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The Rise and Falter of the Field of Ethnic Politics in Australia: the case of Lebanese community leadership

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ABSTRACT *Since the advent of multiculturalism in Australia in the 1970s, 'ethnicity' has acquired not only cultural and social importance, but significant political consequences as groups mobilised around 'ethnic communities' and as the State increasingly structured social policy around cultural differences. The political patronage and funding central to Australian multiculturalism led to the development of organisations and leaders whose task was not only to service the needs of specific 'ethnic communities' but to represent them in the wider political field. This paper traces the emergence in Australia of the field of ethnic politics, in the Bourdieusian sense. Using the Lebanese 'ethnic community' as a case study, we analyse the accumulation by 'community leaders' of 'ethnic capital', which converts to symbolic capital that is recognised by the State as the capacity of leaders to represent ethnic communities. We argue that conflicts arising over moral panics around 'Lebanese youth gangs' in Sydney since 1998 have undermined the legitimacy of Lebanese community leadership. This has coincided with moves by the NSW government to devalorise 'ethnicity' and substitute it with 'communal relations', which accord with the national shift away from multiculturalism under the Howard government, as the politics of 'One Nation' are increasingly mainstreamed.*

Since the emergence of multiculturalism in Australia in the 1970s, ethnicity has not only become an issue of cultural and social importance in a diverse society, but one which has political consequences as groups mobilise around 'ethnic communities' and as governments increasingly seek to structure social policy around cultural differences. The lines of political patronage and funding central to Australian multiculturalism led to the development of organisations and leaders whose task was seen to be to not only service the needs of specific 'ethnic communities' but to represent them in the wider political field. ('Ethnic' will be used here in its colloquial, but problematic sense of non-Anglo immigrant.) Within this context, 'ethnicity' as a symbolic value became essential in preserving the legitimacy of ethnic leadership *within* these perceived communities on the one hand, and *beyond* these

communities in the wider public realm on the other. The relationship of ethnic leaders to the State, as well as to their respective 'communities', became a crucial element in the overall strategy of the government to manage and make use of 'ethnic politics'.

In this paper we begin to explore what we call, following Bourdieu, the *field* of ethnic politics. We suggest that crucial to the function of 'community leaders' within this field is their accumulation of 'ethnic capital', in which the forms of capital which have value within perceived ethnic communities are converted into symbolic capital that is recognised by the State as the capacity of leaders to represent ethnic communities. We briefly examine the historical conditions that led to the formation of an 'ethnic field' in Australia, and then analyse, as a case study, the specific processes that resulted in the emergence of a Lebanese community leadership. This field, like any field, is always contested and negotiated, and hence we discuss conflicts associated with moral panic about 'Lebanese youth gangs' in Sydney since 1998 and the ways this has led to a reconstitution of the ethnic field and of ethnic capital. In the aftermath of this panic, the NSW state government participated in a populist law and order auction entailing the racialisation of crime. This secured them electoral victory in 1999 and again in 2003, but undermined the legitimacy of Lebanese community leadership, and led to a new direction in state politics which had the outcome of devalorising 'ethnicity' and substituting it with 'communal relations'.

Field, Capital and Political Representation

Pierre Bourdieu has deployed the concepts of *field* and *capital* to explore the constitution and operation of particular domains of life in complex societies. Bourdieu defines a field as:

a network, or a configuration, of objective relations between positions. These positions are objectively defined, in their existence and in the determinations they impose upon their occupants, agents or institutions, by their present and potential situation (*situs*) in the structure of the distribution of species of power (or capital) whose possession commands access to the specific profits that are at stake in the field, as well as by their objective relation to other positions (domination, subordination, homology, etc.). (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 97)

Despite its abstract formulation, this definition refers to the basic elements that constitute a field: an objective set of unequal positions, occupants, institutions and capital. In his analysis of political representation, for example, Bourdieu (1991, p. 190) discusses the formation of a political field in which professionals vie for control and support of non-professionals and the right to speak and act in their name. *Capital* in this context is a metaphor used to describe the varied and valued resources which occupants accumulate to succeed within the field, and over which they struggle for the control of the field. The capital of a specific field is produced, circulated and appropriated by actors occupying unequal positions within the field. We can also infer from the above quotation that each field in a particular society

would have its specific capital which could be economic, cultural, social, political, religious, linguistic, etc., or a combination of such species of power. Crucial in Bourdieu's model is the emphasis he places on the broad categories of cultural and social capital, alongside the conventional recognition of the role of economic capital (1998, p. 41). Cultural capital refers to the cultural knowledges, competencies and dispositions social agents embody, particularly through educational experience and qualifications, while social capital refers to the kinds of connections people develop and make use of. People constantly seek to have their capital recognised and validated as they position themselves within a field, and they also attempt to convert it into other forms of capital to gain profits in other fields.

Bourdieu (1998, p. 102) uses the notion of *symbolic capital* to refer to the accumulated prestige that results from the recognition of the capital agents have accumulated. It refers to the ways agents attempt to achieve status or influence via the reputation they can claim on the basis of their accumulated economic, cultural and social capital. Political capital is thus a form of symbolic capital because it is a kind of 'credit' based on recognition—from the group the politician represents and from the State (1991, p. 192). Central to Bourdieu's argument is the role the State plays in recognising and validating all forms of capital (1998, p. 51). The State plays a particularly important role because it confers a symbolic value on the type of capital that would be most compatible with its overall strategy for maintaining social cohesion and order. Bourdieu underlines the paradoxical nature of representational politics that results from this: in speaking for a group, the representative has to silence dissent; in deriving authority from a group, the representative has to exert authority over the group to ensure its cohesiveness (1991, p. 212). This paradox has particular significance for so-called 'ethnic community leaders'.

