chaldeans coming to Australia and to show the real danger they are facing from Islamic fundamentalist groups. This perceived threat faced by the Chaldeans is also raised by Samir and other diasporic CNC branches with the USA and French governments. He even mentioned that the CNC contacted John McCain, the Republican candidate in the presidential race 2008, and discussed with him the need to protect the Chaldeans/Assyrians in Iraq from persecution. On the Australian scene, Samir indicated that he recently joined the Labor Party because it controlled the City of Fairfield, the area in which he resides, and in so doing he believes that his organisation will be in a better position to exert influence on the political direction of the Labor Party in relation to Iraq and within it the political future of the Assyrian-Chaldean community. In September 2008, Samir was elected as a Labor candidate in the local government of the City of Fairfield. In addition, during the Iraqi general elections that took place in 2005, Samir revealed to us that his community strongly participated in the voting of those who

¹³ Information is extracted from two interviews with a community activist conducted in 27/3/2004 and 9/7/2008

¹⁴ Youssef mentioned to me that these rights would include the right of the Iraqi Chaldeans to exercise in full their rights as citizens and the recognition of the Chaldean nationalism as mentioned in the Iraqi constitution.

supported their political claims in Iraq¹⁵. He claimed that around 11,000 participated in this general election in Sydney alone¹⁶ ().

Moving on, the Iraqi Shi`a in Australia have many politico-religious organisations (more than ten groups). The most politically active groups are the Islamic Da'wa Party (IDP) and the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution on Iraq (SCIRI). There are also other minor groups such as the Organisation of Iraqi Human rights, the Australian Ahl-al-Bait Islamic Centre, Al-Moustafa Islamic Association and the Iraqi Islamic Council of Australia (set up in 2005) which is an umbrella organisation consisting of eight Shi`a associations¹⁷ including the SCIRI.

The IDP is divided into two groups: one is nationalist, believing that its political decisions should be independent and should emanate from the free will of the Iraqi people, and the other is pro-Iranian, believing in the supreme rule of the Faqih (*Wilayat al-Faqih*). The SCIRI, however, consists of a number of Islamic parties, and its headquarters is located in Iran. Mohammad al-Salami is the Australian representative of the SCIRI. In December 2002, he represented the Australian Chapter of the Supreme Council in the Iraqi Opposition conference. The Chair of SCIRI, Mr. Abdul Aziz al-Hakim, is also the Chair of the current coalition of Iraq.

Al-Salami is an active member of the Australian Iraqi community. He holds many positions in committees set up by the Australian authorities for consultation on issues related to the Iraqis in Australia (e.g. The Immigration Detention Advisory Group, The Refugee Resettlement Advisory Group and the former Muslim Community Reference Group), and in his relation with the Australian authorities, he stresses the moderate line of his organisation and promotes the idea of a federal democratic system in Iraq. The participation of these groups in the general election in Iraq in January 2005 constituted the most intense moment in their engagement in Iraqi transnational politics.

Moreover, during this election, 'Iraqi community representatives reported thousands of Australian Iraqis to have voted in Iraq's first democratic election. Many Iraqis in Australia saw the election as an extremely important opportunity to vote not only for a democracy but also to vote against terrorism for a safer Iraq. Mr Kassim Abood, President of the Iraqi Migrant Council [now dissolved] and assistant head of country voting indicated that 11,800 nationals had registered to vote and 95% of those who registered had officially voted.'

Broadly speaking, transnational politics amongst Iraqis in Australia is basically an extension of home politics. Similar to the political scene in the country of origin, the political scene in Sydney is extremely divisive. There has been one serious attempt to unify the Iraqi political groups in one umbrella organisation (i.e. the Iraqi Community Council), but eventually the attempt failed due to their political differences which echo those that emanate from their home country: the tensions between the Iraqi Kurds and the Iraqi Arabs; the conflict between a Shi`i majority and a Sunni minority over their share in power and the role of the US-led coalition forces in Iraq (the Shi`a support the coalition to install and protect democracy and the Sunni see in them a force undermining their historical dominance of the state in Iraq); the conflicts between the Christian minorities (the Assyrians and the Chaldeans) and the Shi`i majority on one hand, and the Sunni predominance of the Kurds in the area where they have historically resided (north-western Iraq) on the other. As a result of all these tensions,

¹⁵ Interview with Samir Youssef, Sydney, 2/09/08.

