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Strong in Their Weakness or Weak in Their Strength? The Case of Lebanese Diaspora Engagement with Lebanon

Jennifer Skulte-Ouais* & Paul Tabar

Department of Social Sciences, Lebanese American University, Beirut, Lebanon

This paper seeks to assess when and how the Lebanese Diaspora in Australia, Canada and the USA is most able to affect homeland affairs in Lebanon. Drawing on over 300 in-depth interviews and analysing literature on the Lebanese Diaspora and Lebanon itself, the article seeks to categorise the spectrum of diaspora engagement with Lebanon and more fully define the diaspora's homeland participation. Tentative conclusions indicate that the Lebanese Diaspora is most able to affect homeland affairs when the state is absent or unable to perform its functions as well as because the various political factions do not want a state built. However, to date, despite its renowned strength, the Lebanese Diaspora has not been able to affect change in the sectarian nature of Lebanese homeland politics nor in the too often replicated sectarian politics in the diaspora. We conclude that the diaspora is thus both strong and weak vis-à-vis affecting homeland public affairs.

Keywords: diaspora; transnationalism; Lebanon; non-state actors; migration; politics

Introduction

The Lebanese Diaspora has long been a topic of study due to its large size relative to that of the home country's population. Estimates range from 12 to 15 million on the upper end, according to the World Lebanese Cultural Union,¹ compared to fewer than four million inside Lebanon. Also notable is the Diaspora's strong attachment to Lebanon itself. Though the country

*Corresponding author. Email: jennifer.skulte-ouaiss@lau.edu.lb

won its independence only in the early 1940s, there had long been a sense of an entity called Lebanon, though historically smaller than the current UN-member state. A consociational democracy – reflecting the need to ensure power-sharing among the diverse and numerous religious and ethnic groups that comprise Lebanese society – Lebanon has long reflected a dual nature of economic and social vibrancy as well as chronic conflict and periodic economic crisis, resulting in a large diaspora. For many scholars, ‘the volume of this “continuously reversible population flow” of the Lebanese Diaspora is virtually unprecedented in populations that are so widely dispersed.’² In fact, some would argue that it is almost impossible to accurately determine how many Lebanese are inside the country and how many are outside at any given time due to the frequency of travel and the ‘in between-ness’ of many Lebanese lifestyles.

Something that has not been documented enough among this Diaspora is its strength, be it economic, cultural or political. The Lebanese Diaspora has spread to virtually all corners of the globe and has often done well adapting to their ‘adopted’ homelands.³ Still, despite their acculturation in many places (or perhaps because of it), this research shows that the Lebanese Diaspora has long retained and/or rebuilt ties to the homeland, using hard earned economic and social capital to try to ‘build’ the Lebanon.

Given the long history of political and social conflict in the country, a chronically weak state, fragile economic prospects for those who choose to remain in the country, and a myriad of other factors, why does the Lebanese Diaspora seem to so highly value keeping involved in their homeland? While this paper will not focus on trying to answer this question as it is discussed elsewhere in the literature,⁴ it will look at the organised means by which the Diaspora remains involved in its homeland and its impact on the character of the Lebanese state and its relationship to the major socio-political groups in Lebanon. Specifically, we seek to assess how and when the diaspora is able as well as not able to affect public affairs in Lebanon – that is, to assess when the Lebanese Diaspora is ‘strong’ and when is it ‘weak’.

The discussion and conclusions of the article result from data gathered from over 300 in-depth interviews with individuals and groups inside Lebanon who are significantly tied to the Diaspora and individuals and groups in Australia, Canada and the USA who are actively engaged in Lebanese public affairs. The frequency and intensity of Diaspora participation in all aspects of Lebanese life (politics, the economy, society, etc.) as well as the Diaspora’s autonomy from the Lebanese state reflect the power that they have built up in the Diaspora as well as their transnational

positioning. Yet, we contend that the Lebanese Diaspora intentionally and unintentionally participates in preventing the building of their homeland state by often unquestionably supporting the major political parties and other Lebanese Diaspora–homeland organisations whose ultimate aim is to serve their respective communal interests. How and when the Diaspora is able to realise its goals in public affairs in Lebanon is the focus of the paper.

Following this introduction, the paper turns to a deeper explanation of the main research question structuring the present discussion, the methodology of the research project from which this paper draws its data and then onto a brief review of the literature on the Lebanese Diaspora and its involvement with the home state. This is followed by an overall discussion of the project's research findings, highlighting three specific examples from the data analysis regarding how and when Lebanese Diaspora organisations are most powerful in their engagement in homeland public affairs and how and when they are weak. The paper concludes with some thoughts on how the present research adds to an understanding of the Lebanese case as well as how the paper's conclusions might and might not be generalised and areas where further research and analysis is needed.