While Bourdieu recognises that there are different forms of political capital (1991, p. 194), he does not explore the kinds of political capital that underlie the role of 'community' leaders in what we now refer to as 'ethnic politics': the strategies parties engage in to secure the support of 'ethnic communities', and the politics that this produces within and between community organisations. Analysis of the function of ethnic leadership demonstrates the ways in which this paradox produces different kinds of positions within a field. Higham (1978, pp. 1–15), for example, distinguishes between marginal and centre leaders in American ethnic politics—that is, leaders with orientations towards the dominant political field of the host society and leaders with stronger ties to the communities they represent. He also distinguishes between leaders of protest and of accommodation, a distinction Werbner echoes in her analysis of ethnic leaders in Britain and the contradictory strategies they employ that emanate from the intercalary position they occupy in the host society (1991, p. 34). While neither of these approaches captures the complexity of a field or the process of capital accumulation which Bourdieu's model describes, they nevertheless point to key aspects of the contradictory forces ethnic leaders are faced with.

We have attempted to explore these issues in relation to the bind that 'ethnic leaders' experience in Australian multiculturalism: the need to participate in the construction of a sense of an imagined, cohesive ethnic community as they struggle with each other, the complex differences that structure such 'communities', and the

paradox of beholdenness to political masters ‘above’ whilst maintaining a claim to represent those ‘below’ (Collins *et al.*, 2000). This analysis can be better elaborated by turning to an examination of the emergence of an ‘ethnic field’ and ‘ethnic capital’ in Australia.

The Prehistory of the Field of Ethnic Politics in Australia

Prior to the early 1970s, there was not yet an ethnic field in Australia in the strict sense intended in Bourdieu’s model. The field of national power, as Hage (1998, p. 57) argues, was fundamentally a ‘field of Whiteness’ which dominated the governmental management of national space in Australia since Federation in 1901. Whiteness here does not refer simply to skin colour, nor even to what Hage describes as sanctified forms of the cultural capital of national belonging—the knowledges, bodily characteristics and dispositions which are valued and accumulated in the field of power (1998, pp. 53–54). Immigrants accumulate national capital by learning how to speak the language, specific cultural practices, etc.—that is, by assimilating. Whiteness describes the process whereby this national capital is converted into symbolic capital; that is, the recognition of one’s right to participate in the management of national space, not simply to exist in it.

This Whiteness manifested itself through the implementation of the White Australia Policy, and then through policies of assimilationism and integrationism. Since the early days of Federation, the White Australia Policy was a direct manifestation of the prevalence of the field of Whiteness. It valorised the economic, social and cultural capital derived from European capitalist societies—not simply white skin, but wealth, class connections, elite cultural tastes and so on—and these formed the basis of the symbolic capital of Whiteness, whose possession or the lack of it determined the owner’s position in the field. A racialised fantasy of cultural purity sustained the dominance of Whiteness as symbolic capital from Federation until the end of the Second World War and helped the maintenance of a homogeneous population where 90% of the people were Australian-born and English-speaking:

In terms of cultural identity and aspirations, Australia was an unusually homogeneous society. A central part of this homogeneity was a persistent culture of racism manifest most prominently in the contempt for the Aborigines and fear of the ‘yellow peril’ to Australia’s north. Racism against immigrants had become a virulent element of Australian identity in the nineteenth century experience of relations with Chinese on the goldfields and ‘coolie’ and Kanaka’ labour. This carried through in the White Australia Policy of the twentieth century, and racist ideology about Asia that came with fighting the Japanese in the Second World War. (Castles *et al.*, 1995, pp. 1–2)

The White Australia Policy manifested itself in the selection criteria for immigrants.

Categories of potential migrants were ranked according to their racial and cultural affinity with British–Australians. The most preferred were Britons,

followed by Northern Europeans. Southern Europeans, considered to be far less assimilable, were less desired. The least desired were Asians and other non-whites.... The least desired were virtually excluded according to the tenets of the White Australia Policy. (Lopez, 2000, p. 43)

After the Second World War, a new policy emerged within the broader field of Whiteness: that of assimilation, which allowed for the expansion of the cultural base of Australia's population while guaranteeing to maintain the perceived cultural homogeneity. Assimilationism began taking shape when the Australian government decided to embark on an ambitious immigration programme designed to meet the shortages in the labour market for workers in the manufacturing and natural resources industries, as well as to increase Australia's (European-derived) population for defence against potential threats from Asia (Collins, 1988, pp. 21–22). For the first time in 1945, a Department of Immigration was established, supported by two advisory bodies: the Immigration Advisory Council (IAC) and the Immigration Planning Council (IPC), which were established in 1945 and 1947, respectively. The former was designed to deal with settlement policy and the latter to handle immigration policy. In 1949 the Department helped in the creation of a network of Good Neighbour Councils (GNCs). This was linked with established charitable organisations in the broader community and had the overall aim of assisting 'migrant settlement, welfare and successful assimilation'.

After the Second World War, assimilationism was constantly referred to as a guiding principle in the various policy documents and governmental statements (Lopez, 2000, pp. 45–49). Many academics and senior bureaucrats were involved along with the politicians in the 'symbolic labour' of assimilationism. For example, Professor W.D. Borrie, Professor of Demography at the Australian National University and Tas Heyes, Head of the Department of Immigration from 1945 to 1961, were staunch supporters of assimilationism and keen to implement its policy requirements. All major political parties supported the assimilationist policy. Both the Chifley Labor government and the conservative Menzies Coalition which succeeded it promoted the policy. Opinion polls throughout the late 1940s and the 1950s consistently showed that the majority of Australians rejected immigration from more ethnically distinct regions, like southern Europe and Asia (Lopez, 2000, pp. 49–51).

Between 1960 and 1972, Whiteness was still dominant in the formation of national capital and governmental belonging, while assimilationism progressively lost its appeal in the official discourse of Australian politicians and policy-makers and was partially replaced by the policy of 'integration'. Integration was a strategy to reconstitute the valorised capital of Whiteness, by abandoning the requirement that migrants immediately renounce their cultural baggage and assimilate completely into the dominant Anglo-Australian way of life. Integration had its own group of proponents, and coexisted with the policy of assimilation. As Lopez (2000, p. 56) put it: 'Integrationist and assimilationist ideas existed side by side in combinations that varied according to the preferences of individual policy-makers, and therefore also varied between different government bodies and agencies.' By 1964,

the Assimilation Branch of the Department of Immigration was renamed as the Integration Branch, reflecting the relative shift in the thinking of politicians and bureaucrats who were monitoring and managing the national space to ensure the reproduction of Whiteness as a dominant mark of the Australian national identity. Despite this name change, the same set of government agencies and community organisations that previously oversaw the implementation of assimilation were used to implement the policies of integration.

