Lebanese Diaspora

History, Racism and Belonging

Chapter 10

Shifting Identities among Second and Third Generation Lebanese Living in Aotearoa/New Zealand

Matthew Farry (Fakhry) Ph.D.

I am a third generation member of the Lebanese community of Aotearoa/New Zealand. There is a strong sense of 'Lebanese identity' among 'second and third generation'[1] Lebanese living in Aotearoa/New Zealand. If this is the case, it is because 'assimilation' is not a process of identification but an ideology. It is because cultural identities are resilient and not the dying remnants of traditional cultures that are destined to die out and be replaced by more modern forms of identity. It is certainly not because polices of 'biculturalism' and talk of 'multiculturalism' have enabled the free expression of cultural difference. In the face of exclusion, of being ignored and placed in their 'otherness' the Lebanese that migrated to Aotearoa/New Zealand between the late 1880s and 1930s and their offspring have maintained a strong sense of 'Lebanese identity'.

In this paper, I want to examine the process of identification among 'second and third generation' Lebanese living in Aotearoa/New Zealand and the transformations that have taken place, between themselves and earlier generations in the way they experience, express, construct and interpret their 'Lebaneseness'. I want to look at the relationship between these transformations

---

[1] There is no exact definition of the term's second and third generation. The term 'second generation' is most often used in studies of migration to describe or categorise the children of immigrants (the first generation). The third generation are the grandchildren of immigrants. These definitions are most commonly used when gathering statistical information. Here the terms second and third generation are not used as fixed categories that the participants either fit or don't fit, but are instead subjective definitions. For example, some of the participants' parents or grandparents were born in Lebanon and some were born in Aotearoa/New Zealand. All of the participants however, saw themselves as belonging to either the second or third generations (Bottomley 1992, Vasta 1992).

and the changing representations of cultural and ethnic difference produced by the dominant discourses, both globally and locally, and how these meanings have impacted on the identities of 'second and third generation' Lebanese living in Aotearoa/New Zealand. By examining the discursive strategies they employ as they bring their identities into being through systems of language and thought, the changing and shifting nature of identities and their formations becomes evident.

The research material is primarily derived from long interviews with thirty-two 'second and third generation' members from both the Dunedin[2] and Auckland[3] communities. Generally, the participants felt more comfortable and spoke more freely knowing that they would remain anonymous. The purpose of the following details is to provide the reader with a context and an understanding of the social political locations and daily activities of the participants. The names used in this paper are fictitious. Exact information about occupations is not given in order to keep the participants' identities anonymous.

Michael (Dunedin), a thirty-six year old male, was single and working as an

[2] Most of the Lebanese who settled in Dunedin came from two areas of Lebanon - the city of Tripoli and the village of Becharre. The largest group came from the village of Becharre in the north of Lebanon and that is the group the participants come from. The immigrants from Becharre were all members of the Maronite church, while those from Tripoli were Greek Orthodox.

The Dunedin Lebanese community displayed most of the features of chain migration. In the nineteenth century Becharre was made up of four principal clans, the Fakhry, Kayrouz, Touak, and Jahjah. Most of the early immigrants came from the Fakhry clan and consequently, the majority of the Lebanese immigrants to Dunedin were from this clan. There were some exceptions, for example, from the Kayrouz clan and the Touak clan.

Another northern village, Hasroun, was also represented in the early community. Hasroun was very close to Becharre. Most of those who came from Husroun were married to people from Becharre. The Raad family were an exception to this as they were originally from Hasroun (Sanders 1980; Page 1990).

[3] The Auckland community is larger and more fragmented than the Dunedin community. Due to the lack of research on early immigration to Auckland it is difficult to get a general picture of where the early immigrants came from. Although separate families, such as the Corbans, displayed a chain migration, unlike the Dunedin community, the Auckland community did not develop a migration chain from one village.

This fragmentation is evident within the participant group. Six of the participants were direct descendants of Assid Abraham Corban who came from the northern village of Dhour Choueir. Three of the participants came from the coastal town of El Mina near Tripoli. One participant came from Tripoli. All of these participants had connections to the Greek/Eastern Orthodox Church.

Four of the participants had connections to Becharre and like the Dunedin participants were Maronite. One of the participants came from Batroun, a coastal town north of Beirut and another from the village of Barouk in the Chouf area. Both had connections to the Maronite church.

advertising sales representative for a local publication. Both of his parents were Lebanese. He felt very strongly that his racial and ethnic background had severely limited his occupational opportunities.

Jonathan (Dunedin), a twenty-three year old male, had just returned from a visit to Lebanon and at the time of the interview was rethinking his 'Lebaneseness'. He was studying law at university. Both of his parents were Lebanese and he identified strongly with his 'Lebanese identity'. He had a high level of racial and ethnic consciousness and self-awareness.

David (Auckland), a forty-seven year old male, was married to a 'European New Zealander' and they had one child. He was a self-employed professional. Both of his parents were Lebanese. He had been very involved in the Lebanese community in Auckland and had a strong self-awareness of this ethnic identity and the issues surrounding it. He identified strongly with both his 'Lebaneseness' and his 'New Zealandness'.

Leila (Auckland), a thirty-five year old female, was working at a bar and pursuing a singing career. Her father was a second generation 'Lebanese New Zealander' and her mother was born in Lebanon. She had recently visited Lebanon, which had transformed the way she understood and interpreted her 'Lebaneseness'.

Mariam (Dunedin), a thirty five year old female, had spent most of her life in Dunedin but had just returned from London where she was working as a journalist for a political publication. She had been involved in various political activisms both in New Zealand/Aotearoa and overseas. She had a high level of political consciousness and awareness about her 'Lebanese identity'. She had experienced strong feelings of displacement in her early years but felt that her visits to the Arab World had helped her place these feelings in a context and re-discover her 'Lebaneseness'.

Peter (Dunedin), a forty-nine year old male, was married to a 'European New Zealander' and they had two children. He was a self-employed travel agent. Both of his parents were Lebanese. He felt a very strong sense of difference from most of the people he interacted with on a daily basis. He felt displaced and was aware of the contradictory nature of his identity.