¹⁶ Similar information was also collected from an interview in 1/09/08, with the president of the Assyrian Democratic Movement in Australia, Frederick Auraha. This Movement, however, does not encourage the Assyrians/Chaldeans community to emigrate. Instead, it calls upon its community to remain in Iraq for fear of becoming numerically insignificant and lose their chance to become autonomous in a federated Iraq

¹⁷ These are: Australian Ahl al-Bait Islamic centre, Al-Moustafa Islamic Association, Al-Sajaad Islamic Foundation, The Organisation of Human Rights in Iraq – Australia, Mosque of the Great Prophet, Housayniet Imam al-Askary, Al-Rafdden Iraqi Association and The Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq – Australia.

the idea of founding a council representing a unified Iraqi voice in the face of the new Iraqi regime and the Australian state did not take off.

Mainly for this reason, the transnational politics of the Iraqi migrants and their descendants are still framed in ethno-religious outlooks. Despite intra-denominational differences which, in the majority of cases, are attributable to personality differences, the Iraqis are still mobilised and organised along ethnic and denominational lines. Each ethno-religious group (e.g. the Kurds versus the Assyrians/Chaldeans and the Mandaeans, and the latter groups versus the Sunni and the Shi`a) and each politico-religious group (i.e. the Sunni versus the Shi`a) has a different political agenda, which makes their transnational mode of politics fragmentary and difficult to unify. Overall, their mode of political engagement reinforces the divisions and conflicts that are encountered in the home country.

Egyptian transnational politics: government co-option and politics of minority protection

The vast majority of the Egyptian-born population in Australia are Coptic¹⁸, and are organised politically around their ethno-national identity. In this context, their Coptic Church with its entire developed organisational infrastructure, represents the hub of their social, religious and political activities. In the context of engaging in their identity and community politics, the Egyptian-Australians have founded two Coptic organisations, the Australian Coptic Association (ACA) and the Australian Egyptian Council Forum (AECF), as well as two Islamic groups, the Islamic Egyptian Society of NSW and the Australian Egyptian Islamic Centre.

Moreover, there are fourteen Coptic churches in NSW, each with a Sunday school. ‘The Coptic orthodox community operates a monastery and a Coptic Centre comprising 12 conference rooms and other buildings used for camping and youth activities. There is also a welfare office and two houses used as ‘refuges’ for recent arrivals under the humanitarian component of the migration program.’¹⁹ There are three Coptic schools in Sydney: a primary and a high school in Wattle Grove and two primary schools, one in Bexley and one in Mt Druitt. The Coptic community has also a theological college in Arncliffe, established in 1981, which caters to 65 part-time students and 28 teachers, and has also developed a Diocese called the Coptic Orthodox Church-Diocese of Sydney and Affiliated Regions (NSW, Queensland, Northern Territory and South and North-East Asia). The Coptic Church in Egypt has appointed a bishop to run the Diocese since 2002. The Diocese has a Grants Subcommittee which receives funding from various government agencies to run its settlement and other welfare services (in 2004, the Church was awarded AUD 129,126 for two year period to provide ‘direct client services, group work, community capacity building and service planning and development to newly arrived Coptic migrants in metropolitan Sydney’).

It is apparent here that the Coptic community is very active in identity²⁰ and community politics, and the capacity created by this activity is oftentimes utilised to support the Coptic community in its transnational political engagements. The main group involved in the latter engagement is ACA, and it has established in its political agenda that, ‘complementary and unofficially, the Church supports the [political] activities of the ACA’. In any case, the declared aims of the ACA are indicative enough of its transnational activities. In this vein, it claims ‘to defend the rights of Copts under Human Right Law in Australia and worldwide; to communicate with Human Rights organisations around the world in relation to Christian people in Egypt; [...] ; to inform Copts living I Australia on current news in Egypt’.