The change from assimilationism to integrationism occurred because of the cumulative effects of much broader processes that were related to many international and domestic factors. Internationally, Australia's trading activities were becoming more strongly linked with the economies of Japan and South-East Asian countries. The traditional source countries (Britain and north European countries) of 'assimilable' migrants were becoming less attracted by the idea of immigrating and settling in Australia. In fact, in the 1960s a substantial number of Germans and Dutch were re-migrating from Australia to their original homelands. 'Unassimilable' people from southern European and Middle Eastern countries were the only solution to the problem of labour market shortages. Integrationism provided the ideological justification for this new direction in the immigration policy to allay the fears of a predominantly xenophobic population. It led people to believe that the process of successfully assimilating migrants would take more time (the anticipation was that it would happen with the second generation of migrants), and that the Australian government, instead of letting migrants integrate by themselves, should intervene in this process (Castles *et al.*, 1995, pp. 54–55). Moreover, the growing militancy of the Aborigines in the late 1960s made it extremely difficult for the government officially to sustain the assimilationist strategy for maintaining the white character of the Australian identity.

In 1968, the Minister for Immigration in the Liberal government, Bill Snedden, revealed clearly the ultimate objective of integration: 'We ask particularly of migrants that they be substantially Australians in the first generation and completely Australian in the second generation' (quoted in Jakubowicz *et al.*, 1984).

Multiculturalism and the Emergence of an Ethnic Field

By 1972, when the Whitlam Labor government came to power, the 'national groups', who were thought by the integrationists to be helping agents in the process of assimilation, developed an outlook which ultimately led both the Liberal and the Labor Parties to abandon integrationism and to adopt a new policy based on cultural pluralism or multiculturalism. In this process of policy shifting, social workers, community activists and some academics, who were all involved one way or another in the migrant reality in Australia, played a crucial role. Essentially, integrationism in the previous decade set the scene for considering alternative ways for looking afresh into 'the migrant presence' (Martin, 1978) in Australia. At this time, there was an increasing pressure from 'ethnic' organisations for political representation and access to mainstream political processes, and increasing awareness by major political parties of what was deemed the 'migrant vote' (Collins, 1988, p. 133).

The social-democratically oriented Labor government increasingly recognised 'ethnic communities' within the 'family of the nation', but largely in relation to socio-economic inequalities. Designated ethnic communities were perceived as like other 'disadvantaged' groups, needing State intervention to address the injustices that they suffered. In this process, migrants were transformed into an ethnic constituency that could be incorporated politically by the Labor government whilst gaining some access to the political field. Many ethnic leaders, social and community workers, academics, professionals and political activists contributed to the process of developing this policy from the mid-1960s, as did some progressive Anglo academics (such as Jean Martin) and community workers (Lopez, 2000). It is arguable that the Australian Labor Party (ALP) policy on migrant issues between 1972 and 1975 gave voice to aspirations long held by immigrants. However, from the perspective of showing the State role in the formation of an ethnic field, it can be argued that between 1972 and 1975 the ALP *ethnicised* migrants by transforming them into a symbolically valued and desired 'ethnic vote'. From this period on, the possession of the symbolic capital of ethnicity constituted in the dominant discourse of state and society the necessary precondition for immigrants and their children to be Australian nationals. Within this context, ethnicity was transformed into a valorised cultural element, and became the object of struggle by the occupants of the ethnic field.

The Liberal–Country Party Coalition, when it came to power in 1975, also had a role in the *ethnicisation* of migrant communities by bringing to the forefront their rights to political participation based on consultation and cultural expression. It developed policies and structures of community funding which more systematically recognised these communities but drew them into a hierarchy of political patronage (Jakubowicz *et al.*, 1984). As the Galbally Report, which was to be the reference point for government policies relating to migrants from the late 1970s onwards, puts it very clearly: 'The knowledge that people are identified with their cultural background and ethnic group enables them to take their place in their new society with confidence if their ethnicity has been accepted by the community.' After giving a crude definition of culture, the Report goes on to state that: '... the most significant and appropriate bodies to be involved in the fostering and preservation of cultures are the ethnic organisations themselves' (quoted in Castles *et al.*, 1995, p. 69). In other words, for immigrants to take their proper place in society, they have to be politically consulted and culturally respected and only thus could they gain State recognition and funding. With the adoption of this new policy, the State was empowered to incorporate ethnic leaders.

In brief, the Labor ethnic affairs policy initiated by the Whitlam government ethnicised the migrant presence through addressing their socio-economic and welfare problems, whereas the Liberal–National Coalition led by Malcolm Fraser, ethnicised the migrants through their broader outlook on migrant rights in the political process and their entitlement to express their cultural identity. Both policies had the net effect of valorising ethnicity as a new symbolic capital within a specific field of ethnic politics that articulated forms of community and cultural organisation with the structures and imperatives of mainstream political processes.

Ghassan Hage (1998) provides perhaps the most innovative exploration of the significance of multiculturalism in terms of an argument about national capital and Whiteness. What he calls White multiculturalism, while opening up a space for different cultural forms, is essentially a strategy of containment which maintains the centrality of White national managers while presenting itself as disinterested. It treats ethnicity as a source of enrichment to be savoured by cosmopolitans. It may be, however, that Hage overstates somewhat the incorporation of cultural difference into the project of a new breed of White nationalists. He construes ethnicity primarily as a negative capital (1998, p. 61)—something that erodes the symbolic capital an immigrant hopes to accrue. To ‘bend the stick’ the other way, we are attempting here to analyse how ethnicity becomes valorised as a distinct form of symbolic capital in the context of multiculturalism. The Labor and Liberal–Country/National governments of the 1970s and 1980s, we suggest, valorised an emergent ethnic capital without necessarily displacing the dominance of Whiteness.