Why look at 'When is the Lebanese Diaspora Strong?'

This is one of the main questions that has animated our gathering of data on the Lebanese Diaspora and a question that also has broader relevance for other diasporas worldwide. When we started the research project described briefly above, we wanted above all to be able to demonstrate when this anecdotally powerful diaspora was indeed powerful and when it was not. Before going any further, however, we needed to define what is meant by 'powerful' and 'weak'. Our definition is that 'powerful' means 'able to attain stated or implied goals' (whether or not shared by other groups inside or outside Lebanon) and that 'weak' means 'unable to attain stated or implied goals' (again, whether or not shared by other groups inside or outside Lebanon). Once we defined these core concepts, we sought to find data describing the Diaspora's relationship to Lebanon in such terms. Prior to our research, we could find little data that documented what is assumed to be true of the Lebanese Diaspora: that this specific diaspora is powerful and affects Lebanese public life. So how does it do this? When? Are only specific parts of the diaspora involved? Is it only the diaspora in specific host/adopted countries? Numerous related questions came up but we finally returned to what we saw as the key question that would both address the concerns of the larger research

agenda on diasporas, Lebanese politics and society, and the Lebanese state as well as be able to yield demonstrable data on the activities of the Lebanese Diaspora. The aim was to better understand how and when the Lebanese Diaspora affects Lebanese public affairs, and the impact of these activities on the overall role of the state in Lebanon.

Methodology

This paper is the direct result of the 3-year research study funded by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), a Canadian Crown corporation. The project aimed to assess whether or not the Lebanese Diaspora engages in peace-building or conflict perpetuation through describing and analysing Diaspora engagement in public affairs in Lebanon. For the present study, only Diaspora in three comparable countries with significant Lebanese settlement (Australia, Canada and the USA) is included. We define 'engagement in public affairs in Lebanon' to mean activities beyond the strictly private (e.g. sending remittances to a spouse) to capture individual as well as collective efforts to participate in public affairs, be they expressly political, economic and/or social. In turn, we examine how local actors (in Lebanon), including the state, deal with and respond to the engagement of the Lebanese Diaspora.

As with any research methodology, there are strengths and weaknesses. The large size of our study as well as its qualitative nature made possible not only the amassing of large amounts of data on a subject that still has limited documented evidence, but also a greater validity in the findings – not as a representative sample of the Lebanese Diaspora writ large but as a fairly representative sample of the *active* Lebanese Diaspora in three comparable countries. We utilised the 'snowball method' for constructing our interview sample, checking it against trusted descriptions of the Lebanese Diaspora community for each country (Australia, Canada, and the USA) as well as seeking to include all the major Lebanese sects when possible. Last, we also conducted numerous semi-structured interviews in Lebanon as not only a means to begin our list of individuals and organisations to interview in the Diaspora, but also as a check against recommendations we received in the field. Given the large amount of data collected during the course of the project, and the fact that it is qualitative data, we decided to use the software NVivo to organise and code the interview data for subsequent analysis. Our choice has allowed us to compare across countries and types of groups (e.g. religious organisation or political party) using themes such as 'community building [activities]' and 'political remittances'. The paper now turns to a review of literature key to our project.

Diaspora–Homeland Relations in the Literature

Despite the dramatic increase in research and writing on diasporan politics,⁵ few generalisations can still be made at the systemic level. Shain and Barth conclude that

altogether, more empirical studies should be conducted to provide a valid, generally applicable answer to the question of the direction in which Diasporas push. As migration flows accelerate, and Diasporas increase both in numbers and in political access to their homelands, answering this question becomes all the more important in understanding the future directions of homeland foreign policies.⁶

In the realm of international relations, Diaspora politics has often been viewed as more of a domestic or state level research topic. In ‘Remapping the Boundaries of “State” and “National Identity”: Incorporating Diasporas into IR Theorizing’, Adamson and Demetriou explore the means of incorporating diaspora into International Relations theory.⁷ They perceptively state that

the organizational form of ‘diaspora’ is being adopted by both non-state political entrepreneurs and state elites who are taking advantage of new technologies to use transnational practices of diaspora mobilization as a means of generating material resources and political support in an increasingly integrated global economy.⁸

The enormity of their impact on the nation-state constitutes diasporas as actors that in many ways play roles similar to those of nation-states and often fill in gaps left by nation-states in terms of development and even fulfill state duties. The task of defining these diasporic actors that are becoming increasingly integrated into the formal world of international politics and state relations is being undertaken throughout many fields.