¹⁸ See, Community Information Summary: Egypt-born, jointly produced by Multicultural Affairs branch and the Programme Statistics and Monitoring Section of DIAC. Retrieved from <http://www.immi.gov.au/media/publications/statistics/comm-summ/source.htm>

¹⁹ Information retrieved from the Coptic Orthodox Church Website in Australia

²⁰ One of the aims of ACA is ‘to offer lectures to Copts living in Australia on their heritage and civilisation’

On many occasions in recent years, the Coptic community, through its church and community organisations, has protested against the alleged oppression of their co-religionists in Egypt. For instance, in March 2004, the Copts in Sydney were very distressed over news from Cairo about at least six cases of abductions of young Christian women and 'their conversion to Islam'. While the community was waiting on the official government response to their Pope in Egypt, they were preparing themselves to stage a demonstration in the streets of Sydney against their home government. In April 2006, Copts in Sydney and Melbourne marched to put pressure on the Egyptian government to halt attacks on their churches by Islamic fanatics, and 'to stop the cover-ups'. This demonstration was part of a worldwide protest by the Egyptian Coptic diasporan community. More recently, in July 2008, the Coptic community marched in Sydney against the alleged attack on the Abu Fana Monastery in Egypt and the kidnapping of three monks. It was reported that the attack was carried out by 60 militant Islamic fundamentalists. In response to this incident, Coptic organisations from around the world (USA, France, Italy, Austria, Netherlands and Australia) also published a joint press release condemning this attack. Moreover, prominent members of the Coptic Church in Sydney have always monitored the Arabic radio programs broadcasted on SBS, a government sponsored media outlet. A complaint which has been lodged for many years against the SBS revolved around the belief that SBS presenters are not objective in conveying news and current affairs concerning Egypt and are not 'giving the Coptic and broader Egyptian community adequate broadcasting time'.

It is around these issues and the like, which mainly concern the minority status of the Copts in Egypt, that Egyptian Copts in Sydney focus their transnational political engagement.

Transnational politics in the public domain

This study has argued that a large part of transnational politics amongst Arab communities is directed at fulfilling the collective needs of the people in the home country. In most cases, this is done because of the absence of the state concerned in performing these public duties. In a sense, therefore, diasporan Arab communities could be considered as compensating for the lack of services by the state in the domain of public needs and services.

As mentioned earlier, the number of religious-, family- and village-based organisations amongst the Arabic-speaking communities is extremely large. Thus an empirical survey of their contributions to the service of public needs in their home countries would undoubtedly represent a considerable percentage of the GNP of their home economies.

In this section²¹, I will examine the case of one village-based association and show the type of transnational political activity it is engaged in. This association is called the Tannoureen Charitable Association. Tannoureen is a farming village in the Batroun District of Mount Lebanon. There is no official census of Batroun's inhabitants in Australia, but the number of first- and second-generation migrants originating from this village is estimated to be around 2500 persons, most of them living in NSW, particularly in the western suburbs of Sydney. The village association owns two juxtaposed houses in the suburb of Punchbowl, and normally has a busy schedule of activities for its members throughout the year. The peak event of this schedule is usually an annual dinner party in which a large number of the villagers would participate. Our interviews with the village informant revealed to us a list of typical activities that could be classified as transnational politics in the domain of public affairs. First and foremost, the Tannoureen migrants consider their association to be the only agency in Australia entitled to work for the public issues in their home village. It has often donated a lot of money to the churches, clinics and various sport and cultural clubs in the village. Also, it has been donating sums of money for many years to three primary schools (AUD 1,000 per year for each) and one high school (AUD 1,500 per year) in the village. Most notoriously, in the last two years, the Tannoureen association

²¹ Based on three rounds of interviews with the ex-president of the association (still an active member) in which the questions and the answers to them were in writing. The interviews were conducted over the period of August and September 2008.

and associations of the surrounding villages have joined forces in support of the village public hospital: they specifically formed a joint committee for that purpose, and initiated their work by sending a huge amount of money to the hospital in 2007. At the moment, they have started on a huge plan to build a new private ward in the hospital to be called the 'Australia Ward'. The idea behind this project is to generate income from this 'private' ward and use the revenue to further develop the free service of the public wards, including the free treatment and hospitalisation of poor patients. As I was engaging in the interviews with the village informant, the association was selling tickets for a dinner party designated for fundraising to support the building of the 'Australia Ward'.