Joseph (Dunedin), a forty-two year old male, was married to a 'European New Zealander' and they had three children. Both of his parents were Lebanese and he identified strongly with his 'Lebanese identity' but this was not always the case. He had at times in his life felt very uncomfortable about his 'Lebaneseness'. At the time of the interview he was a self-employed

management consultant.

Paul (Dunedin), a forty-year old male, was divorced with two children. He was a beneficiary. His mother was Lebanese and his father was European. He had a high awareness of his racial and ethnic difference and identified strongly with his 'Lebanese identity'.

Maria (Dunedin), a thirty-four year old female, was married to a 'European New Zealander' and they had two children. Both of her parents were Lebanese and she defined herself as a mother/wife. Her husband was a self-employed professional. She had no tertiary qualifications. She was very conscious of her difference and identified very strongly with her 'Lebanese identity'. She also felt that certain conflicts in her marriage were due to cultural and ethnic differences.

Hind (Auckland), a thirty-four year old female, had just returned from living in Lebanon for two years. Her mother had migrated from Lebanon and her father was a 'second generation Lebanese New Zealander'. At the time of the interview she was teaching English. She felt that her identity had transformed through her life and living in Lebanon had enabled her to understand her feelings of difference and displacement in New Zealand/Aotearoa.

Houda (Auckland), a twenty-four year old female, was working as a journalist in the radio industry and had completed a tertiary degree. Both of her parents were Lebanese and she had recently visited Lebanon. She felt that at times it was difficult to negotiate the two very different 'worlds' she existed in.

Isabel (Auckland), a thirty-four year old female, was the retail manager of a women's fashion store. Her mother was Lebanese and her father was English and she identified with both ethnicities but at that time of the interview she felt more of an affiliation with her 'Lebanese identity'. Her partner at the time was from another minority group in New Zealand/Aotearoa and she felt that this commonality between them had enhanced their relationship.

Joanna (Auckland), a thirty-six year old female, was a fashion designer and owned her own retail store. She was married to a 'European New Zealander' and had five children. Her mother was Lebanese and her father was Scottish and she identified with both of these ethnic identities but at times was ambivalent.

Louise (Dunedin), a thirty-four year old female, was married to a 'European New Zealander' and had one child. Both of her parents were Lebanese and she too identified strongly with her 'Lebanese identity'. She had felt displaced her entire life and had a high level of awareness of her difference. At the time of the interview she described herself as a wife/mother/shopkeeper.

Zenna (Dunedin), a thirty-four year old female, was unemployed and

planning to attend university. She had strong feelings of displacement and was very aware of her difference. She identified strongly with her 'Lebanese identity'.

Identities are seen here as self-narrative representations and are analysed as discursive formations. The subject constructs his or her identity in and through the relations of representation. The theory of articulation is helpful here as it acknowledges the importance of the discursive in social categories such as, race, class, gender, ethnicity and nationality, allowing us to understand how, under certain conditions and in particular contexts, different concepts and ideas, which have no necessary link, become linked together within a discourse, producing a meaning and hence an identity which becomes temporarily stabilised (Hall 1996).

All of the Lebanese who migrated to Aotearoa/New Zealand between the late 1880s and the 1930s were Christian, either Maronite or Eastern/Greek Orthodox. Most came from villages in North Lebanon. The main reason for emigration from Lebanon in the 1880s was economic, and most emigrants were poor but not destitute (Naff 1992). Emigration, in most cases, was seen as a family investment. It is estimated that the first Lebanese arrived in Aotearoa/New Zealand around 1884 (Sanders 1980). In 1899 there was an influx of Lebanese but relatively few arrived after this, as they were subject to the Immigration Restriction Act of 1899. Immigration picked up again after World War 1. This was partly due to the hardship of the war years, but also to the famines, successive swarms of locusts and epidemics that struck Lebanon between 1915 – 1918. In a number of cases, members of the participants' families came to Aotearoa/New Zealand in the late 1800s, returned to Lebanon after making an economic recovery, and then returned to Aotearoa/New Zealand after World War 1. Of those who emigrated after World War 1, many were part of a migration chain and already had family members in Aotearoa/New Zealand. By 1926 it is estimated that there were 951 people of Lebanese origin in Aotearoa/New Zealand (Hashimoto 1992:105).

The Lebanese are a relatively small ethnic group in Aotearoa/New Zealand. The most recent census (1996) recorded 729 males and 711 females. These figures are incorrect but they are the only official figures that exist. They are incorrect because through my research I have found that many Lebanese do not identify as Lebanese on the census forms. One of the reasons for this is that there is no category for Lebanese in the ethnic identification section and a person who wishes to identify as Lebanese must first tick 'Other' and then specify Lebanese.

In addition, the section is not geared to record hybrid and mixed identities. This is an example of how the Lebanese are ignored by official discourses.

In a way identities are stories. They are the stories we tell about ourselves. Here I am going to tell some identity stories. Stuart Hall (1990) writes "identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within the narratives of the past" (Hall 1990:225).

The concept or word identity connotes stability, fixity, homogeneity and something with clearly defined boundaries, which is easily definable. This is not the way I want to understand identity. Identity is not a noun, something we can name once and for all, but is continually on the move, in process and like all things historical is constantly undergoing transformation. I want to understand it as the "process of identification" (Hall 1991:15). The subject is constantly repositioning him/herself within the discourses of identity just as s/he is constantly being repositioned by these discourses. This makes identity a highly complex and dynamic process. Like the subject these discourses come out of specific histories, cultures and power relations. Soja and Hooper (1993) argue that there are "multiple subjects with many (often changeable) identities located in varying (and also changeable) subject positions" (Soja and Hooper 1993:187). Identity in this sense is always under construction, but never manages to fix itself once and for all. Identities are constructions and as such, are not based in nature or any singular historical experience, but are always open to new contexts, circumstances, cultural influences and are contingent. There is no 'eternal self' transcending the histories, cultures and powers that have formed us.

