

Public Engagement of Lebanese Immigrants in Three World Cities

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If it seems obvious that the history of migration is one of instability, fluctuation and discontinuity, it seems also clear for many Third World members of the diaspora that their sense of group solidarity, of ethnic and national identity, has been nourished in the milieu of the immigrant, the refugee and the exiled. Here, identity is a product of articulation. It lies at the intersection of dwelling and traveling and is a claim of continuity within discontinuity (and vice-versa). A politics rather than an inherited marking (Minh-ha 1994:14).

Background on Lebanese Immigration

Lebanon is considered one of the world's most emigration-prone countries, resulting in a large diaspora whose numbers exceed that of the population in the home country (Abdul-Karim 1992). Historically, the Lebanese immigrants' first destinations were New York in the United States and Montreal in Canada (Abu Laban 1992). Since the outbreak of the Lebanese civil war in 1975, Paris has become a destination equal in popularity to the two North American cities (Hourani & Shehdi 1992). The three cities continue to serve as magnets for present-day Lebanese immigrants for several reasons. First, the three cities are major port cities and international, commercial, educational, and cultural centers, and thus form "diasporan capitals" (Butler 2001) where communities from many diasporas congregate. Second, New York and Montreal provide strong networks which have traditionally linked the Lebanese immigrant communities with the home country. Finally, the French milieu (as a result of colonial history), which is congenial to many Lebanese immigrants in Montreal and Paris, has facilitated their acceptance of (and in) the host societies. As such, the three cities are important not only due to the presence of a large Lebanese community, but because they provide strategic arenas for the development and articulation of diasporic identities and communities. These three settings vary in terms of the contexts of immigrant reception, where assimilation and multiculturalism take on different meanings, and consequently will result in different immigrant experiences that are likely to produce diverse dynamics of life in a diaspora.

Despite the specific differences among the three Lebanese communities in terms of their placement within the general racial/ethnic structures of their hostlands, reasons for migration, and class background, the three communities share important similarities as well. First, contemporary Lebanese immigrants are mostly highly educated and professional who pursue goals of educational and economic

improvements in their new settings. Second, they tend to separate themselves from other immigrant groups by emphasizing their similarities to the mainstream. These two aspects are in process of change, given the changing character of migration to France and the events of 9/11, but they continue to characterize Lebanese immigrant communities, however. Finally, contemporary migrants view their movement as more permanent than earlier waves and emphasize their participation in host societies.

Seventy-seven interviews with first generation Lebanese immigrants provide the data for this paper. In Montreal, I interviewed twenty-one individuals. Among these, there are twelve men and nine women; twelve Maronites, six Catholics, one Sunni and one Shiite. Fourteen of the Montreal-based immigrants had a college degree or higher, and eight had the equivalent of a high school diploma. The respondents in Montreal varied in age from 28 to 48 years. In New York City, I interviewed twenty immigrants, thirteen women and seven men. Nine of these respondents are Maronites, ten are Sunnis and one is Orthodox, and all but one had a college degree or higher. The age range in New York City was similar to that in Montreal – 28 to 44 years. I completed thirty-six interviews in Paris. This group of respondents has nineteen women and seventeen men. Religious diversity was the most evident among this group of respondents: seventeen Maronites, seven Catholics, six Sunnis, two Shiites and one Jew. All interviewees in this group have college degrees or higher. The age range in Paris was somewhat larger than the other two cities as the ages of respondents varied from 24 to 57.

Snowball sampling was used to reach the given number of respondents. Initially, I relied on a variegated group of informants (such as academics, young professionals, religious figures, small-business owners, shopkeepers, and students) to create diversity among the members of the sample. Informants were recruited through personal contacts, internet groups, and various civil society associations that cater to Arab immigrants in general. Repeated interviews with key informants allowed me to illustrate the possible ways diaspora experiences are transformed within various socio-historical contexts. I was also able to attend organized social events as well as observe informal forms of interaction. Social gatherings, religious celebrations, political demonstrations, organizational meetings, and cultural performances are among the types of events that I attended.

In this paper I will illustrate the kinds of community engagement among members of the Lebanese diaspora following 9/11. Historical contexts shape communal attachment and involvement of immigrants in their various networks. Lebanese immigrants emphasize their ethnic attachments especially those involving the homeland. Such engagement does not preclude their involvement in their host society in an attempt to portray a positive image of Arabs, Arab immigrants and Lebanese. Participation in the host societies, however, is shaped by the particular socio-political contexts that shape the understandings of ethnicity and belonging among the Lebanese immigrants in the three cities. Alongside the differences discerned in the three communities, my paper also illustrates ways in which Lebanese immigrants in three cities mobilize to participate in the development of a global public sphere.

More importantly, participants in the Lebanese diasporic public sphere regard their public engagement as an important source for their identity and membership in the various communities. In “Imagining Solidarity: Cosmopolitanism, Constitutional Patriotism, and the Public Sphere,” Craig Calhoun (2002) critiques Habermasian accounts of the public sphere that rely on notions of abstract individuals who move beyond their individual differences and particular interests so that they can deliberate issues of common concern and attempt to affect policies. Instead of a public sphere that serves as a setting for deliberations and decision-making, Calhoun calls for a notion of a public sphere “as a setting for the development of social solidarity as a matter of choice, rather than necessity” (148). Emphasizing the public sphere as an arena where social imagination and relationships are created, Calhoun goes on to highlight the public sphere as constructive of social solidarity and identity.

In this paper, I illustrate the ways through which Lebanese immigrants engage in social action that allows them to build solidarities in Lebanon, their host societies and with members of the larger diaspora. I also extend the argument to show that public engagement is the mechanism for constructing identity and forging a sense of belonging. The search for a shared identity allows immigrants to forge global alliances and participate in global action and discourses. This pursuit supports Habermas’ model of a public sphere where individual differences are transcended. Unlike Habermas’ account, however, public involvement is not sought to the extent to which it affects policies and interacts with the state.

Rather, the public spheres in which Lebanese immigrants participate become the terrain for constructing identities and creating solidarities. Holding that the events of 9/11/2001 and the declared war on terrorism mark a new context for shaping Arab immigrant identities, the appeal to universal notions of rights, as the only form of access in larger publics (in host societies or global in nature), becomes important for the constitution of Lebanese immigrant identities.

Based on in-depth interviews with Lebanese immigrants who are active in civil society associations, I explore the ways individuals fashion their identities within the complexities of globalization and immigration, forge universal alliances, and participate in global action and discourses. Universal notions of solidarity, democracy and rights are central to many members of the Lebanese diaspora and thus, their emphasis on notions of universalistic solidarity and cosmopolitan citizenship informs their participation in public activities especially in more recent years.

Arabs in the United States: “*White, but not-quite*”

Most analysts of Arab immigration note that settlement in the US and Canada should be considered part of the same stream of migration to North America (see for example Aboud 2000 and Suleiman 1999). Two waves of immigrants are usually differentiated; the first wave lasted from 1870 to the end of World War II and the second from WWII till the present. Arab immigration to the United States started in 1870. According to Arab-American historian Alixa Naff (1992), the first waves of Arab immigrants to the U.S. were Syrian-Lebanese Christians, farmers or artisans, relatively poor, and poorly educated. These immigrants were referred to as Syrians or Syrian-Lebanese and rarely Arab or Arabian, which indicates a lack of a definite identity (Suleiman 1999). These immigrants were emphatically sojourners, who have left voluntarily, as they wanted to improve their economic condition and to return home in a short time wealthier and prouder than when they left (Naff 1992).

World War I and the restrictive quotas to immigration to North America that followed isolated early Arab immigrants from the homelands and limited the growth of the immigrant community.¹ Suleiman (1999) argues that a sense of isolation had two effects on the Arab immigrant community. On the one hand, it led to enhancing the sense of solidarity among community members and more calls to end inter-sectarian conflicts. On the other hand, however, it also strengthened the assimilationist trend, especially for the American-born children of the early immigrants. For example, the early second-generation spoke only English and quickly moved away from ethnic churches (Ibid.). The process of Americanization of the Syrian-Lebanese progressed with their incorporation, or rather acceptance, in the dominant white culture. Similar to a number of immigrant groups, the Syrian-Lebanese were subjected to strong prejudices and discrimination upon their arrival to the United States (Ibid.). Yet, soon after the turn of the century, the Syrian-Lebanese were officially included in the Caucasian racial category and were gradually characterized as belonging to the “white” subculture within American society (Truzzi 1997: 21). Their incorporation within the privileged racial group allowed members of the Syrian-Lebanese community to utilize their “whiteness” and become legal citizens and more “Americanized.” In other words, it was the acceptance of the Syrian-Lebanese as members of the dominant white race that allowed them to identify themselves as full members of the American society, and adopt an American national identity. Truzzi (Ibid.) describes that success in business activities and professional occupations triggered the interest of Syrian-Lebanese immigrants in the US to participate in politics and take on government positions.