To be sure, numerous studies discuss how globalisation has led to the increase and cohesion of diasporas.⁹ Ongoing developments in transportation and communications technology, as well as the increasing internationalisation of labour, mean that

it is now possible for these diaspora communities to remain much more deeply involved in the national struggles of their homelands than was ever possible in the past ... People of the diaspora continue to be members of the nations whose territories they have left behind ... Diaspora communities are able to maintain their ties to their homelands and to participate in the construction of transnational national communities in a variety of ways.¹⁰

Lebanese Diaspora–Homeland Relations: A Brief History

In regards to the Lebanese Diaspora and its relationship to the homeland, the literature includes case studies¹¹ as well as some cross-country comparisons such as Laurie Brand's book *Citizens Abroad*,¹² which examines Lebanese Diasporan politics from the angle of the sending state (i.e. Lebanon) and its strategies to politically link up with the Lebanese Diaspora. In contrast to Brand's analysis of the reaction of the sending state to its diaspora, there are few studies that seek to describe and explain the state–diaspora relationship from the opposite end, that is, the impact of diasporan political activities on the political process and the social forces of the homeland.¹³

An important aspect of Lebanese Diaspora participation in homeland public affairs is the deeply divided character of politics in Lebanon and how they are often, though not always, replicated abroad. In contrast to the relatively uniform set of political activities generally characteristic of diasporas,¹⁴ the deep and chronic divisions in Lebanese politics have proven influential in fermenting greater schisms within the Diaspora, as well as a tendency among some diasporan organisations to espouse a more radical form of political practice back in Lebanon, creating circular dynamics that are sometimes positive and other times negative.

The Lebanese state has never been able to reach out to the Lebanese Diaspora as a unitary body and has always failed to integrate them into its presumably national policies regarding the Lebanese migrants abroad. The confessional system of governance in Lebanon impacts on citizenship in such a way that the Lebanese find their identity more in their membership within a particular sect than in a unified sense of nationhood.¹⁵ The way in which the state composition impacts on Lebanese emigrants is perhaps the ingredient that most distinguishes the Lebanese Diaspora from other countries. Lebanon is also unique in that it has a long history of emigration and has, at many points, encouraged emigration.

The Lebanese state has attempted to establish more institutionalised connections with its large diaspora, however. The World Lebanese Cultural Union¹⁶ was formed in 1960 under the auspices of the then President Fu'ad Chehab and the full support of the Phalanges, a predominantly right wing Christian Party. It was a joint attempt by the state and members of the diaspora to collaborate and promote a favourable image of Lebanon on a global scale. This was an ambitious project that underwent crippling blows during the decades of war in Lebanon. The confessional divisions evident in loyalties to opposing factions in the war were reflected in the diaspora. The World Cultural Union continues to suffer from these divisions, which

were most manifest in the rivalries between regions hosting the largest concentrations of diasporans. Thus, the overall picture of state-diaspora relations that one sees today is fragmented and weak. Still, a significant portion of the Lebanese Diaspora remains highly involved in Lebanese affairs beyond the maintenance of nuclear family relations. It is to a description and analysis of this involvement that the paper now turns.

Discussion of Overall Research Findings

Our fieldwork in three immigrant countries (USA, Canada and Australia) shows that many active members of the Lebanese migrant communities belong to or support village and hometown associations as well as political organisations representing, or which are closely affiliated with, major political parties in Lebanon, though this varies with the host country. Our interviews and our field observation of some of their activities indicate that many of them engage in public activities oriented to the homeland. Interestingly, many of these activities can be perceived as activities usually performed by the state and/or activities that sometimes are mobilised to challenge the established power structure of the Lebanese state or the very foundation upon which it is based.

Out of the total number of interviews (322) conducted in the Lebanon, USA, Canada and Australia, we were able to interview representatives of 29 political groups, 44 village associations and 29 charity associations (see Chart 1: interviews in the Appendix). If we select village and hometown associations, we readily realise the significant contribution they make towards the development of the infrastructure of their 'home' villages. Apart from the huge amount of money spent on building churches and mosques, other funded projects include improving the supply of potable water, creating a clinic, building a hospital ward, expanding the community school and opening a new road to better access agricultural land.