The term 'Lebaneseness' is used here symbolically to signify the move away from understanding identities as singular and essential to seeing them as plural identifications and subjectivities. It indicates an unstable category and illustrates that being a 'second or third generation' Lebanese person living in Aotearoa/New Zealand is a blurred category which is unable to be defined simplistically, as it has been in the dominant discourses. It is an attempt to move away from reducing identity to ethnicity. It is a 'trace' on the participants' identities that only they can define. In this sense it captures the subjective nature of identification. The dominant discourses have assigned the participants an essential and fixed identity but 'Lebaneseness' captures that unstable moment when the subject brings his/her identity into being through self-identification and the politics of representation by positioning him/herself within the discourses of the past and the present. Although the participants may draw on

256

the discourses of an essential 'Lebanese identity', 'Lebaneseness' represents the more blurred and unstable moments of identification where identities are problematised, pluralised and intersecting.

Before discussing the research material it is useful to briefly summarise the ways Lebanese have been represented and positioned by the discourses of nationhood. Aotearoa/New Zealand was formed at a time when the globalisation process was colonial imperialism, and as an outpost of British imperialism, racial questions were central to the nation-building process. From the very beginning, starting with the indigenous people (tangata whenua), the nation-building process was based on the destruction of minority interests and cultural difference and the elevation of 'European culture' to a position of superiority. These particular discourses of nationhood were based on European imperial culture and led to a Eurocentrically constructed representation of national culture and identity, giving birth to ideas of racial purity, homogeneity, desirable/undesirable immigrants and assimilation.

The first mention of the Lebanese in the discourses of nationhood were in the parliamentary debates of the mid-1890s. At this time in Aotearoa/New Zealand's history the government was trying to encourage the immigration of Protestant Anglo-Celts and restrict the immigration of non-Europeans. The Lebanese were classified as undesirable immigrants and along with other non-European groups, such as the Chinese, were perceived to be a threat to the 'white' social order and treated with overt hostility.

During one of the debates concerning the Hawkers and Peddlers Bill in 1894, the Lebanese, or 'Assyrian Hawkers' as they were referred to, were classified as 'Asians' and were described as "inferior, barbarous, or semi-barbarous races" that would "lower the level of intellect, civilisation and prosperity" of the country (NZPD 1894 vol. 83:156). In the debate over the Asiatic and Other Immigration Restriction Bill (1895) the speaker singles out the Lebanese saying, "They do not add to the wealth of the country...They do not lead sanitary lives. They are not a moral people. They are not a highly civilised people, and in no sense are they a desirable people" (NZPD 1895 vol. 89:349). In 1896, in a debate over the Asiatic Restriction Bill, Richard John Seddon, the then premier, referred to the Lebanese as "undesirable immigrants" and "pests" (NZPD 1896 vol. 92:257).

These representations, drawn from the discourses of imperialism and 'Orientalism', understand ethnic and racial difference through a simple binary oppositional structure of meaning in which colonising Europeans and their

'civilisation' are positioned as 'superior', and all non-Europeans are positioned as 'inferior'. In this imperialist notion of identity there are only two units, a 'them' or 'Orient' (Said 1991:237) and an 'us' or 'Occident' (Said 1991:237), both fixed, homogenous, essential and easily definable. Difference is seen as alien and the speaker projects all of his fears and anxieties onto the Lebanese placing them in their 'otherness', as undesirable and a threat to society.

After these initial attacks there is very little mention of the Lebanese in official discourses. This is in line with the dominant governmental strategy for dealing with non-Mâori minority groups. That is, to ignore them unless they pose a threat to the dominant social order or are a 'drain' on governmental resources.

Before moving on something else needs to be understood about the process of identification. Being positioned as 'undesirable', 'outsider' and 'other' by the dominant discourses is not only an external process but also an internal one. This is a process or reaction in which the subjugated see themselves in all of the ways they are represented in the discourses of racism. European hegemony seeps below the level of consciousness and becomes like 'second nature' – a lived dominance and subordination, internalised. It is an act of "cultural power and normalisation...in which there is an inner compulsion and subjective conformation to the norm" (Hall 1990:225-226). This was one of Frantz Fanon's insights in his groundbreaking work *Black Skin, White Masks* (1991) in which he illustrates identities connectedness and relationship to the 'other'. This is the 'self' as inscribed in the 'gaze' of the 'Other' in all of its violence, fears and desires. Migration to a foreign land immediately intensifies the relationship between the 'self' and the 'Other'. The Lebanese in Aotearoa/ New Zealand have been seen as 'other' and have seen themselves as 'other'. This has had a crippling effect on the participants' experience of 'being Lebanese', and it is one of the more devastating elements of displacement and encounters with the 'other' in the diaspora experience.

Michael describes how at times he feels fixed by the 'gaze' of the 'Other'. He also gives a voice to the emotional consequence of this feeling and refers to it as 'suffocating'.

> *There's an expectation from people outside who sort of look in from an outside point of view. You're Lebanese, you're categorised and that's sort of who you are, no matter what else they see you doing or whatever you do, the fact is you're Lebanese, so you've got to be a certain sort of person and you've got to fit into that. At times it can be suffocating.*

Jonathan also describes how people's glances make him aware of his difference and 'otherness' and how this causes feelings of embarrassment, "People look at me differently and I feel aware of being Lebanese and being different. It's my physical appearance that sets me apart. Sometimes I do feel embarrassed about it." These quotes are evidence that the discourses of racism and the processes of 'othering' are still impacting on the different ways the participants' see themselves. This is not a unitary process and reactions and resistances to it have varied within and across the generations. It must be kept in mind that wherever there is hegemony there is resistance to it.

During the 1970s the Mâori resurgence forced the government to acknowledge Aotearoa/New Zealand's Mâori history. This has been a continuous and contradictory process. Although in the 1970s the official debates over national and racial identity changed direction to include biculturalism and issues surrounding the Treaty of Waitangi[4] and 'Mâori culture', this has had little effect on the way non-European and non-Mâori groups are perceived in Aotearoa/New Zealand. The policy-makers today give lip service to cultural diversity and 'multiculturalism' and are still using the language of assimilation when it comes to immigration policy. These policies no longer affect 'second and third generation' Lebanese, but their identities are affected by official attitudes towards minority groups.