According to the various accounts of Arab immigration to the US, following World War I waves of immigrants were becoming more diverse and sophisticated. Yet, it was only after World War II that the second wave of Arab immigration became distinct (see Abraham & Abraham 1983 for more information on historical trends of Arab migration). This wave of Arab immigrants was highly educated (either came as university students or were members of the educated elite in their home countries) and

¹ Some analysts of Arab American immigration refer to the period between the two world wars as the second wave of immigration (see Abraham & Abraham 1983).

more diverse in terms of religion and national origin. More importantly, unlike the forebears who came as temporary sojourners (but most of whom stayed), post-WWII Arabs came as immigrants who sought a new life in the United States (Haddad 1994; Suleiman 1994). While economic factors were the most significant behind the migration of the first wave, social and political reasons drove many Arab immigrants of the second wave to the US. For example Suleiman (1999) cites regional conflicts (e.g. Palestine-Israel, Iraq-Iran, Iraq-Kuwait) and civil wars (Lebanon, Yemen) as among the factors contributing to the increase of Arab migration. According to the author, the new immigrants were searching for democracy and freedom from their oppressive governments. Suleiman also adds the importance of improvements in transportation and communication as allowing immigrants to perceive of the world as a single unit and thus more accepting of the notion of migration especially to far away places in North America.

The manner in which immigrants understood their position in American society is an important difference between Arab immigrants of the first and the second wave. While first wave immigrants believed that they were sojourners who do not belong to American society, second wave immigrants were permanent settlers who came with well-defined ideas of democracy and citizenship (Suleiman 1999). Higher levels of education and social status also motivated new immigrants to participate in American society. In an analysis of the political attitudes of Arab immigrants, Michael Suleiman (1994) notes that the 1967 Arab-Israeli war marked Arab immigrants' political engagement in the U.S. based on their involvement with issues related to their ethnic community and homelands. Although Suleiman does not use transnationalism as a framework for his analysis, it seems that the 1967 defeat fostered transnational ties in the Arab-American community. Arab-Americans have assimilated to the US society by many measures (see for example Naff 1985, 1992, and Kulczycki & Peter Lobo 2002). Yet, Arab immigrants have expressed strong interest in maintaining ethnic attachments to their homeland as well as ethnic community. The United States' strong support for Israel and partial media coverage of the conflict fostered Arab-American unity and the emergence of an ethnic immigrant identity (see Haddad 1991; Sandoval & Jendrysik 1993; and Marshal and Read 2003).

Over the various waves of migration, civil society institutions flourished in the Arab-American community. The first wave of immigrants established a number of charitable societies that maintained group cohesion and ethnic ties. Members of the small elite in the first wave started organizations to improve the conditions of other members of the community, such as clubs to learn English, and to promote American ideals and mutual understanding (Naff 1985). Furthermore, there were societies based on family name and place of origin which were interested in modernizing their respective villages in the homeland and maintaining transnational ties (Naff 1992). It was not until the second wave of migration, however, that community organizations started to promote participation in political or civic institutions, such as the Syrian Democratic and Syrian Republican clubs which were formed in the 1920s (Suleiman 1999). Ethnic organizations also reflect the strengthening of Arab-American identity post-1967 as they started to develop as pressure groups. Most prominent among these organizations are the Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, which was formed to oppose media stereotypes and negative coverage of the conflict, the Arab American Institute, which focuses on affecting foreign policy through lobbying, and the Association of Arab-American University Graduates, which was more interested in raising public awareness on Arab and Arab-American communities and culture (see Majaj 1999 and Suleiman 1994). As an umbrella identity, however, being Arab embodies various, and sometimes contradictory, meanings and political attitudes based on age, gender, nativity and religion. In a study of Arab-American Public Opinion, Sandoval and Jendrysik (1993) observe that younger, foreign-born, and Muslim Arab-Americans have greater opposition to the U.S. policies relating to the Middle East. Suleiman's (1994) survey also supports this account and adds that younger Arab Americans have stronger identification as Arabs (as opposed to American-only or based on their religion or national origin), but that such identification is mostly political since younger Arabs are not necessarily devoted to cultural traditions and ethnic practices.

Like other racial and ethnic groups in the US, placing Arab Americans within the American ethnic/racial structure has been a source of debate. According to the 2000 census classification, individuals from North African and the Middle Eastern descent are classified as white/Caucasian, and

80% of Arab-Americans identified themselves as such in 2000 (De la Cruz & Brittingham 2003).² At the same time the state and media racializes these same individuals as essentially other, which leads to a contradictory placement of Arabs in American culture (Naber 2000). At one level, the conflation in the media of the categories Arab, Middle Eastern and Muslim as mostly violent, backwards and irrational contributes to construction of an inferior Arab/Muslim/Middle Eastern culture and the perception of Arabs as non-white Other. Thus, according to Naber (Ibid.) the media representations emphasize the exclusion of Arabs from American society despite their inclusion among the majority white population. Despite the original debate within Arab-American activist circles on the issue of classification and identity, the events of 9/11/2001 mark a new historical juncture and a change in the racial formation of Arabs in the US (for a report on discrimination against Arab-Americans in the aftermath of 9/11, see Ibish 2003). The new racial formation led many to realize that: “It is no longer possible to deny that we are people of color” (Naber 2002). Following the proclaimed war on terrorism, however, changing the racial classifications to include Arab as separate categorization in 2010 is believed to increase the perception of Arab-Americans as a targeted inferior group.

As members of the Arab-American community in New York City, Lebanese immigrants were found to contest their stigmatization as members of an oppressed minority. Instead, they seek ways to affirm their identities in ethnic as well as cosmopolitan ways and in the process build become active participants in processes of social change. For example, Fareed, a 35-year old business owner in New York who moved from Beirut in 1982 as his parents were worried about his future given the civil war emphasized that he wants to “be remembered as someone who helped the community and worked to better the image of Arab-Americans as a whole and Lebanese specifically.” Fareed arrived as student in a college town in Eastern Tennessee where he felt isolation and rejection due to the small number of

² Also, according to the same report on the US census 2000, 1.2 million people report an Arab ancestry, which makes the Arab-American population similar in size to the Greek and Portuguese. This number does not include people from Mauritania, Somalia, Djibouti or Sudan – countries that are members of the Arab League. Additionally, this number includes people who originate from Arab-Speaking countries but do not necessarily identify themselves as Arabs, such as Berbers, and Kurds. More than one-third of this ancestry group reported Lebanese origins, which is followed by a general Arab/Middle Eastern/North African categorization (about 20%). Syrian and Egyptian followed Lebanese as the largest specific origin categories. Arab-religious affiliations that are nationally based, such as Coptic or Maronite, were classified as “Other” groups and thus are not included in this estimate. The highest proportion of state population that was Arab was in Michigan (1.2%), and Dearborn’s population is 30% Arab. The largest number of Arabs, however, lived in New York City – where 70,000 people of Arab ancestry lived. Almost one-third of the people with Arab ancestry reported an additional non-Arab ancestry, mostly Irish, Italian and German.

immigrants of any background. The intensification of the war and the invasion of Beirut by Israeli troops a few months after he arrived made him aware that he had lost his home forever, without being able to replace it with a new one in the US. Looking back at his experience in Tennessee, Fareed realizes that since his only option then was to immerse himself in American society, he quickly adapted himself to the new setting. Upon finishing his undergraduate degree, Fareed moved to Washington, DC, where he joined his parents and started working. Two years later, Fareed moved to Los Angeles to start a career in advertising. Soon, however, he realized that LA is not the same kind of city that he is used to, so he decided to move to New York. After living in New York for eight years, Fareed observed that being in his new setting allows him to embrace his Arab and Lebanese roots more than ever.

Well, obviously after 20 years and after living in different parts of the country, I consider myself very much an American. But interestingly, though, because I am in a big city, and because I have so much access to Lebanese and Arab media, I also find myself like going in reverse and if anything embracing my origins. Now I find myself reading more Arabic newspapers and also, because of the technology, because of the Internet, I find myself consuming more Arabic news than I ever did before. When I first got here, I never did that. I just immersed myself totally in Americana: all my friends, all my activities, were American, like rock concerts and what have you. But now that I'm here, I'm back in touch with this kind of cosmopolitan Lebanese culture.