Australia and Canada could be characterised as having a large number of political groups representing the political spectrum in Lebanon and generating a substantial amount of political funds for their respective political parties, whereas the Lebanese Diaspora in the USA is predominantly engaged in lobbying activities and campaigning for the rights of Lebanese expatriates to participate in the voting process in Lebanon. During the most recent general elections in Lebanon (2009), the municipal elections (2010) and even the election of the leaders of the Engineering Syndicate (2011), a new form of diasporan intervention in Lebanese politics emerged: supporters of the competing candidates were

brought to Lebanon from overseas to participate in the local elections and tip the balance in favour of a particular party.¹⁷

This said, however, the data demonstrate that the main function of the Lebanese Diaspora in these three countries, at least politically, lies mostly within the realm of fundraising for the purpose of supporting political and social activities of local actors (e.g. political parties, village associations and religious associations). Looking at their activities in their countries of settlement, the picture becomes more interestingly complex: all diaspora associations engaged in 'public activities' spend considerable time and effort in developing their resources (e.g. buying a property), harnessing support for their counterparts in Lebanon, recruiting new members and increasing the number of their supporters, engaging in fund-raising campaigns, disseminating cause-related ideas in media outlets, media activities and publications (including websites and other social media), holding political and social functions and organising political demonstrations and engaging with local politicians and political parties for the sake of supporting their respective cause. In sum, the most active Lebanese Diaspora organisations in the three countries of our research are significantly involved in Lebanon and in building the Lebanese–Australian, –Canadian or –American) community. Furthermore, activities conducted with the aim of development in Lebanon are often means for community-building in the host/adopted country and vice versa. Mr Sherif Khoury, president of the Canadian lobby group *Liban 2013*, summarises how the organisation's activities are implemented:

Our first event, our first presence, big presence in the community was at the Lebanese festival. The biggest gathering of the Lebanese Diaspora in Montreal ... we had a stand here and we tried to launch our petition there. Basically it is a symbolic petition people would vote for the right to vote. We managed to get around 3000 people at that event and a subsequent one ... was basically a way for us to keep the connection with our members ... [and] to acquire the moral and financial ... support necessary for us to maintain our course of action.¹⁸

Thus, we have found that the primary organised vehicles for diaspora engagement in Lebanese public affairs are political parties, village associations, sect-based charitable associations and, less commonly, pan-Lebanese associations such as alumni chapters or lobbying groups (which are only really active as 'lobbying groups' in the USA.¹⁹ As noted earlier, the predominant behaviour in all three host countries under study is division across sectarian, political and regional lines paralleling those found inside Lebanon; more often than not, however, sectarian and political considerations trump the regional (i.e. the location of the

migrant's 'home' community in Lebanon). There is considerable overlap between sect and political party identification and engagement. In all cases, we found that political parties, village associations and, to a lesser extent, other types of diaspora organisations were more accurately defined as transnational in scope as well as in operation. In addition, organisational dynamics do not solely reflect Lebanon as the power core and the Diaspora as the follower, but rather demonstrate a 'back-and-forth' dynamic across national boundaries. This is further highlighted by the involvement of individuals going back and forth between Lebanon and the Diaspora as has been repeatedly noted in this article.

In this following section, we provide overviews of a few sample organisations/groups that have emerged as actors who are highly engaged in public affairs in Lebanon. These three cases also highlight how and when highly engaged groups are able to attain their stated goals in Lebanese public affairs. It should be noted that none of the following is strictly diaspora-based; rather, each is a unique blend of diaspora and homeland (and sometimes others') agency and resources. In our view, this demonstrates the transnational nature of the diaspora–homeland relationship. These cases also reflect diaspora organisations that we feel best demonstrate the Lebanese Diaspora at its most powerful, though as will be discussed in the conclusion, the use of the word 'powerful' is perhaps best written with quotation marks.

Hizbullah

Hizbullah, directly translated as 'Party of God' but often referred to within Lebanon as 'the Resistance', is a Shi'a Muslim militant group and political party. Founded as a militia during the 1975–1990 civil war, it later adapted to post-war conditions and created a political wing. In recent years, it has arguably become the centre of what is currently the Government²⁰ (and until February 2012, called the March 8 alliance). While it claims that it receives significant funds from its supporters worldwide, it also receives significant in-kind and other support from Syria and Iran. In addition to its strong and disciplined military wing, as well as its well-oiled political machine, *Hizbullah* owns a satellite television station and does extensive social programming across Lebanon where *Shi'a* Muslims dominate.