Both governments incorporated ethnic communities by recruiting their representatives who, in turn, represented the ‘ethnic’ voice articulating these policies. In other words, this process of incorporation converted forms of capital specific to particular ethnic groups into a generalised symbolic, ethnic capital. In the case of the Labor policy, ‘ethnicity’, as symbolic capital, was valorised when it was acquired by individuals with the main task of redressing ethnic welfare problems. In relation to the Coalition policy, ‘ethnicity’ was valorised when used to manifest itself in the process of consultation between government bodies and ‘ethnic leaders’, and when it was translated into cultural activities related to the lifestyles of the ethnic communities (such as cooking, dancing and music, religious worship, etc.).

Ethnic associations, whether religious or secular, existed before and after the formation of an ethnic field in Australia. However, the valorisation of ethnicity as symbolic capital was only made possible with the construction of an ethnic field and the institutionalisation of multiculturalism. In this process the State, whether at the federal or state level, played a decisive role. In fact, the State acted as a chief definer of valorised ethnicity against which all other contesting definitions were measured. Undoubtedly, the State definition of ethnicity was overdetermined by many factors, including the interests of the contestant groups within the field of ethnicity. The role of the media in identifying and legitimating ethnic leaders, their communities and organisations was also central. Yet ultimately, ethnicity, or for that matter any other symbolic capital circulating in society, is valorised according to the terms set out by the State to ensure the overall reproduction of social order and relations of power.

Like other fields in society, the ethnic field is a site of power relations. In it, the occupants battle with each other over the acquisition of its specific capital and over the terms of its recognition. This is a struggle waged on two fronts: it is a struggle to accumulate the specific forms of economic, cultural and social capital that make it possible to exist *within* a socially constructed ethnic community and have them valorised within that community; and the struggle to transform them into symbolic, ethnic capital which is recognised and validated by the State. The more the (largely male) occupant of the field acquires the economic, cultural and social capital

esteemed within a particular ethnic community, the more likely he is to be able to convert it into symbolic capital recognised 'above' him. Although there is no guarantee of this conversion, the amount of symbolic capital also indicates the degree to which the possessor of ethnicity is co-opted by the State. The individual who is most co-opted by the State would be the person who is most recognised within the terms specified by the State in its definition of the ethnic capital. Yet the definition of ethnic capital is a negotiated process. Despite the constant attempt by the State to valorise the terms of its definition of ethnicity in the ethnic field, other occupants will always seek to redefine the meaning of ethnicity to express views and interests that are excluded by the dominant occupants. As we shall see below, the State can at any time opt to ensure its political survival and the maintenance of the social order by devalorising the symbolic capital of ethnicity, and consequently by replacing it with a different symbolic capital.

As we have begun to show, the ethnic field emerged in the second half of the 1970s with its specific discourse, institutions and associations, power structure, symbolic capital, occupants and constituency. Yet the ability to get into the ethnic field and become a leading occupant within its power structure, and the maintenance of this leading position, are no simple matters. To become a leader, one has to accumulate enough cultural, social or economic capital to convert into ethnic capital. Once in the field, the ethnic leader becomes caught between two conflicting imperatives. On one hand, he has to be perceived by members of his community as a guardian of their interests, and on the other, he has to articulate with the State to maintain his leadership role in the eyes of the State representatives. The legitimacy of ethnic leadership, therefore, hinges upon the ability of the community leader to strike a balance between these two imperatives. If the opposition between the interest of the ethnic community and that of the State becomes irreconcilable, the legitimacy of communal leadership enters into a crisis. The leadership crisis becomes even more acute when the State undermines the symbolic capital from which the legitimacy of this leadership is derived.

The following sections will then do two things: the next section will begin to analyse the processes of the accumulation and conversion of capital within a specific case study of Lebanese community leadership, and the final section will explore what happens when a crisis, such as that which ensued from the panic around 'Lebanese gangs', challenges the foundations and dynamics of communal leadership.

Lebanese Ethnic Leaders, *Wajaha* and the Accumulation of Ethnic Capital

In the 1950s and 1960s, there were mainly religious leaders of the Lebanese communities—Christian and Muslim—who, in addition to their religious duties, were also involved in looking after the settlement needs of recent arrivals. Their primary concern at the time revolved around securing accommodation and employment for newly arrived Lebanese immigrants. Alongside these religious leaders, there were also some prominent individuals who took the initiative in these communal activities and were mainly drawn from an older wave of immigrants. Early

Lebanese immigrants sought the help of these community leaders because the latter had more knowledge and experience relevant to their settlement needs in the host society. In this process, social bonds on the basis of family, locality, religion and nationality, were activated to provide the networks for these services. Communal reputation and status (or *wajaha* in Arabic) were formed on the basis of delivering these services, and constituted the elements from which early forms of leadership were developed among Lebanese immigrants. This leadership quality, however, did not have a symbolic (and material) value beyond the social boundary of the Lebanese immigrant communities. In the broader society, neither the specific settlement needs of immigrants nor the work of community leaders and their associations were recognised as being of any significance. At this stage, the authorities and the community at large were concerned with assimilating migrants into the Anglo-Australian way of life to ensure cultural homogeneity.

It was only with the formation of an ethnic field in Australia that leadership based on *wajaha* acquired a new symbolic value as ethnic capital, based on the forms of capital accumulated in relation to a perceived community, but now convertible into a symbolic capital recognised by the State. While there is no easy or automatic interchange between capitals (Swartz, 1997, p. 80), because the State largely controls the processes of conversion the same policies that recognised ethnic communities and their organisations and leaders also enabled the conversion of very specific types of capital into ethnic capital. With the establishment of multiculturalism as official State policy, ethnicity could be transformed into symbolic capital, which motivated potential ethnic leaders to seek its possession.

‘Ethnicity’ here is understood then as a complex of forms of capital that can be doubly valorised: both within a perceived community and in relation to mainstream political processes. These capitals include both the most obvious forms of cultural capital (community knowledge, education and so on), social capital (forms of association and connection) and economic capital. There is an enormous amount of overlap between these forms of capital, and typically a leader cannot convert his capital unless he has some measure of each of them. Apart from the requisite cultural and social capital involved in the expressive identities of ethnicity (such as language, gestures and tastes on the one hand, and intimate and extensive relationships within the community on the other) there are several key modes which are fundamental to the ability to transform expressive ethnicity into ethnic capital. As we shall, there also exists the possibility then of converting ethnic capital into mainstream political capital proper.