Addressing the impact of global media, Fareed emphasizes that he has more opportunities to stay attached to Lebanese and Arab culture, so that sometimes he finds himself knowing more about Lebanon than the people there. Feeling attached to Lebanon does not lead Fareed to wish to return to Beirut as he finds in New York City the different kinds of experiences that he seeks. Fareed draws on the global nature of New York City that allows him to embrace his different identities and participate in various cultural spheres without necessarily regarding them as contradictory:

I like New York City. I really like the multi-cultural aspect of it. And because I think there's nothing like it in the world because I think it's the one city that really doesn't belong to any country and yet has every country belonging to it. This is really the place where I feel the most at home. It's the place where I can be Lebanese as much as I want to be Lebanese, and then when I'm sick of being Lebanese, I can turn around and be something else.

Participation in the host society is considered an important source of belonging to the place where the immigrants decided to live. Shortly after arrival to their new settings, many Lebanese immigrants I spoke with found themselves fully immersed in their host societies as their social networks, personal goals, and regular activities resembled members of the mainstream. In some cases, my interviewees expressed their

rejection of belonging to an ethnic community that is not integrated to the mainstream society. For example, Fareed took issue with such lack of integration and stated that many Lebanese-Americans do not really see themselves as part of American society:

You can meet somebody 20 and 30 years, and they still think of themselves as not part of the American. For them there's always "American," and then there's "us." And that's a problem, because as long as they don't think of themselves as Americans, then clearly they're not going to be active in the system which is necessary in order to effectively make change.

In Fareed's opinion, belonging to a Lebanese ethnic group or the larger American society is a choice that an individual makes. Choosing the larger American multicultural society, in his views, is important not only for a sense of belonging but also for being an effective member of the American community as well as the Arab ethnic community within. The attacks on the World Trade Center only made Fareed's choice more significant as he, as well as other Arab immigrants, have become to re-emphasize the importance of engaging with the general American public in place of ethnic isolation.

Not only does the multicultural aspect of New York City allow Fareed to choose how to identify himself, it also offers him various opportunities to participate in various public spheres that strengthen his identification and ground his multiple attachments through daily activities:

So right now it's kind of this bizarre 50-50 blend, where I could be wearing my Lebanese hat and be totally immersed into this Lebanese slash Arabic scene and be active in all the stuff that's happening around us, the concerts and this and that, the parties and what have you, and I could also make a switch and turn back into my more quote unquote American, New Yorker mode and embrace that scene and everything that it involves... I do that daily, I mean, I do that constantly. It depends on what situation I'm in. And I think this is one of the beauties of living in New York is that it allows you to do that. You can literally wear so many hats and totally embrace so many cultures, both politically and culturally. There was a time, for instance, last year I was involved in a couple of political campaigns here. So here I was suddenly dealing with all kinds of New York communities and going out there and trying to organize a lobby and so on, and really getting very New York specific activity. But at the same time, literally the same evening or same afternoon, I could pick up a group of Lebanese friends, and we're then, sitting at a bar in the village and bam, I'm in a totally Arabic environment then. We're talking about music and we're talking about poetry, politics, and so on, all in Arabic.

Mixing different identities and lifestyles in his daily experience, Fareed realizes the ambivalence that is associated with forging an incomplete sense of belonging. Yet, such ambivalence motivates Fareed to seek coherence in his experience through social involvement and community organizations. Indicating that for him identity means a collection of experiences that left a mark in his life, Fareed notes that the

many labels he wears vary from “American,” “New Yorker,” “White,” “Arab,” “Muslim,” “Atheist,” “Lebanese,” “Gay,” “Immigrant,” and “Professional.” At the same time, he stressed the need to move beyond unitary identities as defining one’s experience, but to utilize them towards bringing about desirable social changes:

It is so confusing, but I’m not totally that concerned about that. I think that your humanity has to precede all of these labels. I mean, if anything, I really use those labels just as tools to push the right buttons. But I’m not really that hung up on it. I think that growing in the world today, with borders falling left and right, because of technology and communication, the whole concept of labels and nationalism is becoming rather tired; unless you want to use it for your political motive, you know what I mean?

Similar to other Lebanese immigrants in New York, Fareed partakes in processes of articulating multiple identities to challenge given cultural assumptions and norms and thus becomes an active participant in the various communities that he crosses. These identities are not necessarily tied to a particular national territory but can be transferred to various contexts. The uniqueness of Fareed’s setting – New York City – also provides an additional source for defining his own distinctive position in the world and is drawn upon to explain the ease with which he can adapt to and mix multiple cultures in his daily lives. More importantly, Fareed emphasizes that his interest in equality unifies the multiple identities that he takes on in the various interactions. Thus, regardless of the kind of identity that he may adopt in a particular social setting, such identity is only meaningful through his engagement with activities that aim at empowering the group to which that identity belongs. For example, Fareed explained that following 9/11 his identification as Arab and Muslim was strengthened given the increasing prejudice towards these communities in New York. Such identification is not a mere revival of ethnicity at times of crisis. Choosing to identify with other Arabs and Muslims were important for Fareed’s desire to change the disadvantaged position these groups were forced into and provided more meaning for his social activism relating to these groups. Similarly, Fareed referred to his preference to identify as gay whenever he is combating discrimination that is directed towards other members of the gay community. Thus, Fareed’s engagement with specific struggles are informed by his general universal interest in equality and

empowerment, which consequently provides basis for his choice of identity label based on the given type of encounter.

Arabs in Canada: *An Ambiguous Visible Minority*

Arab migrations to the United States and Canada are extremely intertwined, and ought to be viewed historically as two streams of a trans-Atlantic flow to the Americas (Aboud 2000). In many accounts of early migratory streams during the late 19th century, migrants from Ottoman Syria have set out to an imaginary place called “America” but ended up in Canada, South America, Australia, West Africa, Europe, New Zealand when they were denied entry to the US, or due to manipulation on part of migration and shipping agents (see Issawi 1992 and Khalaf 1987). According to Ibrahim Hayani (1999), Arab immigration to Canada began in 1882, and the early Arab immigrants to Canada were overwhelmingly Christian, male, mostly unmarried from Greater Syria (mostly from Mount Lebanon). The demographic characteristics of the early arrivals are very similar to the first wave of immigrants to the United States: a majority of Christian, poor and poorly educated men who wanted to accumulate capital so as to return home quickly. Peddling was also the popular economic activity, but some worked as shopkeepers or unskilled laborers, which was reflected in the nomadic pattern of settlement (Abu-Laban 1980). Immigration statistics show that more than 5000 Syrian immigrants came in during the first decade of the 20th century (Abu-Laban 1980). During the following four decades, Syrian immigration declined due to immigration restrictions imposed after the First World War. Canadian immigration policies during the Great Depression prohibited the entry of people from the “Asiatic race” which Arab immigrants in Canada could not contest the way the ones in the U.S. did. Following persistent pressures, in 1949 Syrian Lebanese immigrants in Canada managed to widen the range of admissible dependents from among the Lebanese, Syrians and Armenians to include fiancés/fiancées, spouses, children, siblings and their dependents, parents and orphan nephews and nieces under 21 years of age of Canadian residents. Other “Asiatic” citizens were only allowed to bring in wives and minor children. These changes in the entry eligibility of Syrians, Lebanese and Armenians were only administrative as they took

the form of discretionary measures given to immigration officials, but led to an increase in the population of Arab immigrants. The more significant impact of these discretionary measures, however, is that they maintained the ambiguous and ill-defined status of Arabs in Canada as belonging and at the same time not-belonging to a minority position (Aboud 2000).

Similar to the United States, Arab immigration to Canada underwent an important shift following the World War II. According to Baha Abu Laban (1980), the period following World War II, particularly the decade of the 1960s, has witnessed not only a substantial growth in Arab immigration to Canada,³ but also significant changes in the national origins and social statuses of Arab immigrants. While Syria and Lebanon were the sources for almost all Arab immigration to Canada before 1945, immigrants arriving between 1946 and 1975 were mostly from Egypt (followed by Lebanon). In general, post-World War II Arab immigrants to Canada came from diverse Arab countries and included a larger proportion of non-Christians. Moreover, while the early immigrants were unskilled with little or no education, the postwar immigrants represented a wider range of educational and occupational backgrounds.