Another representation of the Lebanese who arrived before the 1930s in this early period is that of a group that has 'assimilated well and become New Zealanders'. This representation belongs to that version of Aotearoa/New Zealand's history, which celebrates difference that is not perceived to be a threat to the dominant social order. This representation is based on the 'successful immigrant story – a sort of happy ending after a tragic beginning'. The Lebanese are positioned as a group that through hard work, respectability and a 'love of business' have achieved the promises of prosperity and a better life for their children. It acknowledges that the Lebanese eat different food and have close extended families but positions their 'Lebanese identity' as peripheral to the overarching Eurocentrically constructed identity 'New Zealander'. It is the experience of those who have achieved a degree of upward mobility that is most often cited in academic and popular texts. By seeing this as the dominant experience of Lebanese in Aotearoa/New Zealand these accounts are

[4] The covenant signed between the Maori and the British Crown in February 1840 which secured the establishment of Aotearoa/New Zealand as a British Colony.

reductionist and fail to take into account the specific experience of racism, displacement and exclusion felt by the Lebanese as a whole. These accounts reduce the identity of the Lebanese to the ideology of assimilation and see their defining characteristic as upward social mobility.

Throughout Aotearoa/New Zealand's short history the one idea that has scarcely varied is that the national identity – 'New Zealander' was to be forged through the forced assimilation of all cultural and ethnic difference.

Now let us examine some of the discursive strategies employed by succeeding generations to express and construct their identities and some of the identifiable identity formations that these strategies have produced. In addition, let us highlight the most significant shifts and repositionings in the different ways the dominant discourses, both globally and locally, have understood ethnic and racial difference. 'The global' and 'the local' are not seen as separate realms of analysis but instead as constantly intersecting and interacting in the transformation of identities.

In order to understand the formation of identities we need to see identities, discourses and cultural practices as mutually constitutive (Barker 1999:30). By identifying certain identity formations it is demonstrated how different social relations and cultural practices and their discursive elements are articulated together in certain discourses, which then become attached to the participants' identities.

The concept of 'hybridity' is helpful in understanding the participants' identities. Hybridity is employed here as a discursive device to describe the processes of intermingling, crossovers, 'cut 'n' mix' and fusing that takes place when different cultural traditions are drawn on in the construction of cultural identities. 'Hybridity', then symbolises the creation of 'new' identifications in which the participants combine and re-combine elements from already culturally hybrid forms in the construction of their identities. This represents a 'third position', which is only beginning to emerge and is unable to identify with a single 'place', cultural tradition, history or identity, such as 'Lebanese' or 'New Zealander' but is a combination of already culturally hybrid forms and identities.

The participants were more able to acknowledge the hybridities of their own identities than those that included a genuine mixing and sharing between themselves and the dominant culture and in most cases they felt as though they were living in a monoculture. The hybridities that were present were more often than not the dominant culture's continual imposition and intrusion into their lives. This is displayed in all of the ways they live at the 'borders' and "move

260

across discursive and spatial sites of activity which address them in different ways" (Barker 1999:73).

Pieterse (1995) by combining a number of lines of thought constructs a continuum of hybridities that is helpful here. He writes that at one end there is "an assimilationist hybridity that leans over towards the centre, adopts the canon and mimics the hegemony, and, at the other end, a destabilising hybridity that blurs the canon, reverses the current, subverts the centre. Hybridities, then, may be differentiated according to the components in the melange" (Pieterse 1995:56-57).

The idea of lessening difference and trying to 'blend in' was a distinctive identity formation that was present in the interview sessions. It was a common strategy for dealing with the discourses of racism, assimilation and homogeneous representations of national identity.

Earlier generations saw the lessening of difference as a strategy to gain access to society and negotiate living in a hostile environment. The ideology of assimilation not only requires the migrant to abandon his/her cultural identity but it also makes the migrant feel inadequate within his/her cultural identity. One of the ways they lessened the difference between themselves and the dominant culture was by abandoning the external markers of their ethnicity such as language. David explains,

> *Our grandparents had things to sell, first they hawked and then in our case they got into the clothing business which is really partly essential and partly non-essential. In order to attract customers, they had to make their customers feel as comfortable as possible because if the customer had come into the shop and felt discomfort they would not have come in again. And part of making them feel comfortable was speaking to them in English.*

This was not an attempt to assimilate, and in fact in most cases it was accompanied by a strong sense of 'Lebaneseness'. What this passage does display is that diasporic identities were beginning to develop among the Lebanese as they struggled on the one hand to maintain their cultural identities and on the other, with the constant process of differentiation, fragmentation, negotiation and hybridisation. This two-sided nature of diasporic identities has been the dominant force within Lebanese identity discourse in Aotearoa/New Zealand.

In earlier generations there was a tendency to ignore racism and believe in the promises of their new country and that the only way to get ahead was through 'fitting in' and upward mobility. Leila explains how her mother mimicked the

'norms' and values of the dominant culture.

> *I suppose they always felt looked down upon so they wanted to conform and do as much as they could to wipe out the differences especially in their kids. My mother seemed to aspire to white middle class things. When Dad would bring buyers home for tea she would cook very European food and she would never speak to us in Arabic. We used to laugh because she would speak in a funny posh voice and she would serve the meal in courses not Lebanese mezza style. And she would tell us that we had some nice people coming for dinner and we should not be our normal selves but we should be very polite because these people weren't use to crazy Lebanese people.*

This demonstrates the incredibly complex nature of identity formation, and that identity is always constructed in and through its relationship to the 'other'. Not only the 'Other' which exists outside the 'self' and is simply observed and known by the 'self', but the 'other' that exists inside the 'self'.

Mariam explains how at different times in her life she has employed this strategy of 'blending in' as a reaction to feelings of displacement and racism.

> *When I was growing up I always felt uncomfortable around Pakehas/Europeans. I felt I had to tone myself down, dress-wise, emotion-wise, passion-wise, the way I express myself, the things I thought. I always had to change myself to fit in with them. It made you feel quite alienated and separate.*

This passage demonstrates that boundaries between the Lebanese and 'European New Zealanders' although becoming blurred, remain intact.