The first mode is participation in the ‘ethnic affairs industry’ as a professional. The adoption of multiculturalism as State policy, particularly under the model initiated by the Galbally Report, generated a process whereby servicing the welfare needs of migrants became increasingly more professionalised (Jakubowicz *et al.*, 1984). The creation of an ethnic affairs industry made possible not simply a degree of social mobility for some non-English-speaking background men and women, it also provided the basis for converting the cultural capital of a tertiary education, for example, into ethnic capital. Some individuals were able to enter the field of ethnicity in the capacity of social or community workers. As a result, the ‘ethnic

industry' became the object of conservative attacks as an area of privileged treatment of minorities (Collins, 1988, p. 238).

A second mode of entering the field of ethnicity was through the conversion of economic capital into ethnic capital. Some Lebanese immigrants achieved this entry by moving upward on the socio-economic scale and becoming members of the middle class or the capitalist class. At some point, these migrants decided to use their economic position to buy ethnic capital and assume a leading role in the ethnic field. Most of these people ended up cooperating with community organisations to defend the cause of their community (or a section thereof), or joined an existing association with a keen eye to become a leader. In buying an Arabic newspaper with a group of three Lebanese businessmen, Anwar Harb, for example, gained extra credentials in his claim to represent and, at the same time, exert some influence on his community. Harb's building construction firm also involves him in relations with local and state government agencies. As a consequence, this leader has shown some consideration towards converting his ethnic capital to political capital by considering running for state election, in return for his longstanding support for the Liberal Party (his political patron) in the editorial policy of his newspaper, *An-Nahar*.

Another mode of entry to the field of ethnicity is through the conversion of possessed political capital to ethnic capital. In this case, some ethnic leaders started their public life by joining one of the major political parties in Australia. At a later stage in their political career, they decided to champion the cause of their ethnic community by converting some of the political capital they acquired while in the field of Australian politics into ethnic capital. These leaders, however, would always represent the ethnic affairs policy of their party (be it Liberal or Labor). In the aftermath of 'Lebanese youths gangs' crisis that erupted in Sydney in October 1998, this category of ethnic leaders played a crucial role in disseminating the policy position of their party, and in the regulation of the community response to this crisis.

A person could be simultaneously the possessor of more than one capital derived from different fields without necessarily losing any in the process of converting one into the other. The conversion in this case would take the form of using the power and influence associated with the previous capital to buy a position in the new field, which would reflect to some degree the power position derived from the possession of his previous capital. To illustrate this point, we may consider the case of a prominent ethnic leader, NSW Member of the Legislative Council, Eddie Obeid. Obeid was the owner of the most popular Arabic newspaper in Australia (*el-Telegraph*) and the founder of a community association, the Australian Lebanese Christian Federation. Then, because of his business success, he became the owner of an important printing press and, later on, an investor in real estate and the building industry (McClymont, 2000, pp. 29, 37). While he was involved in these activities, he converted some of his ethnic capital to develop an involvement in the ALP, where he became renowned as a 'numbers man', and was ultimately appointed Minister for Fisheries and for Mineral Resources in the NSW government in 1999. With the possession of all these capitals, this person was in an ideal position to use any one capital to acquire more of the other two. In any event, his position in the state government enabled him to act as a 'father figure' for many Lebanese

associations, capable of dispensing favours to his community, recruiting more supporters to his party and drumming up political allegiance to the policy of his government (McClymont & Davies, 2002, p. 1). In the final analysis, all these symbolic credentials will be used to further his political status within the party.

When possessors of any of the economic, political and cultural capital, or any combination of them, convert their capital into ethnic capital, they acquire in the process a specific symbolic capital that constitutes the basis of, in Weberian terms, the charismatic component of their authority (Weber, 1991). This symbolic capital is referred to in Arabic as *wajaha*, and the person who has it is described as *wajih*. *Wajaha* refers to a social attribute that puts the person who possesses it in the forefront when dealing with problems experienced by his community (the term *wajaha* in Arabic is derived from the word *wajh*, meaning the face of a person or an object). As such, *wajaha* is initially acquired when possessors of a particular capital (be it political, economic, social or cultural, or any combination of these) convert it into an ability to be in a leading position in dealing with problems experienced by members of their community. Once possessed, a person can claim a degree of power and influence over his followers. Yet for the influence of the *wajih* over his followers to be functional in the field of ethnicity, and not just the basis for esteem in the local community, it has to be valorised by the State by making the objectives of the *wajaha* compatible with the State definition of ethnicity. In other words, *wajaha* has to be recognised by the State as expressing an ethnicity. Even though it has its origin in the social structure of Lebanon and other Mediterranean societies, the State policy towards the migrants and the realities of migrants in Australia provides a new ground for its reactivation.

Wajaha constitutes an integral part of the symbolic capital associated with Lebanese leaders in the ethnic field in contemporary Australia. *Wajaha* helps to create the impression that ethnic leaders are simply working for the well-being of their community. However, the moral panic around 'Lebanese gangs' since 1998 has resulted in *wajaha* being rendered ineffective, and has led to an attempt by the State to valorise a new form of symbolic capital to restore its symbolic domination over the Lebanese community.

Who Represents What? The politics of ethnic representation

It is estimated that in the city of Sydney there are at least 100 Lebanese community organisations, and most of them were established between the late 1970s and the early 1990s, a period characterised by the consolidation of the field of ethnicity. Most of these organisations were formed around specific religious, regional and familial loyalties despite the widespread rhetoric about their representation of the broader Lebanese community. In the acts of forming such organisations, these loyalties were reconstructed in a context that was determined by local (i.e. Australian) and global (i.e. coming mainly from the country of origin) factors. In the past, there had been attempts to create umbrella organisations such as the Lebanese Community Council (LCC) to represent the whole Lebanese community, but their claim to represent the whole community was constantly contested by rival organisa-

tions. This could be evidenced when an affiliated member decides to take a position different to that of the umbrella organisation in relation to a particular community issue, or when it is realised that the membership of the majority of members in the umbrella organisation is simply tokenistic.