Many similar activities are carried on by almost all family- and village-based associations functioning amongst the Arab communities in Australia. This type of activities is continuous, some of them in direct response to natural or political disasters. The social and political implications of their quantity and quality could be the topic of future research.

Assimilationist and multiculturalist political activities

I choose the term 'assimilationist' to describe this mode of political activity by the Arab diaspora which indicates that prior to the inception of multiculturalism in 1972, assimilationist policy in Australia was prevalent, and any participation in the politics of the host country by Arab-Australians had to be framed within this context. In contrast to this mode, a new type of political engagement by the Arab diaspora in Australia emerged after the mid-1970s, characterised mainly by working within the general framework of multiculturalism, a policy adopted by the main two parties in Australia, the Labor and the Liberal parties.

In these two periods, however, no Arab-Australian has ever campaigned and won the election to a Local, State or Federal seat on the basis of a platform driven primarily by Arab ethnic related issues. All politicians of Arabic descent had always been integrated into the general policy of the party they belong to. Even the ones who, in recent years, had won the election as independent candidates in the local government elections, they have also expressed their political views from within the dominant political discourses of the two main political parties, the Liberal and the Labor parties.

An exemplar case of an assimilationist political engagement would be the case of Alexander Alam. Alam was born in 1896 and raised in Australia. His parents are described as being 'storekeeper and Lebanese migrants' by the Biographical Register of the NSW Parliament 1901-1970. 'Alam was an active member of the Labor party being a president of that party's Gwydir, Dubbo and Wammarawa branches. He represented labor in NSW legislative Council from December 1925 to April 1958, when he retired from that position. He later filled a casual vacancy from November 1963 to April 1973 when he again retired. Alam was therefore a MLC for 43 years.'

Other notable figures belonging to the same mode of assimilationist politics are people such as Sam Doumany who was Attorney-General and Minister for Justice in Queensland and Dr. Frank Gaha who was a Minister for Health in Tasmania and Robert Katter, from Queensland, who was a Federal Minister for the Army.

A prime example of an Arab-Australian politician drawn from the multicultural era is Steve Bracks. Bracks is of Lebanese origin and belongs to the Labor Party. He became 'one of Victoria's most successful Premiers, winning three consecutive elections achieving record majorities in the 2002 and 2006 elections.' Bracks is 'a leading advocate of both multiculturalism and Aboriginal reconciliation. He retired at 52 as premier of Victoria on 27 July 2007, after almost eight years as Premier, Minister for Multicultural Affairs and Minister for Veterans' Affairs.'²²

²² Retrieved from Steve Bracks website in 28/10/08, <http://www.stevebracks.com.au>

In recent times, the degree of Arab engagement in multicultural mode of political activity has been in the domain of local governments. This is apparent in the triumph of more than 35 Arab-Australian candidates in the latest Local Government election in September 2008. All of them, even the Independent candidates (5 of them), belonged to the Labor or the liberal Parties.

An electronic interview was conducted with two of them and the findings clarify even further the character of multicultural political activity as practiced by the Arab-Australian diasporan communities. Khodr Saleh ran twice for the Council as a labor candidate, first in September 2004 and then in September 2008, and won the election on both occasions. He was also elected as Deputy Mayor on 9 October 2008. When I asked him 'What factors led you to be involved in Australian politics?' he replied: 'I was motivated by my previous political and party involvements [in Lebanon] and by the fact that I am an author and a journalist, too. The idea of getting to know a new political reality in Australia attracted me, and I wanted to employ my [previous] experience to develop Arab political representation and the participation of the Arabic community in the Australian society. After all, this is done to benefit the community and the mother country.'

- Why the Labor Party?
- After examining the Australian political reality, the concept of multiculturalism attracted me, and I realised that the importance of the Australian society as well as the interests of the Arab communities and the communities of non-English-speaking-background lie in the reinforcement of this concept. The Labor Party is considered to be the closest to this concept on the basis that its prominent leader, Gough Whitlam, was the father of multiculturalism.