A particular strategy for 'living at the borders' came to the fore in this early period and has remained as a 'trace' on the participants' identities. It was a strategy for 'living at the margins' between two realities, two worlds, two different states of thought and feeling, which are at times unable to exist comfortably together within the subject. For example, in the private realm, at home and around the family a 'Lebanese identity' is played out and in the public realm, at work and school there is a lessening of difference and an attempt to 'blend in'. Peter explains this idea of leading a 'double life', "I think we compartmentalised our lives. Within the household we were totally Lebanese and outside we were as "Englees" as we could be." The participants were skilled at this 'shape-shifting' between identifications. This should be read as part of the fragmented, multiple and shifting nature of diasporic identities, rather than as an 'identity crisis' where the subject is 'stranded between two cultures' as posited in an assimilationist framework.

Another reaction to racism has been to distance oneself from the dominant European culture. In earlier generations there was a tendency to invert the system of meaning and project all of their fears and anxieties onto the dominant culture. Joseph explains, "The 'Englees', as they were referred to in my parents and grandparents generation, were regarded with open scepticism and inferiority. It was said they drank too much, had no idea about family or raising children and lacked moral fibre." This should not be read as reverse racism but rather as a defence mechanism to ward off a situation of marginalisation.

The participants often distanced themselves from the dominant culture when defining their 'Lebaneseness'. This distancing remains a strategy for 'living at the margins' and is one of the ways identity is constructed through difference. There was a tendency to construct their identities through a binary oppositional structure of meaning, defining their 'Lebaneseness' in opposition to a stereotypical image of the 'European New Zealander'. This illustrates the persistence of boundaries in the construction of identities among the current generations. Paul illustrates this, "Family is everything to the Lebanese, it's who we are, it's what makes us different. When I think about being Lebanese I think about family. I don't want to sound racist or anything but Europeans don't know the first thing about family." Marie sees these differences as irreconcilable. "It's just so different, the way we entertain and welcome and the way they (Europeans) entertain and welcome. It's funny isn't it I mean I've lived here all of my life and I've always mixed with the 'Englees' but I can still sit here with you and talk about the difference." These passages demonstrate that although there is the ongoing process of hybridisation, boundaries remain integral to the formation and construction of the participants' identities.

There were numerous reactions to the racism of assimilation among earlier generations, many of which remain as a 'trace' on the identities of the 'second and third generations'. These ranged from trying to 'blend in' and gain upward mobility, to expressing different identities in different social settings and contexts, to distancing themselves from the dominant culture and seeing it as 'inferior', to aspiring to it and mimicking it on some levels. At the same time as there was an ongoing process of fragmentation, dislocation and hybridisation the earlier generations maintained a strong sense of 'Lebaneseness'.

One of the transitional points between the generations came as the participants entered adolescence. The increased 'border crossing' in a number of cases resulted in conflict between the participants and their parents. Hind explains this conflict.

> *Mum and Dad didn't really understand what was going on with other teenage kids so when I was a teenager I felt restricted. Things were happening so fast to me but my parents just couldn't understand. I mean looking back on it, how could they? Both of them had led very traditional lives and the world was changing a lot faster than they were and they had real problems keeping up, but we were living in this society trying to be like 'average New Zealand teenagers'. It didn't really work.*

Houda also explains, "I always felt torn between two different cultures, two different ways. It was always my family and the rest of my life. I was growing up in a New Zealand way which my parents didn't relate to." Here we see the persistence of the identity formation of 'living between two different worlds' and negotiating between different ways of 'knowing and seeing the world'. Houda does not employ this as a strategy for dealing with racism but as a way of 'living at the margins' and negotiating a fragmented identity.

The following quote from Jonathan illustrates the continuities and similarities between the generations as well as the differences.

> *All of my life I have felt different and even with friends I would get into arguments about certain issues and they would say that's just you you're like that. I looked different and I never really felt like I fitted in. My parents weren't like my friend's parents. I just wanted to be like everyone else. I didn't really know where I belonged. At home and around the family I felt comfortable and sometimes with friends I felt comfortable but I never felt like I could mix the two worlds. I suppose what I'm trying to say is that for most of my life I've felt betwixt and between, not really lost because as I said, I've always had my family, but I don't feel this way anymore. Things changed for me after I visited Lebanon. Meeting my family and living there for a while I realised where a lot of my differences came from and that being me in Lebanon was not unusual. I bonded with the place and the culture and I felt like that was where part of me belonged. And really, when I look back on my life, I can see how living in New Zealand and growing up there and coming from another culture you tend to feel different and this can sometimes lead to feelings of depression and not knowing where you belong, but I got a different perspective on things when I went to Lebanon. I'm not quite sure where all of this leaves me now.*

The first thing that is striking about this passage is that even after gaining access to the social and economic institutions of society there is still a strong sense of difference and displacement and a lack of a 'sense of belonging'. These feelings of displacement led Jonathan to express different identities in different social sites and contexts. This identity formation, although present in earlier

generations, is no longer a strategy for gaining access but is a strategy for existing at the 'margins' between two different 'worlds', 'realities' and 'ways of knowing'. After visiting Lebanon, however, Jonathan was able to place his difference within a context, a cultural tradition and a 'place' which enabled him to experience feelings of 'belonging', validation and legitimacy for the first time in his life. This has enabled him to place his identity within a certain set of histories, cultures and power relations. Jonathan's displacement, like a number of other 'second and third generation' Lebanese, had produced in him a certain identity project characterised by a search for identity, 'home' and 'roots'. This demonstrates that identities are always contingent, contextual and shifting. This passage also demonstrates that identity, although containing 'traces' of past meanings and experiences, is an ongoing process and like meaning in language, it is always unstable.

The 'third position' described above is only beginning to emerge among the 'second and third generations'. These open forms of identification are multiple and hybrid and are unable to be conceptualised through essentialist notions of culture and identity. Hind describes how her identity has been influenced by more than one value-system and set of cultural ideas. She believes that she is a combination of both but at the time of the interview she identified with one more than the other.