Ever since its inception in 1983, the leaders of LCC had many problems in claiming the right to represent the common position of the Lebanese community. Though membership in LCC has increased over the years, the number of 'real' affiliates did not exceed 30 associations in 2000–2001, and the majority of them are regional and family associations. Some influential organisations, such as the Australian Lebanese Association (ALA) and the Maronite Catholic Society (MCS) never joined the LCC, and they have always refused to be present in the Council. The leaders of LCC and ALA have a lot of disagreements over the legitimacy of representing the Lebanese community. The LCC leaders claim that they represent the Lebanese community because their council is made up of a large number of community groupings. The leaders of ALA, on the other hand, make a counter-claim that their association is the sole legitimate representative of the Lebanese migrants because first, it is a branch of a worldwide organisation (i.e. The World Cultural Union—WCU) representing the Lebanese diaspora, and secondly, its mother organisation (WCU) is founded by the Lebanese government and has branches in different states in Australia. In addition, each party challenges the right of the other to community representation on the ground of the identity of its constituency. ALA states that LCC predominantly represents Muslim associations, and consequently, it has no right to claim that it represents all Lebanese migrants in Sydney. In contrast, LCC leaders confirm the cross-religious nature of its constituency and accuse ALA implicitly of being unable to represent all the Lebanese except for a section of the Lebanese Maronite Catholics.

The settlement of the dispute about the legitimacy of representing the 'Lebanese community' is crucial in determining the amount of ethnic capital that could be possessed by the Lebanese leaders in the field of ethnicity. The more representative a leader is, the more he (ethnic leaders are mostly male) obtains ethnic capital needed for improving his power position in the field of ethnicity.

The struggle over the representation of the community is certainly not confined to the above issue. The panic around 'Lebanese gangs' from 1998 on further reveals the contradictory and contested nature of ethnic leadership among the Lebanese community, and the impact of State policy on the politics of ethnic representation.

In October 1998, a 14-year-old boy of Korean background was stabbed to death in a footpath brawl in Sydney's south-west. The media in Sydney immediately described the assailants as of 'Middle Eastern appearance' and more specifically referred to them as 'Lebanese' (see Collins *et al.*, 2000). The NSW Premier, Bob Carr, used the same ethnic descriptor 1 week later when describing the identity of a group who were suspected of shooting at a police station in the proximity of the first incident. On 2 November 1998, Premier Carr made the following remarks: 'Police investigators have revealed that a Lebanese gang involved in drugs and car theft has been identified in relation to recent disturbances. You're dealing here with a gang that is fully employed in criminal behaviour' (Humphries & Marsh, 1998,

p. 1). All major Lebanese organisations condemned this associating of criminal acts with Lebanese ethnicity, especially at a time when nobody was yet charged by police, let alone tried. However, their united position did not go beyond this condemnation. At first, the ALA President expressed his astonishment that even before any arrest was made the offenders were described as ‘Lebanese’. Then, the Australian Lebanese Joint Committee (ALJC), of which ALA and LCC were members, issued a press release in which they stated that: ‘... all lawful means should be used to convince the Premier that all those comments [about the presumed involvement of “Lebanese gangs” in the stabbing and shooting incidents and other criminal acts] were in fact unjustified and should be retracted’ (English & Trute, 1998, pp. 1, 4). No sooner had this press release been published, the ALA President changed his position completely, and later defended Carr’s ‘good and friendly relation’ with the Lebanese community. He also ridiculed the consideration of taking the Premier to court because of the link he made between criminal acts and the Lebanese identity of the presumed perpetrators. During this time, when we were in the field observing the unfolding of events, it was alleged by the President of LMA that the President of ALA changed his position as a result of personal pressure applied on him by a well-known Lebanese-Australian member of the Upper House belonging to Carr’s Labor Party. On the other hand, LCC leaders did not insist on adopting the above press release, but were primarily concerned about forging a community consensus on the matter. As usual, their strategy was to make the Council a leading party in creating a united and, consequently, a moderate position for all the Lebanese organisations. The care for ‘unity’ and ‘moderation’ is a necessity for the presumed role of the Council to represent all Lebanese organisations in Sydney.

A careful look at the responses of ALA and LCC to the crisis of ‘Lebanese gangs’ reveals that the leader of the former was concerned, among other things, about dissociating his organisation from defending the reputation of criminals who were suspected of being Muslim youths. Two years later, in 2001, when a group of youngsters coming from a Lebanese Muslim background were charged with a supposedly racially motivated gang rape, this strategy of invoking the Muslim identity of the accused ‘gang’ was used once again by Maronite Catholic leaders, including the ex-president of ALA (see Poynting *et al.*, 2003). As in the previous occasion, their aim was to exclude Muslim youths from the right to belong to Lebanese ethnicity and to associate them exclusively with criminal acts which had been publicly linked to the ‘Lebanese community’. Ultimately, they wanted to abolish any link between Lebanese ethnicity and crime to preserve the value of their ethnic capital. On the other hand, the LCC leaders fought very hard to get all the major Lebanese organisations to adopt a common standpoint so that they could speak on their behalf and consolidate their image of representing the whole Lebanese community. This objective could best be served by defending an inclusive image of the Lebanese identity. Similar dynamics can be observed a fortiori in ‘ethnic community’ responses to September 11 (see Poynting *et al.*, 2003), but cannot be dealt with in the present paper.

The Australian Arabic Communities Council (AACC) is a second umbrella organisation that seeks to represent all Arabic-speaking communities including the

Lebanese community. It had always competed with the LCC over the right to represent Lebanese organisations. The tension between LCC and AACC over the question of communal representation (an essential ingredient of ethnic capital) prevented their effective cooperation in addressing the 'Lebanese gang' crisis and the racist slurring of the community. Indeed, independent community activists (one author of this paper was present at the time of the meeting) approached the LCC to consider, along with other members of the ALJC (ALA, LMA and MCS), the establishment of a new and independent committee in which the largest possible number of community organisations and activists would be represented. The aim was to avoid the sensitive issue of working under the name of any existing body that may cause others to refuse cooperation on the ground of repressing their distinctive and leading roles. Two weeks after the initiative was proposed, the LCC rejected the proposal, arguing that there was no need for a new committee because it already had a youth sub-committee which could be joined by any association and any individual willing to work under the LCC umbrella. The question of what body (or leader) should have the upper hand in leading the campaign to deal with the 'gang' crisis and the vilification of the community, led to the fragmentation of the community response. Each party was willing only to take steps that would promote its image of being the main, if not the sole, representative of the community. This promotion would certainly accumulate more social capital of *wajaha* for the leader concerned.