When I further asked Saleh about the significant factors that enabled him to get to where he is now in the Labor party, he emphasised the role he had played in making members of the ethnic communities, particularly those of the Arab community, aware of the importance of participating in the political process and employing their voting power to serve their interests. Saleh mentioned that he is the president of the multicultural council in the City of Canterbury, and through his work in this council, he learns about the needs of ethnic communities and tries to fulfil them. Finally, Saleh reveals that he is completely happy with the fact that the basic target of promoting the political representation and political participation of the Arab community is being achieved, and that the labor party is the proper frame for that achievement²³.

Shaoquett Moselman is another Lebanese-Australian who immigrated to Australia with his parents and siblings when he was 12 years old. He joined the Labor Party at the age of 16 in 1982, and the reasons for joining are expressed in these words:

- Briefly, coming from a war torn country and our environment was politically charged and having seen and experienced the sufferings of war , deprivation and poverty. This is particularly so for us [referring to Lebanese immigrants coming from the South of Lebanon] as we [the people of southern Lebanon] have experienced the terror of war, aggression and deprivation. Also, the need to help local migrants in Australia called upon us to be involved in local affairs as I have been ever since, helping in local, state and federal matters, be it in social security, immigration, legal work , youth , women and elderly issues. As well as other general community matters such as health, sporting, cemetery/ burial needs as there is a currently not only a shortage but in fact an absence of burial space for the Muslim Community in NSW. This is only to name a few of the areas, and of course always working to help our community be part and parcel of the wider Australian community and get involved in local civic life and political affairs: helping local schools, local charitable organisations e.g. Red Cross, hospitals, Salvation Army etc.
- Why the Labor Party?
- Simply because we identified with Labor principles, the right of the worker, fairness and protection of the worker in terms of healthcare, education and other legal rights to name a few.

²³ Interview on the internet, October 10, 2008

These principles were enshrined in the labor Party constitution and we supported this party because it identified with the Arab World and issues relevant to the Middle East causes such as the rights of the People of Palestine, peace etc...

- Any hurdles preventing you from further advancement in the party echelon, e.g. running for a state seat or federal seat or the State Legislative Assembly? What specifically are they?
- All party members have the opportunity to move forward. I feel that our biggest hurdle to success and moving up the political scale is our community's lack of participation and the negative image that it carries in the wider Australian Society. Issues of prejudice, discrimination and racism are never far off, but I believe we have a lot to be blamed for. Our community is unfortunately fractured along political, social, religious and sectarian lines reflecting that of Lebanon. This is the single most significant issue that has certainly and will continue to present our young and active members to move forward.
- Is your ethnicity including your religion a factor?
- No doubt (Shaoquett is a Muslim Shi'i).

Moselman has aspirations to be a State or a Federal politician one day. He expressed his wish to work in the area of foreign affairs, but recently, his hopes have been dashed by not being selected for a seat in the State Upper House (Benson, 2008). This is the second time in which Mosleman gets too close to enter State politics but then gets rejected by the higher echelon of the Party²⁴.

The two interviews we have examined here are suggestive of the basic characteristics of multicultural politics as it relates to the Arab communities. It's a type of politics which has attracted many members of the Arab diaspora because it addresses issues relevant to both their host and home countries. Most importantly, addressing these issues within a multicultural perspective has had a significant inclusionary effect on the Arab diaspora in the host country. However, multicultural politics is constantly a site of conflicts and continuous negotiations. As the above interviews suggested, prejudice and discrimination against non-Anglo communities and particularly against 'Middle-Eastern' people still impede the Arab-Australians from full and equal participation in the politics of the host country. This reality is undoubtedly making multiculturalism debated and highly controversial on many occasions. That being said, the significant issue here for the purpose of our study is to highlight the effect of multiculturalism on the emergence of a new type of diasporan politics, where issues relating to the migrants in the host country, to broader society and to the home countries may all converge.