> *The individuality in this society comes at a cost and so does our collectivity but I choose the collective way of life and I have lived in both. I am a mixture of the independence of the 'West' and the collectivity of our extended family - it's hard to pinpoint exactly."*

Isabel expresses the opening up of this 'new space' of identification which is plural and hybrid.

> *It's hard to find anyone who's pure anything these days, we're all mixed up. I'm Lebanese, there's no denying that, but I've also lived in New Zealand all my life. I'm a combination of both worlds. That's what I've got. I'm part this and part that. I can't deny any part of myself, I'm just who I am. I'm engaged to a Cook Islander so our children are going to be totally mixed.*

The boundaries between earlier generations and the dominant culture, though unnatural, were far more obvious than they are today. They had very little, if any, formal education and in most cases spoke poor English. They were living in a society that saw them as undesirable and was hostile towards them. The battle for them was gaining access to the social and economic institutions of society. They found ways of avoiding the obstacles to gaining that access and

upward mobility, believing that this was the key to their being accepted. They were attempting to break down these boundaries and in one way or another assure their children's place in Aotearoa/New Zealand society.

What has been the result in the current generation? There is no doubt that some have gained access through financial and educational success. They can speak fluent English, as assimilation policy won the battle over language. Some of them are business proprietors and professionals, and many of them have attained tertiary qualifications. They are still, however, positioned by the dominant discourses as 'other' and 'outsider'. They have strong feelings of displacement. They experience racism. Many of them feel excluded from the identity 'New Zealander' and marginalised. They have a strong sense of 'Lebaneseness'. Despite the fact that the boundaries between themselves and the dominant culture have become less well defined and there is more 'boundary crossing', the boundaries remain. They still exist at the 'borderzones' and are constantly negotiating between different realities, worlds and already culturally hybrid identities. Their battle is the battle of identity, of trying to combine and recombine different cultural elements within their fragmented, multiple, dislocated and shifting identities. The 'borders' are an undefined territory between vastly different 'ways of knowing and seeing the world'. There is the incommensurability of certain cultural elements and discourses and the frustration of putting a puzzle together whose parts don't fit. The two-sided nature of 'Lebanese identity' discourse is now based around a constant search for 'roots', identity and 'home' on the one hand and on the other the ongoing process of differentiation and hybridisation.

There is, however another force, another influence that has significantly transformed the participants' expression of their 'Lebaneseness'. Over the last four decades there has been 'a new evaluation of difference' and a 'new awareness' of the peoples and cultures outside Europe. Since the onset of imperialism and colonialism the peoples of the 'Third World' have been denied identities and have been placed in their 'otherness' by the 'imperialising eye' of Europe and now the USA. It is only recently that those at the margins have come into representation and gained a place from which to speak and represent themselves (Hall 1991a). Hall (1991a) argues that this is one of the most profound cultural revolutions of the second half of the twentieth century. Hall (1991a) believes that this is evident in "art, in painting, in film, in music, in literature, in the modern arts everywhere, in politics, and in social life generally (Hall 1991a:34)." This has been a profound moment for non-Europeans both

inside and outside the 'West'[5]. The story of cultural identity cannot be told without these moments of decolonisation.

This 'space' did not just open up, but was pried open by the margins through spontaneous and organised struggle against the centre's domination. This is the notion of identity that was at the heart of postcolonial nationalist movements, pan-Africanism and pan-Arabism, the civil rights and 'Black Power' movements and the struggles of indigenous peoples. These movements have profoundly transformed cultural identities everywhere. They were based on essentialist notions of identity that saw cultural identities as the 'one true self' which is 'inside the subject' and has always been there but needs to be rediscovered and excavated as the subject breaks the shackles of colonialism. Fundamental to these notions of identity was the idea of a shared culture, ancestry, history and experience that binds a people together and is continuous and unaffected by history. This notion of identity has significantly changed the way we understand cultural identity both globally and locally.

At the heart of all of these resistance movements has been a renewed respect for 'roots' and cultural tradition and a rediscovery of the 'hidden histories' and the places they come from. These movements have opened up a space from which the participants can speak and represent themselves – 'new spaces of identification' that were not available to earlier generations. It has enabled diasporic identities to place themselves in a context, a certain set of histories and power relations and a cultural tradition.

This prying open of 'spaces' has profoundly transformed marginality. The margins have opened up a place from which to speak and express their identities. This 'space' is of course cut across by numerous power relations and although it is a place from which to speak, it remains marginal, and continues to be very often overshadowed by the dominant discourses both globally and locally (Hall 1991a:33-36).

These 'spaces' of representation that have opened up are counter-hegemonic and challenge the dominant discourses and their narratives and in this way, they pose a threat to the dominant social order. However, the centre continually repositions itself and consolidates itself around these challenges from the margins. Rather than attempting to destroy all difference, as it once did, it now

---

[5] Here I am referring to a concept and not a geographical area. It refers to the countries of West Europe and the USA and colonial settler nations such as New Zealand and Australia, which are dominated by Western Europeans. Again, this is used as an explanatory tool and I am aware of its reductions.

267

attempts to co-opt and therefore neutralise difference. Difference has been commodified and this is tied into the current phase of 'accelerated globalisation' and the marketing of cultural and ethnic difference as yet another consumer item. Through the commodification of difference, "Difference ceases to threaten, or to signify power relations. Otherness is sought after for its exchange value, its exoticism and the pleasures, thrills and adventures it can offer (Rutherford 1990:11)." The participants' reactions to these ideas varied.

Some of the older participants noted a change in the way ethnic and cultural difference was perceived in their lifetime. All of the participants felt that there was more awareness of cultural and ethnic difference than in their parents' and grandparents' generation.

This 'new evaluation of difference' has impacted on the ways the participants' understand and interpret their 'Lebaneseness', on many levels. The heightened awareness of cultural and ethnic difference has enabled the participants on the one hand to assert their difference more comfortably, while the commodification and marketing of this difference has on the other hand resulted in only a superficial awareness. Although on some levels this has only produced a superficial appreciation of cultural and ethnic difference, as once again the 'other' is racialised and 'exoticised', it is a discursive shift separating the discursive strategies of succeeding generations. Joanna expresses this turn around from previous generations.