Many specialists on political parties and movements in Lebanon view *Hizbullah* as 'the most powerful single political movement in Lebanon'.²¹ Along with the *Amal* Movement, which also has a significant and organised base in the Diaspora, the two parties claim to represent the vast majority of the *Shi'a* population in the country and the Diaspora. Last but not least,

the organisation has a formidable media presence (as noted above) in both TV and radio. *Al-Manar*, the organisation's satellite television station, is shown throughout the world but also banned by a number of Western states who claim that the station incites hatred, particularly against Jews and Israel.

Of particular interest for our research is, of course, how and when such a powerful organisation as *Hizbullah* has behaved transnationally to affect public affairs in Lebanon. It should be noted that in addition to formulating and executing what amounts to a foreign policy separate from that of the Lebanese state (e.g. agreeing to the ceasefire to stop the July 2006 War), it also has *de facto* control over South Lebanon and a near monopoly on social and educational services in the area.²²

Hizbullah's relations with the Diaspora are strong and specialists believe that the organisation receives significant financial and in-kind support from the Shi'a Lebanese Diaspora in West Africa, where it is particularly strong, as well as in the USA, Australia and a handful of countries in Latin America.²³ Given that *Hizbullah* is considered a terrorist organisation in the three countries involved in our study of the Diaspora, we had to be careful in our research regarding how information was obtained and, in the end, the organisation was also equally careful in what it shared with us. In Australia, for example, our research has revealed to us that a large number of the Lebanese Shi'a Diaspora support *Hizbullah* and, to a much lesser degree, the *Amal* Movement. In fact, *Amal* control of the first Shi'a mosque in Australia (built in 1983 in Sydney) was contested by *Hizbullah* in the mid-1980s, and eventually came under its control via *al-Zahra* Muslim Association. Under the impact of classifying *Hizbullah* as a terrorist group in Australia, its sympathisers showed their material and political support of the party by not only making sure that the major Shi'a mosque, *al-Zahra*, came under their control, but also by creating a political group using a different name, the Lebanese-Australian National Council. This council was designed to engage in various political practices (e.g. demonstrations, writing political articles in local Arabic newspapers, etc.) with a view towards expressing its support of *Hizbullah* from abroad.²⁴

The context in which *Hizbullah* operates in the diaspora should be emphasised as it is forced to work clandestinely for its cause in Lebanon by using pseudonyms. In December 2011, the US government alleged that the organisation had been involved in a \$300 million money laundering scheme as well as drug trafficking in order to finance its activities. Prosecutors said the \$300 million was wired from Lebanon to the USA and used to buy used cars and ship them to West Africa. They said *Hizbullah* money-laundering channels were used to ship proceeds from the car sales

and narcotics trafficking back to Lebanon, involving the Lebanese Diaspora in a number of countries. While strongly denied by the party leadership, the Lebanese Central Bank responded to US pressure by closing one bank alleged to have had close ties with *Hizbullah*, Lebanese-Canadian Bank, and moved to push Lebanese banks overall to comply with US Treasury regulations regarding international money laundering.

The relationship between members of the Lebanese Diaspora and *Hizbullah* in Lebanon is certainly not confined to these alleged transnational activities. Our fieldwork in Sydney shows that Diaspora support shows itself in various political activities (street demonstrations and public gatherings within the community) and material support not directly handed out to *Hizbullah* but indirectly to people and associations in Lebanon closely associated with the party. In an interview with a founding leader of the main Shi'i association in Sydney, the informant said to us:

The association is like a mother, it was not tied to a village or a city, it had an indirect relationship with villages It was the association that started this kind of work (i.e. since the 1980s) Australia has the honor . . . to have one person sacrifice 600 dollars a year to sponsor and orphan. This covers his schooling and clothing.²⁵

When asked how many orphans he had taught till now, the informant replied: '2000 orphans'. Then he continued: 'We have done this for 20 years. I hope this does not stop'. In the context of justifying this activity, the interviewee added:

So a person whose father is a martyr and if that person has nothing then you will send him money for his education till the age of 20 But in Lebanon we have tens of thousands During the 2006 July war, after the protest we started knocking on doors and received no less than AUD 500 as a brotherly and social obligation, some people even paid AUD1000.

The only interview (conducted in Haret Hreik in May 2009) we managed to have with a party cadre confirmed the strong relationship that *Hizbullah* has with the Lebanese abroad. By way of introducing himself, the informant said:

I am among a team tasked with designing the overall strategy to encourage the Lebanese Diaspora to come to Lebanon and vote and to explain the importance of their participation. *Hizbullah* deputies visit diaspora [members] in the host countries, especially when there are special occasions to celebrate the 2006 victory against Israel.