Based on a survey of Arab-Canadians in Toronto and Montreal conducted in 1974, Abu Laban (1980) illustrates that postwar Arab immigration included a large number of professionals and highly skilled individuals for whom emigration was not an economic necessity, but rather an avenue for the fulfillment of higher career and professional aspirations. Moreover, many of the occupationally well-placed among recent immigrants referred to the goal of higher education as a primary reason for coming to Canada. Family-related considerations, such as presence of family members in Canada, constituted the second most important reason for Arab immigration to Canada, which was a more prevalent reason among women and the less educated respondents in the survey. Political reasons also contributed to Arab immigration to Canada and included political repression, socialism, and discriminatory treatment as causes for migration. Abu-Laban concludes that Arab immigrants to North America between 1945 and 1975 were typically secular (both Christian and Muslim) and largely “Westernized” – for example, they

³ According to Hayani (1999), 97.7% of the 324,160 Arab migrants who came to Canada between 1882 and 1997 came during the post-1950 period, and 84% came after 1970.

have been schooled in Western or Western-type institutions. More recent immigrants share similar characteristics and, unlike the pioneer cohorts who had no national allegiance, identify more by their national origin than by religion. Finally, given the influence of Nasser's Pan-Arabist ideology that emerged in the 1960s and continues to bolster, recent immigrants are prone to identify as Arabs, and many are Arab nationalists (Eid 2002; Suleiman 1999).

Many Lebanese immigrants consider Canada to be the ultimate land of settlement, a place "where children can have a decent future" (Kemp 1992: 685). With its emphasis on multiculturalism and ethnic pluralism, Canada is seen as providing Lebanese immigrants with the opportunity to form communities that reinforce social attachments and political commitments to the homeland and maintain their ethnic cultural identity (Abu Laban 1992). Speaking of Lebanese immigration to Canada following the civil war, Hayani (1999: 286-287) observes that:

The precarious balance that had kept in check volatile and explosive religious forces in Lebanon came apart with horrendous consequences for the Lebanese people in the mid-1970s. Tens of thousands of Lebanese came to Canada, where most already had relatives who could sponsor or nominate them. Some came under the new immigration category of business investors, and others came as refugees. Many of the latter category were probably of Palestinian origin.

Evidence pertaining to the religious identity of post-1970 Arab immigrants to North America is not conclusive. Yvonne Haddad offers the most comprehensive work on Arab immigrants' religiosity. In her various analyses, Haddad points to post-1970 immigrants as giving primacy to their Islamic identity and rejecting Arab identity, which triggers a counter-trend by Christian immigrants who champion ancestral identities such as Phoenician or Pharonic and consequently reject an Arab one (see for example Haddad 1994). Haddad's observations are based on research conducted in the 1980s. More recent studies on Arab immigrants, however, indicate a contradictory trend with respect to religious identification. For example, in a qualitative study of confessional identity among the Lebanese in Montreal, Karim Lebnan (2002) observes that Lebanese immigrants in Montreal do not structure their identities first and foremost around their denominational affiliations. Instead, Lebanese immigrants favor multiple and secular forms of identification, and based their choice to migrate to Canada given the existing multicultural policies.

A recent survey, conducted by the Canadian Arab Federation (CAF) in November 2001-February 2002, offers a broad portrayal of the Arab Canadian community and identity. The majority of survey respondents (62.6%) claimed a hyphenated identity and rejected the idea that they were leading two contradictory lives – one Canadian and one Arab (64%).⁴ A large majority of the respondents were fluent in English and French (inside and outside Quebec). These Arab immigrants chose Canada because of its human rights, its multiculturalism, and the presence of family members. In terms of community life, the majority of respondents reported involvement in mainstream (as opposed to Arab) cultural events and high levels of voting in recent elections. Although one-third of the respondents reported feelings of alienation (politically and culturally), the majority was satisfied living in Canada and the policies followed by the Canadian government (except for the government's handling of the widening gap between the rich and poor). While 80% of Arab-Americans identify themselves as white, only 35.3% of Arab-Canadians surveyed by CAF chose white as a racial category (but this group is the largest followed by 26.1% choosing "olive," 25.7% choosing brown and 0.4% choosing black). The Canadian census, however, does not categorize the population in racial terms, the way the US census does, but individuals can be identified as members of visible minorities.⁵

Montreal provides an important context for investigating Arab Canadian immigration.⁶ Given the Franco-phone environment and the large number of Middle Eastern/Lebanese immigrants in Montreal, the identity and patterns of community participation of Lebanese immigrants is different from those living in New York City. Lebanese immigrants in Montreal did not engage in rejecting a Canadian identity and in most cases they did not perceive a difference between being Canadian and being Lebanese. Instead of emphasizing marginalization and stigmatization, Lebanese immigrants in Montreal emphasized their

⁴ A small 5.6% identified with their religion, and only 1.3% among them identified with their sect.

⁵ Since the survey was conducted almost immediately after September 11, 2001, the respondents report a heightened awareness of prejudice and discrimination. The respondents almost unanimously agreed that Canadians know little about Arab culture and are influenced in their views of it by the negative stereotypes in the media. Among the survey respondents, 33.2% believe that Canadians do not like Arabs and 41.3% hold that Canadians do not like Muslims. The media was given the biggest share of propagating negative attitudes towards Arabs. The survey asked respondents to report on specific incidents of discrimination, and 24.8% of respondents stated that they, or someone in their immediate family, have experienced racism, mostly during the last two years (there is no information in the report of specific occurrences post 9/11). Acts of racism were encountered at workplaces and schools, as well as by the Canadian government in general.

⁶ In 1996, individuals from the Middle East amounted to 73,950 in Montreal, and accounted for the largest group of immigrants. The most frequent source of immigrants from the Middle East was Lebanon.

contributions to Canadian mainstream society and stressed that Lebanese immigrants are important for shaping the kind of multiculturalism that Canada idealizes. For example, Marcel, a Canadian university professor, noted that initially he only identified himself as Canadian but that the various political events that led to strengthening his identity as Lebanese-Canadian. At first, the political crisis following the Israeli invasion of Beirut in 1982 caused him to participate in various activities that were focused on Lebanon as well as other parts of the Arab World. Over the years, Marcel noticed the lack of a narrative describing the contributions of early Arab immigrants in the history and development of the city of Montreal:

I looked around me, and there are all kinds of stories about the multicultural history of the city, but somehow, my narrative was missing from this history... I knew from my family's stories that such narrative needed to be told, so I decided to tell it.

Marcel's "inspiration came when he was visiting his grandmother... She'd been living in the same house for over 70 years, and her basement was cluttered with memorabilia she'd brought with her in 1922 from *Rashayya*, a town in what is now southeastern Lebanon" (Polak: 2003). As a result, he decided to put together an exhibition, held at the Centre d'Histoire de Montréal, narrating the story of Arab immigrants, who are mostly of Lebanese-Syrian origin.

"*Min Zamaan*" (Since Years Ago) is the exhibition that Marcel put together, and it describes the experiences of the early Syrian-Lebanese immigrants in Montreal and in other parts of Quebec. The exhibition covered a range of themes:

The context and causes of departure from Bilad al-Sham, the journey to North America, the challenges and strategies of earning a living during the initial years after immigration, the subsequent process of adapting and contributing to Montreal and Quebec's economy and culture, the achievements and trajectories of some of the community's more 'legendary' personalities" (Polak: 2003).

Although the planning for *Min Zamman* was in process before the September 11, 2001 attacks, the events only reinforced Marcel's devotion to execute the project. "After Sept. 11, there was an even greater need for all Montrealers to realize that the Arabs among them were co-citizens who have helped build this city" (Ibid.). Marcel's interest in telling his own ethnic narrative was aimed at challenging given assumptions about Arab immigrants in Montreal – being only recent arrivals, fanatic, and undemocratic. His personal

interest was framed in terms of contributing to the general multicultural environment in Montreal, and thus specifically addresses issues of importance in Canada.

The works of Bassam, an established artist in Montreal, also address issues of memory and belonging with respect to both Canada and Lebanon. Bassam is a 39 year-old photographer and writer living in Montreal. He left Lebanon around 20 years ago to Cyprus and then to New York City. During his nine years in New York, he got a diploma in photography. He left New York due to his inability to maintain legal status. Bassam found in Montreal a better environment to settle, pursue his education as well as his artistic ambitions. In 2001, Bassam participated in a Canadian exhibition titled “The Lands Within Me.” The exhibition “deals with the experience of migration, immigration, multiple identities, all presented from the perspective of 26 diverse Canadian artists of Arab origin” (Globe and Mail 2003). Similar to Marcel’s exhibition, Bassam’s participation in “The Lands Within Me,” as well as several others, is informed by his desire to weave the Arab/Lebanese experience into the Canadian general culture to make it truly multicultural. The events of 9/11/2001 led to a public controversy surrounding “The Lands Within Me” and it was terminated shortly thereafter. Consequently, Bassam joined forces with the group of disappointed artists participating in the exhibition to announce that the termination is a threat to Canada’s multicultural mandate. In an open email, Bassam and others stated that:

Cultural events such as this have an important educational and humanitarian role, and that they are needed at times like this more than ever. We believe that the museum needs to stand up and show support for the Arab-Canadian community and to exhibit exemplary art works made by Arab-Canadian artists. This will help bridge the divide between Canadians and will assist in bringing about an understanding between the Arab-Canadians and other communities.