> *I like telling people I'm Lebanese - it's a bit more exotic. It's kind of funny because my mother wasn't that keen to tell people and from what she said when she was growing up it wasn't that cool. They used to get a lot of prejudice against them. For my generation or my age group it was cool to be something other than Pakeha/European. When I tell people I'm Lebanese they often say how exotic. They will often say I love your food.*

In the following passage Louise illustrates how this 'new celebration of difference' exists with the older more familiar discourses of racism.

> *I was at a gathering of some friends and I took some Lebanese food with me and they all loved it and said how they love the fact that there is so many different types of ethnic eateries now. Later in the evening someone brought up Hezbollah and called them 'crazy Arab terrorists'. I sort of felt unable to reply because everyone agreed. At one moment I felt good about my culture and the next I felt uncomfortable and angry but that's racism for you.*

On the one hand there is acceptable cultural difference, such as food, music, dance and art and on the other unacceptable cultural difference, such as 'Arab'

freedom fighters that resist occupation and imperialism and challenge the unjust dominant social order. We have seen the devastating effects of these neo-imperialist discourses and their treatment of Iraq and its people.

At the same time, the participants' identities have been affected on a deeper level by the 'new identity spaces' that have opened up as a result of 'the margins coming into representation'. This enabled the participants to position themselves in 'spaces' not dominated by the centre, which enabled them to challenge the universality of the dominant discourses and the narratives of the past. This allowed the participants to move beyond the cultural 'straightjackets' tailored for them by the dominant discourses and create their own sense of themselves, unhindered by the dominant discourses and valid without reference to them.

Mariam describes the 'new awareness' of cultural difference that has taken place on a deeper level, as a result of the 'margins coming into representation'. Mariam expresses how even in her lifetime she has experienced this change.

> *We had trouble at school, because we were seen as different, and we saw ourselves as different. We freaked out if we had Lebanese food in our lunchbox, or we looked different from the other kids. But we didn't understand that difference and we thought there was something wrong with us. I think now there's much more awareness of ethnic minorities and of people whose origins go back to 'Third World' cultures. I mean people are more proud of their backgrounds because of the kind of renaissance that's taken place all over the world. There's so many things taking place now, so many different shifts of consciousness and understandings of different cultures, that it's affecting the children. They're proud of who they are. In our day we were not proud of who we were.*

In these late modern times two discourses exist side by side and are in battle with each other. One is the commodification of difference which is 'difference without a difference', and the other is the recognition of difference that has been gained through struggle. These discourses are, however, not separate with solid boundaries, as they often overlap in the articulation of cultural identities. Hind (34) describes these two discourses, "Europeans love hummus and pita bread but when it comes to Arabs and Islam, they have very little understanding."

The final section of the paper examines some of the 'new spaces' of identification that are opening up in the current generations as a result of the transformations described above.

In earlier generations there was a drive to lessen difference for both themselves and their children and this was one of the contributing factors to the loss of language among the 'second and third generations'. This is symbolic of

the nagging sense of loss that is part of all communities in the diaspora. Under the guise of assimilation policy all languages that were not English were discouraged. In the case of Aotearoa/New Zealand, English was the deliberate 'murderer' in the name of a homogeneous national culture and identity.

Mariam was the first woman in her family to achieve a tertiary qualification and at the time of the interview she was working as a journalist. She had visited the Arab World a number of times. She had been involved in political activism both in Aotearoa/New Zealand and overseas. She had a high level of political consciousness and awareness about her 'Lebanese identity'. She had experienced strong feelings of displacement in her early years but felt that her visits to the Arab World had helped her place these feelings in a context and re-discover her 'Lebaneseness'.

> *I can't speak fluent Arabic. I can speak parts of Arabic, bits and pieces. I actually use it a lot in my everyday language. It's not real Arabic but a sort of mixture between English and Arabic. It's our own New Zealand Lebanese language. Actually at the moment my sisters and I are trying to learn Arabic. I think it's really important to understand your own language and to recognise that English was thrust upon us.*

By recognising the Eurocentric nature of assimilation with statements such as "English was thrust upon us." Mariam opens up a counter-hegemonic position and locates her identity within a certain set of power relations. Her reference to a coded language which is not pure Arabic but is definitely not English is symbolic of the cultural hybridisation that occurs with the process of migration. Identities such as these challenge the dominant representations of minority groups. They not only rupture identities at the margins but also the centre. Their very existence challenges categories such as ethnicity, race and nation. They are not only reactive, but are affirmative and valid without reference to the centre.

As demonstrated above being fixed in the 'gaze' of the 'other' had a devastating effect on the participants' identities, however, with the counter-hegemonic positions that have opened up through the 'margins coming into representation', some have been able to place this process within the discourses of racism and move beyond it, while acknowledging the complexity of their identities. Hind had just returned from living in Lebanon for two years. She felt that her identity had transformed throughout her life and living in Lebanon had enabled her to understand her feelings of difference and displacement in Aotearoa/New Zealand. What is interesting about this passage is that she is able to acknowledge how the process of 'othering' results in a sense of 'lostness' and by placing it in the discourses of racism she is able to move beyond it.

270

I have been very lost in my life. I had really down points but when I think back I never let it drag me down completely. I liked the Lebanese part of me but others didn't accept that part of me. For example, once when I put a band in my hair my boyfriend at the time said "you look like an Arab, take it off" and I turned around to him and I said "I am an Arab". I thought to myself I can't be something I'm not…and I remember thinking that was one of those many times that – 'you are that but you can't be it'. I wasn't being reinforced or validated. I was seeing myself the way others were seeing me. That's when you get lost because you're always taking on others identities and not your own.

The Gulf War had a profound effect on the participants' identities, as it did with all Arab communities living in the 'West'. Although political tensions have always brought the question of loyalties and identities to the fore, very few world historical events have been as immediate and intense as the Gulf War was for Arab communities in the diaspora. It was a global media event. For example, in early 1991 CNN news broadcast a blow by blow account of the Gulf War. Everyone who had access to a TV was watching the same accounts that were being beamed across the world virtually instantaneously. What we were watching and what was happening were of course two different things because all of the news was being sent to the rest of the world via America, so obviously we were receiving a one-sided view. Events that were happening far away were being beamed into living rooms all over the globe. It was 'time-space compression' at its best, as distance events were dislocating the identities of Arabs in the diaspora.