As Werbner (1991) suggests, around particular issues, ethnic leaders develop contradictory and competing strategies—along a continuum of protest and accommodation. Generally speaking, three main positions were developed within the community in relation to the 'Lebanese gang' crisis and the attendant racist campaign against the Lebanese community. One position, angered by the vilification of the Lebanese community, argued that the crimes that were carried out by a group of youngsters should primarily be identified as acts of Muslim rather than Lebanese youths. The proponents of this position were interested in protecting the symbolic value of Lebanese ethnicity around which their leadership is structured by underlining the Islamic identity of the accused. To be a leader of a criminalised ethnicity would certainly undermine the symbolic value of one's leadership and, consequently, would weaken one's power position in the field of ethnicity. The position taken by the above-mentioned leaders is best characterised as 'competitive ethnicity' because its representatives compete with each other over the definition of their constituency. By establishing the ability to represent the community that fits the description of the State, they hope to receive State recognition of their communal leadership and all the favours that come along with this recognition.

The second position, characterised as 'incorporated ethnicity', expressed its dissatisfaction with the racist slandering of the community, but its representatives were not prepared to hold the NSW Premier responsible for abetting the racist campaign against the Lebanese community, let alone to force him 'by any means' to retract his comments on associating the 'Lebanese' identity with the accused criminals. This position was adopted by major Lebanese organisations that were members of ALJC and the AACC (for copies of the letters written by ALJC and AACC and addressed to the Premier, see *An-Nahar*, 1 December 1998). Each party

in this general position was concerned to please the Premier by dropping the demand to take him to court for his racist remarks. Had they pressed this demand, and the second demand to make ethnic descriptors illegal when referring to the identity of criminals, they would have lost the State recognition necessary for the maintenance of their community leadership in the field of ethnicity (Poynting *et al.*, 2003). Furthermore, failing to obtain the State recognition would also mean the loss of government funding necessary for the financial and institutional survival of their organisations. The AACC, for instance, made this point very clearly when it argued against the request of some its members to press on with a legal case against the Premier. At the same time, in taking this position, leaders of AACC encountered the other problem of maintaining the legitimacy of their leadership in the eyes of their constituency.

Finally, the third position—what we call ‘rebellious ethnicity’—was taken by a number of independent community activists who focused mainly on the need to fight the racist campaign against Lebanese (and Asian) youth. Without hesitation, they called for suing the Premier if he did not retract his ‘racist remarks’, and demanded that the use of the ethnic descriptors in identifying criminals be made illegal. They also urged the government to address youth crime in broad economic and social terms that would go beyond the simple solution of strictly enforcing law and order as proposed by the state government (Poynting *et al.*, 2003).

According to the Premier, and those who shared his views (the Police Commissioner, prominent politicians and some media representatives), criminality and violence were somehow inherent to Lebanese culture. Representatives of rebellious ethnicity wanted to preserve the symbolic value of Lebanese ethnicity by arguing that youth crime was a general societal problem rather than one pertaining specifically to the Lebanese community. Moreover, they suggested that the solution to this problem lies in the working of the broader society rather than in ‘fixing’ the Lebanese community and its culture. In contrast, the Premier argued that first, the community should acknowledge that the youth gang problem is primarily a Lebanese community problem, and that an immediate solution should be based on creating tougher laws and strictly applying them to the cohort of the primary suspects: Lebanese youth. Furthermore, the government argued that the role of Lebanese community leaders should be strictly confined to cooperating with the police to catch the members of the ‘Lebanese gangs’. Even when (in mid-2001) the government finally acknowledged the need to deal with ‘the causes of ethnic youth crime’, it insisted on arguing that they derive from circumstances specific to the Lebanese community and its culture. This was clearly reflected in the so-called ‘Partnership Plan to Prevent Violence and Crime among Arabic Speaking Young People’ (Carr, 2001) which was proposed by the state government to address the problem of ‘Lebanese ethnic gangs’. Furthermore, the government policy of ethnicising criminality was reinforced by the Premier’s decision to give the Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research ‘a free rein to collect data on the possible link between ethnicity and crime’, and by calling for the use of ‘ethnic descriptors’ to assist law enforcing agencies ‘in making arrest’. Premier Carr was clear on this point when he stated: ‘We should be blind if we ignored the fact that some groups will recruit gang

members from a specific ethnicity' (Research Institute of the United Australian Lebanese Assembly, 2001, pp. 2–11). Carr expressed similar views while discussing the issue of gang rape that occurred in western Sydney around August 2000. In this instance, too, Carr defended his naming of the rapists as 'Lebanese' on the basis that the members of the gang define themselves as 'Lebanese' (interview with Alan Jones, 2GB radio, 7:10 a.m., 12 August 2002).

The Devalorisation of Ethnicity: the beginning of dismantling multiculturalism and the ethnic field

In the process leading to the construction of the ethnic field, the establishment of the Ethnic Affairs Commission (EAC) in New South Wales in May 1977 represented an essential step by giving this field a formal and institutional presence in the State. In March 1985, the EAC became independent of the Premier's Department following the establishment of the Ethnic Affairs Ministerial portfolio in December 1984. A close look at the Ethnic Affairs Act (No. 23, 1979) (State Records NSW, <http://www.records.nsw.gov.au/cguide/c4g/eac.htm>) reveals that by establishing EAC the state of New South Wales had adopted a policy of acknowledging the ethnic diversity of its population, and that ethnic communities have special needs that would require its intervention to address them. Also, the specified functions of the Commission ensured the valorisation of ethnicity (competitive and incorporated ethnicity as symbolic capital) according to the policy terms of the state government. In this context, EAC funding of ethnic organisations provided an essential means to keep them in line with its state-sponsored policy. In brief, at the level of the state of New South Wales, the Ministry for Ethnic Affairs and the EAC were the main State institutions in the field of ethnicity that paved the ground for the emergence of valorised ethnicity and legitimate ethnic leadership.