Dealing with the controversy surrounding “The Lands Within Me,” as well as in his various activities, Bassam emphasizes the need to carve a position for Arabs within Canadian society and address their contributions over the years. Similar to Bassam and Marcel, many of the Lebanese immigrants in Montreal emphasized that they have an important role to play in shaping cultural life in the places where they live at present.

The interest in presenting the homeland and its culture and engaging in a cross-cultural dialogue between Lebanon (or the Arab World) and the countries of settlement is considered an important vehicle

for granting immigrants a positive image and welcomed presence in their host societies. More importantly, these cultural activities do not only serve the homeland or the ethnic community in the new setting, but the host society as well. Participating in processes that contribute to host societies' acceptance of multicultural diversity provides Lebanese immigrants avenues to participate in bringing about desired social changes to their new settings. Gilbert a professor of English at a Canadian University expressed the reason behind his interest in translating Arabic literature to English:

There is a great need for us to be known as we are; naked. Through our publications and our literature, especially our art, the West will be able to have a clearer glimpse of who we are. Unfortunately, there haven't been much. We are not known as artists, writers and singers. We are known as terrorists, fighters, and warmongers. That loud voice is much, much stronger than the quiet voice. I try to engage in activities that tell the West that we do have culture that we know beauty. We know humanity. We know what is peaceful... Hopefully, my writings and my translations would contribute to a little understanding of this part of the world or of the people who wrote it.

Having established himself within Canadian academia, Gilbert believes that he can cross cultural boundaries with relative ease, since he is proficient in both Canadian and Middle Eastern cultures. His interest in translating Arabic works to the Canadian public is based on his interest in making Canadian society more just and multicultural and hence benefiting both Canadians and Arabs alike. More importantly, translating Arabic literature into English aims to provide more than a positive image of Arabic society. Instead a deeper knowledge of Arab culture, with both its positive and negative aspects, provides the "naked" portrayal of Arabic culture that will consequently lead to a human understanding which is what Gilbert aspires for.

Arabs in France: "*bon chic bon genre*"

Unlike the North American contexts, Arab migration to France has mostly originated from North Africa. In fact, Maghrebis (those from former French North Africa) are the largest single groups among the population of immigrant origin (Hargreaves 1995). Until independence in 1962, Algeria was considered an integral part of French territory and all its inhabitants had the status of French nationals. Understandably, Algerians are the largest group among the foreign population in France (amounting to 805,000 in 1982) (Ibid.). Despite the surplus of studies on North Africans in France, Lebanese immigrants have not attracted the attention of much academic analysis.⁷ The precarious presence of the

⁷ To date, there are only four authors that I have come across who provide an outlook on Lebanese immigrants in France. Of the four, three wrote MA theses that provide demographic overviews of the Lebanese in Paris. Percy Kemp's essay is the most extensive account of the

Lebanese in France is a probable reason for the dearth of information on the immigrant group. In “The Lebanese Migrant in France: *Muhâjir* or *Muhajjar*?” Middle East expert Percy Kemp (1992) explains the ambiguous position France occupies in the worldview of the Lebanese migrants, as it is positioned (geographically and mentally) in between the traditional lands of migration such as Canada or West Africa and temporary destinations such as Cyprus or Jordan. Unlike Lebanese migration to France, migration to these destinations were structured and well planned. The transitory position that France occupies in the psyche of Lebanese immigrants leads to an assortment of immigration flows and patterns that only makes France an incoherent place in terms of Lebanese immigration. Kemp explains:

As a result of this eminently trivial and intermediary position, Lebanese migration to France is rather difficult to fathom. There are those who have successfully applied for French nationality and have settled in France permanently. There are those who are still waiting for their French nationality and share their time between France and Lebanon. There are those who, having become French nationals, have gone back to Lebanon or moved on to Canada and elsewhere. There are those who are in France on the basis of a regular or temporary stay permit. There are those who hold a stay permit yet do live in France. There are those who are in France on the basis of a tourist visa. There are those who have been living in France for two years and more on a precariously renewed three-month tourist visa. There are those who succeed in acquiring an EEC passport through a ‘Greek connection’ by Lebanese and Greek lawyers specializing in supplying Greek passports on the basis of a certain resemblance between Lebanese surnames and the names of certain Greek villages. And there are finally those who manage to settle in France on the basis of forged Lebanese papers: Palestinians and Syrians who have purchased Lebanese passports... In brief, the state of Lebanese migration to France is as confused as are the minds of the Lebanese themselves regarding the future of their country. It is difficult to determine the number of Lebanese nationals living in France at a given time, and it is equally difficult to determine who is Lebanese and who is not (686).

Despite the lack of accurate patterns and figures on Lebanese immigration in France, Kemp concludes that the Lebanese migrant in France is not a *muhâjir*, an immigrant seeking to settle permanently in France, but a *muhajjar*, a migrant who has been forced to leave the homeland without the decision to settle anywhere on permanent basis.

According to the last census, there are 28,160 individuals in France who were born in Lebanon, 79% of whom with the French nationality. The French census does not provide national origin data on second and later generations and thus it is difficult to assess the magnitude of individuals of Lebanese origin (Simon 2003). Despite their small number and transitory presence, the Lebanese in France tend to

Lebanese in France. Unfortunately, it is not based on a systematic study and thus only offers a general observation on the Lebanese immigrant community.

have a strong economic presence. According to Hattab (1985), 81% of the working Lebanese in Paris are in three professional categories: industrial and commercial, liberal professional (doctors, engineers, teachers, artists, etc.), and senior and intermediate executives. This percentage is significantly larger than that of immigrants altogether (18%). The percentage of Lebanese immigrants engaged in manual labor (4%) also contrasts sharply with that of the immigrant population (58%). While these figures are from the mid-1980, a time that marks the shift in the nature of the Lebanese community in France according to Kemp, they still provide an outlook on the nature of the Lebanese community in France as an elite social group.

The social and cultural composition of the Lebanese community in France has undergone major changes during the last two decades – ones that contradicts the pattern of immigration in North American. Initially, Lebanese migrants to France were mostly educated, fluent in French, and wealthy individuals who resided in France temporarily to pursue high education or spend vacations in their second homes in the Côte d’Azur (Kemp 1992). About half of the Lebanese in France live in Paris (Abdul-Karim 1992), and reside in the *quartiers chics* (mostly in the west and south-west areas of the city) and the students stayed in the *quartier Latin*. In general, the early immigrants relied on money generated in Lebanon to sustain their stay in France. Starting the mid-1980s, the economic crisis in Lebanon reversed many of these trends. Money generated in France by the Lebanese was used to sustain their families back home and their stay in France was becoming less transient. The pattern of migration to France also became “more democratic” as those who are less wealthy and not-highly proficient in French were also leaving Lebanon to France. In terms of residential patterns, more and more Lebanese immigrants and businesses were locating in the less wealthy areas, and some even in the least fashionable suburbs (Kemp 1992). Despite these “democratic” tendencies, the majority of the Lebanese in Paris still reside in the wealthiest areas, exactly opposite to the residential patterns of North Africans in Paris (Simon 2003).

The position that Lebanese people occupy in French culture is also very different from North Africans. Unlike North African immigrants in France, Lebanese immigrants, with the exclusion of the student body, are politically to the right who even sometimes support the far-rightist party Front National

(Kemp 1992). The Lebanese conservative position on political and social issues (especially with regards to immigration issues) places them in a more favorable position within French society, especially when compared to the working-class Algerian migrants. Reviewing a poll conducted in 1989, Percy Kemp (Ibid.) contends that:

Behind the reality of the Lebanese war there is in the French mind the idea of a Lebanese who is schematically urbane, French-speaking, a French first-name carrier, non-sectarian (albeit identified as a Christian), and striving to live decently and normally while surrounded by hostile and cynical forces (691).

Images of Lebanese individuals escaping genocide and foreign intervention assisted in the construction of Lebanese image as victims in French society.⁸ Moreover, Lebanese individualism strengthened the affection the French have for the Lebanese especially when contrasted with other immigrant groups.

Kemp explains:

When they look at the Lebanese who live in France and compare them with other migrants, the French see an industrious and hard-working middle-class and lower-middle-class people (whereas other migrants such as the North Africans are overwhelmingly unskilled labourers); they see entrepreneurs who have learned to count on themselves and only on themselves, who do not expect social benefits from the French state and who, unlike other migrant communities in France, do not live in ghettos and do not look threatening, either socially (jobs, etc.) or culturally (religion, race) (692).