This event caused many 'Lebanese New Zealanders' to question their identities which they had assumed for so long were stable. A 'Lebanese New Zealander', for example, who saw him or herself as a Aotearoa/New Zealand citizen and part of the 'democratic free world' could not reconcile this with the fact that Aotearoa/New Zealand was part of an alliance that was destroying an Arab country. These identity positions were incommensurable and contradictory.

Zenna explains how she was affected by the Gulf War.

It really came home to me during the Gulf War. So many of my friends didn't understand what was going on, they just thought Saddam Hussein was an evil tyrant who had to be destroyed. They didn't understand that it was just another bullying act by America in the 'Middle East'. Let's face it, it was about oil. If it wasn't why didn't they do the same to Israel. The media reaffirmed negative Arab stereotypes and people in this country just

> *thrived on it. I felt upset because the New Zealand government was behind the destruction of an Arab nation. I didn't know where my loyalties lay. I felt like shouting at people can't you see what's actually happening. I didn't feel comfortable being Lebanese and being around these people.*

This passage is interesting as it highlights how through the 'global mass media' distant political conflicts are having an impact on the identities of those in the diaspora. The discourses of imperialism and racism were so obvious in the media debacle over the Gulf War that it took very few, if any, critical skills to identify them. Opinions varied widely among the Lebanese in Aotearoa/New Zealand, but this account illustrates the opening up of counter hegemonic positions. Zenna not only demonstrates the dislocation she felt as a Lebanese person living in Aotearoa/New Zealand but also the counter-narratives that have been made more accessible in this generation as a result of the 'margins coming into representation'. Not only have the 'second and third generations' been more able to assert their difference and identity than earlier generations, but also in an increasingly globalised world, many of them want to speak on global political issues concerning the 'Arab World' and how these are impacting on their identities as Lebanese living in Aotearoa/New Zealand. They not only want to tell 'quaint' localised stories about their 'Lebaneseness' but they want to speak about their position in a globalised world.

In conclusion the participants' testimonies illustrate the two-sided nature of Lebanese identity discourse – a search for 'roots', 'home' and identity on the one hand and an ongoing process of differentiation and hybridity on the other. Boundaries between the Lebanese and the dominant culture, though weakening in the 'second and third generations', still remain significant in the construction and formation of their 'Lebaneseness'. The shifting nature of cultural identities is demonstrated here as these aspects of identity are linked historically to an emerging global discourse on cultural and ethnic difference. By translating the new global awareness of cultural and ethnic difference into a discursive shift within the Lebanese community separating the discursive strategies of succeeding generations we see the appearance of 'new spaces' of identification. The participants' testimonies demonstrate that these 'new spaces' are at times counter-hegemonic. Moreover, the participants accounts demonstrate that identities, although containing 'traces' of past meanings, are always open to 'new meanings', new contexts and new cultural influences. This reflects the changing and contingent nature of identities and their openness to the continual play of history, culture and power.

References

BARKER, C. (1999) *Television, Globalisation and Cultural Identities* (Philadelphia, Open University Press).

BOTTOMLEY, G. (1992) *From Another Place: Migration and the Politics of Culture* (London, Cambridge University Press).

FANON, F. (1991) *Black Skin, White Masks* (Reprinted in New York, Grove Press Inc.).

FARRY, J.E. & PAGE, D. (1990) *The Hawkers A Family Story* (Dunedin, Shinbone Alley Press and printed by John McIndoe)

HALL, S. (1990) Cultural Identity and Diaspora, in: J. RUTHERFORD (Ed.) *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference* (London, Lawrence and Wishart).

HALL, S. (1991) Ethnicity: Identity and Difference. *Radical America*, vol. 23, pp.9-20.

HALL, S. (1991a) The Local and the Global: Globalisation and Ethnicity, in: A. King (Ed.) *Culture, Globalisation and The World-System Contemporary Conditions for the Representation of Identity* (London, Macmillan Press).

HALL, S. (1996) Introduction: Who Needs 'Identity'? in: S. HALL & P. Du Gay (Ed.) *Questions of Cultural Identity* (London, Sage Publications).

HASHIMOTO, K. (1992) Lebanese Population Movement 1920-1939: Towards a Study, in: A. HOURANI & N. SHEHADI (Ed.) *The Lebanese in the World: A Century of Emigration* (London, The Centre for Lebanese Studies and IB Tauris).

NAFF, A. (1992) Lebanese Immigration into the United States: 1880 to the Present, in: A. HOURANI & N. SHEHADI (Ed.) *The Lebanese in the World: A Century of Emigration* (London, The Centre for Lebanese Studies and IB Tauris).

New Zealand Parliamentary Debates. 1894 vol. 83. 1895 vol. 89. 1896 vol. 92.

New Zealand Census of Populations and Dwellings. Ethnic Groups. Wellington: Statistics New Zealand, 1996.

PIETERSE, J. N. (1995) Globalisation and Hybridisation, in: M. FEATHERSTONE & S. LASH et al. (Ed.) *Global Modernities* (London, Sage Publications).

RUTHERFORD, J. (1990) A Place Called Home: Identity and the Cultural Politics of Difference, in J. Rutherford (Ed.) *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference* (London, Lawrence and Wishart).

SAID, E. W. (1991) *Orientalism Western Conceptions of the Orient* (Reprinted in London: Penguin Books).

SANDERS, M. (1980) *The Lebanese Community in Dunedin before 1936*, Honours Thesis, University of Otago (unpublished).

SOJA, E. & HOOPER, B. (1993) The Spaces that Difference Makes: Some Notes on the Geographical Margins of the New Cultural Politics, in: M. KEITH & S. PILE (Ed.) *Place And The Politics Of Identity* (London, Routledge).

VASTA, E et al. (1992) The Italo-Australian community on the Pacific rim, in: S. CASTLES et al (Ed.) *Australia's Italians Culture and community in a Changing Society* (Sydney, Allen and Unwin).