In lieu of a conclusion: Overlapping diasporan politics

Diasporan politics in the sense defined in this study do overlap. We already alluded to how community and transnational politics find expressions in diasporan multicultural politics. We should also mention that multiculturalism in Australia and the new opportunities and outlook that it has generated have resulted in the enhancement of identity, community and transnational politics among the Arab communities. More specifically, it has made Arab communities more sharply aware of their collective identity and collective needs, and provided them with resources to develop the infrastructure for their respective communities.

In many instances, issues relating to identity and community politics become part and parcel of mainstream multicultural politics. This is best illustrated during the eruption of racist tensions between Arab communities and the host society. In these situations, the issue of defending Arab identity becomes paramount, and the defense may emanate from members of the main political parties (the Labour and the Liberal parties) in the host country as well as members of diasporan community organizations. On the other hand, major political parties in Australia may end up adopting a racist

²⁴ Interview on the internet, October 16, 2008

agenda during election times in order to win or maintain power. In recent years, this strategy has been successfully deployed by the State Labour and Liberal parties during the NSW state elections in 1999 and by the Liberal Party during the federal elections in 2001 in response to the crisis in the politics of multiculturalism and the identity politics of the Arab communities

Furthermore, in concluding the discussion on this point we cannot ignore the ‘symbolic capital’ that members of the diasporan Arab communities may accumulate from their engagements in various types of diasporan politics. Once this capital is accrued, it becomes available for conversion into a ‘symbolic capital’ pertaining to other types of diasporan politics. So, the increase in the social standing of a political activist due to his/her engagement in identity politics, for instance, would enable this person to make a head start when deciding to become active in community, transnational or multicultural politics. The same could be said about any other type of diasporan politics and the impact of its ‘symbolic capital’ on the status of the concerned activist in the other three.

My discussion of the various forms of diasporan politics amongst Arab-Australians raises some interesting theoretical issues about the nation-state and associated forms of political behaviour. Based on this discussion, it becomes apparent that political behaviour in present day globalised world could not anymore be restricted to within the boundaries of the nation-state, and associated concepts, such as citizenship, national sovereignty, national culture and boundaries, have to be redefined if not totally replaced with new concepts capturing the complexities of present day political practice. The right to a dual citizenship and the engagement in absent voting are a formal acknowledgement of this complexity. The discussion of the various types of diasporan politics in this paper is a bottom-up approach to partially achieve this task. Future research should focus on the impact of diasporan politics, particularly multicultural and transnational politics, on national sovereignty and foreign policy of the host country. What is more interesting in this context, is the reality that the challenge facing the nation-state is coming from a political entity that ‘chooses’ to remain rootless and de-territorialised. To put it differently, the challenge is emanating from a political community that has a triple sense of belonging: one that refers to the land of origin, the other accounts for the impact of the host country on the identity of this community and the last one relates to the ‘imagined diasporan community’ that exists over a number of nation-states cutting across their national boundaries.

Finally this paper showed that diasporan politics is not only de-territorialised but also de-centered. Its mode of behaviour is like an octopus. It has many arms (tentacles) that could reach many places within and beyond the national boundary at the same time. This octopussity²⁵ of diasporan politics is gradually but surely exerting influence on the nation-state, and its full implications in the domain of not only politics but also culture and economics should be the subject of future research papers.

²⁵ The term is borrowed from Ghassan Hage recent presentation at the University of Technology, Sydney, August 11, 2008, on ‘Becoming octopussy – Varieties of Lebanese being transnational’