Kemp goes on to compare political activism undertaken by the Lebanese in France to that of other migrants to assert that the Lebanese pursue their specific interests in a manner that does not challenge their integration to French society:

Even when tension in Lebanon is at its highest, protests by the Lebanese community in France remains quite civilized, and demonstrations by Lebanese nationals have a certain BCBG (*bon chic bon genre*) touch and never constitute a threat to public order. When they shout slogans, Lebanese demonstrators do so in good French, their banderoles are written in Latin script and show no spelling mistakes, and they are accompanied by this or that French politician who acts as their advocate and interpreter before French public opinion (693).

While Kemp does not compare Lebanese led demonstrations to those organized by North Africans, his assertion that they are “civilized,” “chic,” and conducted in “good French” point to the place Lebanese immigrants in France view themselves vis-à-vis North African (or other) immigrants. Accounts on

⁸ At times, the Lebanese are seen as victims of multiculturalism and the Lebanese Civil War is used as a model of what multiculturalism may bring to France. French social historian Alain Torraine’s critiqued multiculturalism in France by signifying that it would lead to the “Lebanonization of France” (cited in DeGroat 2001).

Lebanese immigrants in North America conveyed a relatively similar understanding of the Lebanese as integrated to a white, middle-class majority.

Lebanese immigrants to Paris emphasize political reasons instead of economic ones as the grounds for their migration. Alain is the only official political refugee in my sample, who, while working as a journalist in Lebanon, was beaten up and imprisoned twice due to his opposition to the political establishment in Lebanon. Georges refers to his status as “self-imposed” exile as he left Lebanon when, Maronite political leader, General Michel Aoun was sent to exile in France. Chady, while motivated by the lack of economic opportunity in Lebanon, also asserts that he moved to Paris when he reached a dead-end in his political career in Lebanon. All three immigrants chose Paris since, in their view, it provides an ideal center for continuing their political activity and organizing other Lebanese immigrants in the diaspora towards changing the political environment in Lebanon. Immigrants in this group reasoned that they cannot return to Lebanon unless the political establishment is transformed, which meant abandoning sectarian confederalism that diminishes the power of Maronites.

Similar to Kemp’s (1992) observation that the majority of the Lebanese in Paris are migrants who were compelled to leave their homeland but have no intention of settling anywhere, my interviewees draw on their transitory status to explain their ethnic identity. Asserting their Lebanese identity, this group of respondents do not see themselves as “immigrants” and emphasize that Paris is a transitory place which will allow them to continue their engagement with Lebanese issues until their return. For example, Georges asserts that:

To be in Paris is not unnatural for Lebanese, because they speak French mainly, and France is the first country they think of going to. But going to France is not really immigration. To really migrate, to leave the country, one has to go across the Atlantic Ocean, may be to Montreal or Buenos Aires.

Georges goes on to explain that he does not consider coming to Paris as a form of migration because of the proximity to Lebanon, not only in terms of distance, but also culturally. Specifically, Georges claimed that most Lebanese people are Franco-phone and Catholic, and thus share the same cultural milieu. The history of French involvement in Lebanon, brought about by missionaries, travelers, and

political figures also contributes to the similarities in Georges' opinion. These similarities render identifying himself as French a meaningless endeavor. More importantly, Georges refers to the large number of Lebanese in Paris which allows him to "live day by day what's going on in Lebanon." The Lebanese that Georges refers to are not all immigrants, but political, economic, and cultural figures who frequently visit Paris for various reasons. These frequent visitors make Paris a strategic base for political organizing, which is an important goal for Georges, Chady and Alain.

The strategic base Paris offers is related to the political goals the immigrants in this group emphasized. While I did not know before interviewing three of them, the five Lebanese immigrants in this group indicated that they are part of the World Lebanese Cultural Union (WLCU). These respondents chose the WLCU because it is an umbrella organization that aims to organize the various Lebanese immigrant groups all over the world, and thus provides them with an important network of members of the Lebanese diaspora. In this sense, these respondents illustrate forms of an ethnic attachment and being Lebanese that are understood in diasporic terms. Importantly, the engagement with the diaphora is sought by these respondents to draw the attention to cultural and identity issues specific to Lebanon.

For many Lebanese immigrants in Paris, the starting point for defining "Lebanese" is that being Lebanese does not include being Arab. The negation of "Arab" is expressed differently by each, mostly by drawing on various historical constructs. For example, Georges explains that:

I am part of the Arabic-speaking people, but not Arab. If you talk about ethnic Arab, it's a lie. It's a historical and geographical lie. It's fact. But as we are Lebanese, Arabic speaking, you are Arabic speaking, and so on for others.

Insisting that, "I would accept being French more than being Arab," Chady explained his reasons:

First of all, what is Arab? Is it a language, religion, or civilization? If it is religion, I am a Maronite and not Arab. If it is civilization, Lebanon has a longer history and civilization that preceded the Arab one. For Lebanese, there is no need for an Arab identity.

Chady's assertion that being Arab does not meet an interest shared by Lebanese immigrants illustrates the process of constructing an identity to meet strategic goals. Like other identities, "it is precisely through processes of exclusion and othering that both collective and individual subjects are formed" (Gupta &

Ferguson 1997: 13). Inventing a Lebanese identity in the diaspora takes place within structural relations of power and inequality, and at a time when being Arab evokes a wide range of negative stereotypes, the exclusion of this form of identity seems convenient for this group of immigrants. Lebanese immigrants in Paris refer to the assumption held by French society that “Arab” specifically means North African. Differentiating themselves from the problematic immigrant group, members of this group of respondents verify that Lebanese immigrants are positively received in France, which highlights the importance of drawing lines of distinction between “Arab” and “Lebanese.” For example, Georges justifies the prejudices against North Africans in France and stresses that Lebanese immigrants are different:

I understand it because of the way the North African people immigrated to France: it’s messy. Integration here has social roots and they have to expect it, and not bring so many people at the same time. You have to integrate people. And they have to understand how to integrate. So I understand the problem. When they [the French] know that you’re Lebanese and especially Maronite or Christian Lebanese, then they realize that there is no difference. They know that we are not going to create a ghetto or demonstrate against them. The Lebanese community [here] is distinct from other Arab communities.

Georges’ distinction between Arab and Lebanese immigrant communities draws on official French policies and rhetoric which emphasize the importance of integration and the problems associated with ghettoization and ethnic mobilization. Interestingly, Georges does not see the activities of his group in the same light, despite his assertion that the main goals of the group are raising awareness and mobilizing the Lebanese around the world towards influencing change in Lebanon. Alain draws similar distinctions to emphasize that Lebanese immigrants do not face the kinds of hostility that “Arabs” face in France and the United States. While religion seems to be the central factor rendering “Arab” and “Lebanese” as mutually exclusive categories for this group of immigrants, Alain’s distinctions are extended to differentiate between “Lebanese” and other Arab non-Muslim groups by referring to the Egyptian Coptic ghetto in Paris. This form of distinction, while forgoing a possible alliance based on religion, strengthens the more strategic claims of negating “Arab” – and thus provides more coherence in the Lebanese ethnic identity.

In his essay, “Reflections on Exile,” postcolonial author Edward Said (1990) clarifies that:

Exile is a jealous state. What you achieve is precisely what you have no desire to share, and it is in the drawing of lines around you and your compatriots that the least attractive aspects of being in

exile emerge: an exaggerated sense of group solidarity, and a passionate hostility to outsiders, even those who may in fact be in the same predicament as you (360).

When applied to this small group of Lebanese immigrants in Paris, Said's statement explains the process of negating their belonging to an Arab society so that they can distance themselves from a problematic group of immigrants. This process is taken to be strategic in allowing this group of Maronite political activists to achieve their goals of mobilizing members of the diaspora around specific notions of Lebanese identity, culture, and society against the political establishment in Lebanon. Equally important, drawing lines of distinction between Lebanese and other Arab immigrant groups by emphasizing that Lebanese immigrants are better integrated in French society makes possible the affirmation of an ethnic identity that precludes their participation in French political or economic spheres. Lebanese immigrants in this group are incorporated into French society through their jobs, political activism and social relations. Their inability to return to Lebanon based on their sense of exile, however, leads them to emphasize their ethnicity to maintain their uniqueness within French society – which in this case means pursuing their Maronite aspirations for dominance in Lebanon that plays on the French perception of the Lebanese as victims. Ethnicity is thus defined as those practices that preserve their favorable position in French society.

From a Diaspora to a Global Community

Despite the different articulation of identity among Lebanese immigrants in the three cities, strengthening ethnic attachments seems to be a common factor especially following 9/11. Contrary to the understanding of ethnicity as a unitary and coherent form of identification, Lebanese immigrants point out that they understand their social position in multiple and sometimes contradictory ways.