In April 1999, 6 months after the outbreak of the 'Lebanese gang crisis' and following the victory of the governing Labor Party in the state election, the NSW Premier announced the decision of his government to change his Ethnic Affairs portfolio to Minister for Citizenship and to replace the EAC with the Community Relations Commission (CRC). This announcement caused a lot of reaction among community leaders and state politicians. On the far right of the political spectrum (i.e. One Nation Party), the Premier's announcement was received with enthusiasm (*Hansard*, 10 October 2000). In contrast, critics of the Bill in the Upper House (e.g. Dr Chesterfield-Evans, a Democrat) accused the government of trying to appeal to the votes of 'the ultra-conservative' and the 'racists' by changing the name of the EAC to CRC, and consequently, to change the funding policy of the Commission by making funds available to 'community' rather than 'ethnic' groups. Chesterfield-Evans also stated that while people lobbied him on both sides of the argument, he discovered that: 'The better funded-groups seem to support the bill, and the smaller and unfunded groups do not' (*Hansard*, 10 October 2000).

In their critique of the bill, state politicians further revealed the shift in the government policy on multiculturalism. They conceived of Carr's new policy as a way of 'mainstreaming' Hansonism that symbolised racist policy and stood for the

return to assimilationism. Peter Wong, a Unity Party member of the Upper House, argued that:

One example of the ‘mainstreaming’ of Hansonism ... is the current efforts by the NSW Labor government to rename the Ethnic Affairs Commission (EAC) as the Community Relations Commission (CRC). One of the issues Hanson has campaigned against was government grants going to ethnic communities and multicultural projects. The EAC was the prime government agency which handed out these grants and spoke on behalf of ethnic communities in the state. (*Hansard*, 10 October 2000)

Helen Sham-Ho, an independent member of the Upper House, argued that both major parties [Liberal and Labor Party] have actually retreated from their multicultural policies.

[Prime Minister] Howard is talking about cultural diversity of the Australian society but refuses to use the word multiculturalism, because that implies adopting government policies to recognise non-Anglo migrant cultures. In the same way, NSW Labor Bob Carr wants to talk about ‘community relations’ and not ‘ethnic affairs’. (*Hansard*, 10 October 2000)

In the words of Usha Harris, an information officer for the Multicultural Arts Alliance, ‘Carr is taking the word “multiculturalism” out of politics. He has changed his portfolio from Minister for Ethnic Affairs and Multiculturalism to Minister for Citizenship. Now he is changing the name of EAC. Basically, “ethnic” is out now’ (Seneviratne, 2000). Bill Cope, a former Director of the Office of Multicultural Affairs in the Prime Minister’s Department, and Mary Kalantzis, Dean of the Faculty of Education at RMIT University, Melbourne, defended the term ‘ethnic’ by arguing that the word ‘community’ described everything, ‘and by describing everything describes nothing’. Cope and Kalantzis (2000, p. 19) further indicated that out of the 92 submissions received by the Upper House Committee looking into the Community Relations legislation, only two prepared by Carr and EAC Commissioner, Stepan Kerkyasharian, preferred the words ‘community’ and ‘Citizenship’ to ‘ethnic’ and ‘multiculturalism’.

Both supporters and opponents of the Community Relations legislation clearly indicate that the state government was embarking on a process of dismantling the ethnic field in the state of New South Wales by redefining immigrants in terms of citizenship and community relations. Indeed, the state began to abolish the basis of multiculturalism by negating the ethnically diverse character of the Australian society and its implications for social policy. This shift in the political views of the state government came at a time when the devalorisation of Lebanese ethnicity was at its peak in the context of addressing the issue of crime and ‘Lebanese gangs’. During this process, the misrecognition of the ethnic field as a field of disinterested pursuits became impossible, and consequently, a crisis in the legitimation of the ethnic field emerged. The government and its supporters could no longer justify the presence of the ethnic field and criminalise ethnicity at the same time. On the other hand, Lebanese community leaders and other ethnic leaders

rejected the racialisation of criminality despite the different strategies they have used to maintain 'good' relations with the State representatives. It was at this moment, when Lebanese (and Asian) ethnicity was demonised and ethnic leaders were rejecting the racist devaluing of (Lebanese) ethnicity, that the state government started to dismantle the ethnic field in New South Wales, and to initiate its gradual replacement with a field of community relations. In brief, the management of the 'gang crisis' in the ethnic field has greatly facilitated the shift in the policy from 'ethnic affairs' to 'community relations and citizenship'.

Conclusion: towards an analysis of the ethnic field

In New South Wales a new rhetoric of 'community relations' is reconstituting the 'ethnic field' and some of its attendant policies of multiculturalism. Along with this change, the symbolic capital of ethnicity is exposed to systemic attempts of devalorisation by the state Labor government, the representatives of the One Nation Party, the Police Commissioner and important sections of the media. In the midst of this process, deeply entrenched assimilationist views in the 'white' community have further been activated. The emphasis of the state government on community relations is transforming the latter into a new symbolic capital around which a new category of leaders is emerging. 'Community relations' leaders are gradually replacing 'ethnic' leaders. Ethnicity is being gently pushed to the margins under the new rhetoric of community relations. The future development of Australian ethnic politics will certainly demonstrate whether this shift has significant consequences for the wider project of multiculturalism in Australia.

For the time being, we believe it is necessary to develop a more sustained analysis of the ethnic field by exploring questions around ethnic capital in more depth. The first question would be how the State allows for the valorisation of certain ethnicities over others. The second would entail examining in more detail how the general field of ethnicity relates to the accumulation of particular ethnicities. The third and related issue would be to explore what is actually accumulated when one accumulates ethnicity and how this is converted into what we have called general ethnic capital. This could be best achieved by an empirical mapping of the key organisations which constitute a particular ethnic community, and how ethnic capital is distributed unevenly across these organisations within the wider field of ethnicity.

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