Bibliography

- Abu Duhou, I. and Tesse, R. (1992). Education, Workforce and Community Participation of Arab Australians: Egyptians, Lebanese, Palestinians and Syrians. Australian Government Publishing Services: Canberra.
- Batrouney, T. (1979) 'Case Study of an Immigrant family: 1889-1934' in Mosaic or melting Pot: Cultural Evolution in Australia, de Lacey, P. R. and Poole, M.E. (eds.) Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Group: Australia.
- Batrouney, T. (1992) 'The Lebanese in Australia, 1880-1989' in Albert Hourani, and Nadim Shehadi, (eds.) The Lebanese in the World: A century of Emigration. London: Centre for Lebanese Studies and Tauris.
- Batrouney, T. and Evert, H. (1994) Community Profiles, 1991 Census, Lebanon Born, Australian Government Publishing Service: Canberra.
- Benson, S. (2008). 'Muslim MP a Frontrunner for Costa's old seat', The Daily Telegraph, October 3, 2008, retrieved October 3, 2008 from www.news.com.au/dailytelegraph/story/0,22049,24438400-5006009,00.html.
- Collins, J., Noble, G. Poynting, S and Tabar, P. (2000). Kebabs, Kids, Cops and Crimes: Youth, Ethnicity and Crime. Pluto Press: Sydney.
- Department of Immigration and Citizenship. (2006). Egypt-Born. Community Information Summary, retrieved September 10, 2008 from <http://www.immi.gov.au/media/publications/statistics/comm-summ/source.htm>. Commonwealth of Australia: Canberra.
- Department of Immigration and Citizenship. (2006). Gaza Strip and West Bank-Born. Community Information Summary, retrieved September 10, from <http://www.immi.gov.au/media/publications/statistics/comm-summ/source.htm>. Commonwealth of Australia: Canberra.
- Department of Immigration and Citizenship (2006). Iraq-Born. Community Information Summary, retrieved September 10, 2008 from <http://www.immi.gov.au/media/publications/statistics/comm-summ/source.htm>. Commonwealth of Australia: Canberra.
- Department of Immigration and Citizenship (2006). Lebanon-Born. Community Information Summary, retrieved from <http://www.immi.gov.au/media/publications/statistics/comm-summ/source.htm>. Commonwealth of Australia: Canberra.
- Goldlust, J. and Doherty, F. (1995). Community Profiles, 1991 Census, Egypt Born, p.2, Australian Government Publishing Service: Canberra.
- Gow, G. et al. (2005). Assyrian Community Capacity Building in Fairfield City. The Centre for Cultural Research, University of Western Sydney: Sydney.
- Humphrey, M. (2001). 'Lebanese' in The Australian people, James Jupp (ed), Cambridge University Press: UK.
- Levitt, P. (2004). 'Transnational Migrants: When "Home" Means More Than One Country', in
- Mansour, A. (2005). 'Religion Matters: The Experience of Syrian/Lebanese Christians in Australia from the 1880s to 1947', in Humanities Research, Vol. XII No. 1.

- Morris, L. (2003). 'New Muslim council hopes to unite factions', in *The Sydney Morning Herald*, April 16, 2003, retrieved on October 23, 2008 from <http://www.smh.com.au/cgi-bin/common/popupPrintArticle.pl?path=/articles/2003/04/15>.
- Price, C. (1981). 'Migration to Australia from Arab Countries' in, *Population Bulletin of ECWA*, no. 21, Dec 1981, pp.61-84.
- Poynting, S., Noble, G., Tabar, P. and Collins, J. (2004). *Bin Laden in the Suburbs: Criminalising the Arab Other*. Sydney Institute of Criminology Series, University of Sydney: Sydney.
- Scheffer, G. (2006). *Diaspora Politics At Home Abroad*. Cambridge University Press: NY
- Tabar, P., Poynting, S. and Noble, G. (2003). "The Rise and Falter of the Field of Ethnic Politics in Australia: the case of Lebanese community leadership." *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, Vol. 24, No. 3, 2003: 267-28.
- Tabar, P. (forthcoming). 'Cronulla riots: community leadership, generational and class conflicts'. In Greg Noble (ed) *Lines in the Sand: The Cronulla Riots and the Limits of Australian Multiculturalism*. Sydney Institute of Criminology Press, University of Sydney: Sydney.
- Vertovec, S. (2005). 'the Political Importance of Diasporas', *Migration Information Source*, retrieved on January 29, 2008, from <http://www.migrationinformation.org/Feature/print.cfm?ID=313>
- Werbner, P. (2002). *Imagined Diasporas among Manchester Muslims: the public performance of Pakistani transnational identity politics*, James Currey: Oxford.
- Yarwood, A. T. (1964). *Asian Migration to Australia: The Background to Exclusion, 1896-1923*, Melbourne University Press: Melbourne.