In The Transnational Villager, Peggy Levitt (2001: 7) argues that “the communities and organizations that emerge from transnational migration offer migrants a variety of ways in which to distribute their energies and loyalties between their sending and receiving countries.” In the case of Lebanese immigrants, the communities and organizations that they formed facilitated their participation

in both Lebanon and their place of residence. Ethnic activities and organizations that were established in the host society allow Lebanese immigrants to maintain their attachment to Lebanon, and facilitate their integration to the mainstream host societies as well (for a review of ethnic organizations among Arab Americans, for example, see Naff 1992). More importantly, Lebanese immigrants also maintained solidarities that extended beyond their transnational alliances to include Lebanese immigrants in various regions of the world. Participation in the larger diaspora community, independent of contacts with the homeland, was granted political, economic and social importance in the lives of the individual immigrants I spoke with. Engagement with the diaspora community was especially important for political activists among Lebanese immigrants in the three cities. Political activists illustrate “a continuous involvement in a triadic relationship between the diaspora, the host country and the homeland” (Sheffer 1986: 8). For example, Chady spoke of the importance of maintaining ties with people in Lebanon, since “they are the ones who are living there and they keep us informed of the reality of the situation.” He also emphasized that “people outside are also important since they have the money and the influence and they are the only reason Lebanon has survived during the last thirty years.” Similar beliefs were shared by Georges, who spoke of the importance of the diaspora at large and the need to mobilize different members of the diasporic community:

It is easier to organize people in the diaspora, and I think that the diaspora has a strong potential for affecting what is going on in Lebanon. I just came back from a World Lebanese Convention, and we are having another one next year. We have plans for getting organized and becoming more effective. I believe we can do a lot... We start by organizing Lebanese people in the cities we live in, and then at the national level, and then at a regional level, and all those chapters get represented at the world convention.

In terms of immediate goals, both Chady and Georges sought the organization of a solid structure as an important mechanism that would facilitate diaspora’s participation in homeland politics as well as international lobbying. For example, both Chady and Georges referred to the diaspora’s ability to influence the appointment of a legislative seat in Lebanon that represents Lebanese migrants around the world. Georges also referred to a group of representatives of the Lebanese diaspora meeting with members of the American Congress to influence American policies towards Lebanon and Syria.

Notwithstanding the political importance, membership in the diaspora was somewhat ambiguous to many immigrants I interviewed. In a study of Arab-American diasporic aesthetics, Howell (2000) identifies that membership in an Arab diaspora is only tentative since the construction of a pan-Arab, pro-Palestinian political lobby does not hold back the persistence of specific “sentimental geographies of the Lebanon, Egypt, or Palestine.” In a similar fashion, many of my respondents found that the “sentimental geography” that is sustained by being Lebanese only adds to their sense of ambiguity and transience. Specifically, many Lebanese immigrants found that when diaspora communities attempt to reify ethnic boundaries and traditions, they end up feeling excluded. Abeer explained that she was a member of a Lebanese professional group that was oriented towards addressing the Lebanese diaspora in general. The group, however, quickly alienated Abeer:

I didn't like their politics and I felt that I'm dealing with a male-dominated society where women really have no voice, and there was a lot of totalitarian politicians that have the mentality that Lebanon is their possession, and I don't want to deal with this, I left Lebanon for this whole patriarchal mentality, and I'm not ready to embrace it back here again.

In Abeer's example, belonging to a Lebanese diasporic community was not necessarily empowering as it maintained gender discriminations. The replication of Lebanese social and political problems in the diaspora led Abeer and many others to stay away from any sort of formal organization that aimed at unifying Lebanese immigrants. Sometimes, an individual would seek starting his or her own organization, but in most cases, my interviewees explained that they prefer focusing on the specific issues that concern them instead of getting involved in organizational politics and struggles. Such interests lead many members of the Lebanese diaspora to move away from specific national issues towards involvement with cosmopolitan concerns and participation in global communities.

Brubaker (2005) warns against assuming that a diaspora is an entity to which all immigrants from a particular territory belong. Instead of analyzing diaspora as a bounded entity, Brubaker suggests that we think of diaspora

as an idiom, a stance, a claim... As a category of practice, 'diaspora' is used to make claims, to articulate projects, to formulate expectations, to mobilize energies, to appeal to loyalties. It is often a category with a strong normative charge. It does not so much *describe* the world as seek to *remake* it.”

As most diasporas do not go home permanently, connections with the larger diaspora compel immigrants to exist in multiple social, economic, and cultural worlds and cross-national boundaries in their daily experiences (Lavie & Swedenburg 1996). Multiple loyalties entail that members of a diaspora community see themselves as members of a larger diaspora that extends over a number of nation-states, the “host” community in which they live at present, and the homeland especially through memories of and ties with those left behind. This three-way relationship forms the understanding of diaspora as social form proposed by Vertovec & Cohen (1999). Brubaker’s notion of a diaspora community, however, allows us to perceive diaspora communities within a more global perspective. In maintaining this three-way relationship, members of diaspora communities have to construct forms of solidarity that transcend physical boundaries, and hence manifest important features favorable for the organization of a global society.⁹ Diasporas are often assumed to rely on a singular homeland (see for example Tölölyan 1996), but such an assumption has been challenged by a number of analyses (for example Hall 1990). In this section I argue that in place of an ethnic/nationalist project, some members of the Lebanese diaspora are engaged in global communities that utilize universalistic ideals in search of global social change.

Although some Lebanese immigrants emphasize a sense of unity and shared identity, as members of diaspora communities they also realize that, as in the words of Stuart Hall (1990),

they are not and will never be unified in the old sense, because they are irrevocably the product of several interlocking histories and cultures, belong[ing] to one and the same time to several homes.

Thus, instead of focusing on diaspora as an ethnic collectivity to which all Lebanese immigrants belong to, experiences of Abeer and others point to the need to understand diaspora as both an entity, as well as a process and outlook in society. Engaging in homeland issues while emphasizing their full membership to their host societies may lead some immigrants to a sense of fragmentation and homelessness. However, the Lebanese immigrants in my sample tend to regard their multiple loyalties and identifications as building blocks to seek cosmopolitan forms of identification and belonging.

⁹ Basch et al. (1994: 7) describe that immigrants “take actions, make decisions, and develop subjectivities and identities embedded in networks of relationships that connect them simultaneously to two or more nations.” It has to be emphasized, however, that diaspora transcends the dual allegiance that characterizes transnational communities that are caught between a place of origin and a place of current residence. Rather, diaspora is taken to embrace “a wider spread of allegiances” (Van Hear 1998: 249).

In many respects, Lebanese immigrants choose membership to a diasporic community that is more than one extending over different nation-states to include co-ethnics in other parts of the world. Rather, diaspora is “a space where nation and citizenship come to be intertwined with... global dramas” (Werbner 1999:18). In this sense, most respondents emphasize that their participation in political or social activities are not tied to nationality or ethnicity per se, but more to their sense of concern about specific issues such as justice and freedom which shape their understanding of their global realities. Referring to a recent anti-war protest in New York City, Carol, a 32-year old lawyer observed that:

One would expect many Arabs to be at the protest, since it is an Arab country that is being attacked. But no, this was not the case, and it definitely was not my reason to be at the rally. True, there were groups of people who took this as an opportunity to advocate for the Palestinian cause and a sense of Arabness. This is not how I saw the rally, however. For me it was an opportunity to make a statement that we need global solidarity. We need to realize that we are all in the same boat, and that we should stick on the side of justice no matter who is targeted by the violence.

As indicated in Carol’s example, the search for a shared community based on specific interest and values allows immigrants to forge universal alliances and participate in global action and discourses.

While interest in global issues is not specific to immigrants, many of my respondents stressed that their experience with migration allowed them to become aware of the universal nature of many of the issues they have been concerned with. The various examples provided by Lebanese immigrants in the three cities show that participation in the homeland and the host societies are grounded in the immigrants’ interest in affecting social change and transforming both societies to become more democratic. Given their experience with migration, many respondents realize that their goals are not specific to either society, but are emphatically global. Such a realization leads many of the immigrants I interviewed to seek forms of global membership and universal attachments. For example, Alfred, a graduate student in Paris, explains that Lebanon is not the only concern in the activities of his group, as he sees himself as a participant in a global larger society. Alfred emphasizes that his experience with immigration made him realize that his public involvement should be focused on broader issues rather than a specific society or country:

I know I can still get involved in Lebanese issues while here in France, and that’s why I am still involved in various activities that focus on Lebanon. I also realize that my world is not only

Lebanon anymore... Having experienced life in a different country, now I can put Lebanon in a larger context and I also realize that there are larger issues that we should be concerned about... like human rights, environment, and inequality.

While living in Beirut, Alfred was active in Lebanese political life and started a party for the youth. In Paris, he started a cultural group that focuses on social inequalities and their impact on human rights and the environment. While many of the group members are Lebanese students whom Alfred knew before moving to Paris, Alfred stresses that members are unified by their goals and not their ethnicity as he emphasized that many members are French and immigrants from various origins.

Similar to Alfred, many of my respondents refer to their experience of migration, as allowing them to see things more globally. A large number of Lebanese immigrants believed that they belong to a larger group of world-immigrants who may have diverse origins, but a common predicament of navigating two or more societies and seeking belonging to multiple communities. As Alfred exclaimed:

We are all in common destiny, and we must share the experience. We must give the best of ourselves to succeed in this violent and uncertain environment. So maybe that would be the basis to get together and share what we have in common.

Realizing that common experiences of displacement can bring people from different cultures together, many Lebanese immigrants emphasize that being part of a diaspora is a condition that is shared by large numbers of people around the world. Thus, many immigrants stress that being a “world-immigrant” is an important basis for forging alliances and communities, which are more meaningful to their daily lives than ones that are based on national or ethnic origins. In this regard, many Lebanese immigrants emphasize that their interests and sources of identification go beyond the homeland/host society. Rather, they see their public engagement as addressing universal issues of equality and freedom.

In general, my fieldwork suggests that the multiple worlds in which members of the diaspora live are not confined to co-nationals and co-ethnics, but expand to include others who share a similar sense of belonging and acting in the world at large. Lebanese immigrants illustrate forms of actions, networks, and formal organizations that include particular concerns based on their membership to the homeland, host society and a larger Lebanese diaspora. More importantly, their narratives also express forms of attachment that go beyond particular national and ethnic interests and are more global and universal in

nature. It is true that immigrants' interest in Lebanese political and social spheres persists and continues to be an important source of public engagement in the homeland and the host societies. Such engagement, however, is shaped by a belief in universal equality, emancipation, social justice, and individual rights – which forms their cosmopolitan experiences.

In contrast to negative assessments of cosmopolitans as elitist and uncommitted, recent analyses of cosmopolitanism assert that cosmopolitan individuals are ones who share a commitment to the world as a whole and at the same time pursue the fulfillment of these commitments in their own “neighborhoods”. As such, cosmopolitan Lebanese immigrants emphasize their pursuit of social change, not merely in terms of adding to the cultural repertoires of their settings as in transnational narratives, but more importantly in terms of bringing about universal human values and ideals.

Drawing on their cosmopolitan identity, many Lebanese immigrants explain their desire to address universal concerns and global inequalities. For example, May, a 31-year old lawyer in New York City, expresses her membership in multiple publics that also correspond to the various forms of identification she performs:

I write letters to the city council and the mayor, and I also write letters to the president of the U.S. and the Secretary General of the U.N. This is because I am a New Yorker, an American, and a citizen of the world. It become meaningless after a while, when identity becomes a hat that you put on depending on the circumstance or the cause you happen to be interested in. Still, it is not all that meaningless. I cannot sit there and do nothing, I have to get involved and my involvement takes different forms from day to day and from issue to the next.

Most immigrants, however, did not illustrate forms of vertical membership in the way May describes. Instead, many Lebanese immigrants expressed a strong desire to participate in processes of global change that starts with issues specific to the homeland but yet moves beyond it. For example, experiencing the civil war in Lebanon, which was a recurring theme in the narratives provided, led many immigrants to address issues related to the Lebanese civil war in their political, social, and artistic activities. The particular experiences of living in a war situation found articulation in a general pursuit for global peace and harmony. For example, Cristine, a 45-year old filmmaker in Paris explained that her experience with the war in Lebanon led to her interest in war-related issues around the world:

I started out by reporting on the war in Lebanon, since I am Lebanese and was familiar with the story. Given my experience I was able to move on to cover other forms of war, in the Gulf, in Africa, and I was able to communicate the same message to different groups of people, that war is destructive and that we should find an end to all wars... Now my work is changing a bit, but I still address the different forms of destruction that human beings introduce to their own people and their own societies.

Focusing on wars around the world was more than a need to represent human misery and destruction that results. Instead, Cristine, and many others, emphasized their desire to contribute towards putting an end to wars and the need for global social harmony. Cristine's more recent work deals with issues of collective memory in after-war societies to contribute to the process of social healing as well as be effective in avoiding past mistakes. In the process, Cristine ends up addressing global issues in form a concrete local experience instead of abstract ideals and forms of belonging. For the cosmopolitan Lebanese immigrants, abstract universal discourses, such as world peace, equality, democracy, etc, are valued to the extent that they are concretized in specific contexts and towards localized goals.

Many of the immigrants I interviewed emphasize that, given their experience with migration, they believe that they are more capable of bridging the particular interests that are based on national or ethnic attachments and the universal ones that are not tied to a territory or a nation-state. That is, as immigrants consciously discard traditional forms of attachments to the homeland, they are propelled to advance universal legal and civil causes. In this regard, many immigrants interviewed emphasize that their interests and sources of identification go beyond the homeland/host society. Rather, they see their public engagement as addressing universal issues of equality and freedom. For example, Carol explains that Lebanese issues are not her only concern, and that she would rather get involved in other issues to maintain some level of objectivity:

I have lots of opinions about what is going on in Lebanon, and I am very vocal about them... I also get involved in other issues that allow me to see myself as a global citizen and not as someone who has a very narrow understanding of the world... I volunteer a lot with other lawyers who work on immigrant issues in New York... not just Arab immigrants but all sorts of immigrants, especially ones from African countries.

Moreover, memories of war, whether experienced by the immigrants themselves or their parents, were brought up by many of my interviewees as the reason for their sensitivity to issues of justice and freedom.

Fareed explains his concerns about social justice in general:

But I think what bothers me more [than the situation in Lebanon] is just seeing a lot of social injustice out there, and I guess growing up in Beirut and growing up in a very political environment, you tend to be a bit more aware of these things.

Universal notions of democracy, freedom and rights are among the important goals that members of the Lebanese diaspora seek, and thus form an integral part of their sense of belonging to a certain community. As expressed by the various narratives, Lebanese immigrants are aware of their belonging to more than one society and wish to utilize their experiences to the benefit of humanity at large.

Understanding the nature of global attachments that members of the Lebanese diaspora engage in should be sought as opposed to their traditional national or ethnic attachments. In Culture, Power, Place, Gupta and Ferguson (1997) warn against the opposition of “the local”, which is understood as original, centered, natural and authentic, to “the global”, which is understood as new, external, artificially imposed and inauthentic (see also Dirlik 1997). In the experiences of Lebanese immigrants, the global is a real experience that is shaped by migration and living in a diaspora community, which gives coherence to immigrants’ daily social experiences. More importantly, such global experiences do not preclude the disappearance of their local attachments in the places they dwell or in the homeland. Instead, the understanding that their social worlds are composed of multiple localities is at the center of their awareness of their global presence and reality, or as Dirlik (1997) describes “simultaneous cosmopolitanism and localism.” The constant pursuit for belonging allows members of the Lebanese diaspora to escape the “thin” form of cosmopolitan identity that is based on rationality and legality. Arguing against the Habermasian conception of “thin” cosmopolitanism, Calhoun (2002) stresses that the public sphere offers more than reaching consensus on legal and political issues. Rather, a cosmopolitan public offers “new ways of imagining identity, interests, and solidarity” (Ibid. 171). As a realm of mutual engagement, public action when undertaken at a global level supports universal solidarity and forms of belonging. Josiane describes her sense of mutual engagement in form of a duty towards other human beings around the world:

What we need more now, in our period that we live, is the sense of duty. The duty is not an obligation, the duty is a pleasure. I feel this way when you do something to your country, when you do something to the people around you, when you do something for the whole world, when

you extract discipline to yourself, you help somewhere, you present to the society a good world citizen... Your duty is everywhere.

Stressing the sense of duty and engagement with global issues, many Lebanese immigrants challenge traditional forms of belonging, but not all forms of solidarity altogether. Rather, Lebanese immigrants maintain a strong sense of membership through involvement in the various societies they belong to as well as a global society that they envision. This form of membership is formed by their awareness of their diasporic disposition and is therefore organized around universal causes and concerns. Through their various activities, members of the Lebanese diaspora participate in new social movements, use the globe as the reference point for political activity, and act on the basis of a global consciousness, which are important conditions for the rise of a global solidarity.

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