At another point, the informant added: '*Hizbullah* has connections with all sectors of [the] Lebanese Diaspora. Sheikhs are assigned *tabligh* (to spread

the word) so that religious and ideological connections are established. Sheikhs travel from Lebanon [with the aim of] connecting with [the] Diaspora'. And when asked about financial support to *Hizbullah* by the Diaspora, the respondent stated:

The Lebanese Diaspora donates money. It is a religious duty ... It's normal [for someone in the diaspora] to donate his money if the person is willing to donate his blood. The idea of sacrifice is inherent in *Hizbullah* and our people in general and even supporters of *Hizbullah*. The idea of resistance is present among the whole society through defiance, information, politics and financial aspects. In this regard, it is not anymore the classical resistance but resistance of the whole society of all factions.

What is striking regarding the reliance of *Hizbullah* on the Diaspora for a sizable portion of its funding is that while the organisation itself is quite powerful inside Lebanon, the Diaspora itself does not seem to have a prominent leadership role nor does it seem to have staked out positions contrary to the organisation's leadership. As the interview excerpts reveal, while there is indeed significant support for *Hizbullah's* activities, especially the charitable ones, commentary on the party's policies and goals is largely absent. As will be discussed further in the conclusion, this type of diaspora participation seems characteristic of diaspora-political party interaction overall, demonstrating a supporting role for the diaspora, rather than a role as initiator or partner.

The Paal Village Association

Village associations have figured prominently in the literature on diaspora contributions to development of the home country.²⁶ While found the world over, Portes et al. note that transnational associations, including village associations, tend to be more popular as vehicles for homeland development (or in the case of our research focus, more broadly construed as homeland public engagement) among

older, better-educated, and more established immigrants who are more prone to participate in these ventures. The explanation is that these are the individuals with the information, the security, and the resources of time and money to dedicate to these initiatives.²⁷

In our research, we found that this was not the case. Rather, we found village associations to be more prevalent among migrants (or their relatives) who are tied more to the village than to the city; in other words, they did not engage in home-country rural-urban migration but rather migrated directly from rural Lebanon to a foreign country. In addition, in

the three countries under study, village associations were also stronger in locations where there was a higher concentration of migrants from the same family and/or village/town. Village associations also seemed more prevalent in Australia (as compared to Canada or the USA).

For the village association of *I'aal* in North Lebanon (known as the Charitable Association of *I'aal* in Australia), there is no clear line separating those who reside in the village and those who have emigrated, as there is so much circular migration and other forms of transnational interaction. The Deputy Head of the Municipality, Mr Nasser Al Dein Dieb, who has also been a migrant himself, stated that 'there is no single family in *I'aal* who [does] not have at least one relative residing in Australia.'²⁸ The association is active in a variety of infrastructure and education projects in the village; individual migrants are also active in private or family activities, for example, building elaborate and expensive vacation homes that get used only for a few weeks per year. In the 2009 general elections, almost 500 members of the *I'aal* Diaspora community in Sydney travelled to Lebanon to participate and vote. What made their participation very significant was the fact that they voted in a district (*Zghartah* district) where the race between the two major political forces running for this election (March 14 and March 8 alliances) was so close, making their contribution crucial for the final outcome of the elections.²⁹

This village association is by no means the largest that we encountered in our research but rather is typical of many such tight-knit organisations that seek to address the needs of the homeland community that cannot or will not be met by state authorities. Migrants in Australia from *I'aal* (the majority of *I'aal* inhabitants who live abroad are found in Sydney, Australia) have contributed abundantly to the development of the village in Lebanon: they have donated profusely to improve the services of the village school and clinic, and to many families who were in need to provide expensive health care to their sick family members or to support their childrens' education. As a result, all these activities qualify *I'aal*, like hundreds of other diasporan villages in Australia, Canada and the USA, to assume the role of a non-state actor.

More broadly, field notes based on 12 interviews from *Akkar*, the northern district in Lebanon in which *I'aal* is located, indicate that migrant communities not only contribute towards the development of these villages, but also to the development of most of the villages and towns (numbering 93) that are located in the area. Our findings show that migrant communities originating from the designated 12 villages have paid in full the cost of many development projects pertaining to their villages of

origin. In addition, they partially covered the cost of other community projects. Furthermore, we noticed that a lot of contributions are made through personal channels and/or village associations and local municipalities are almost completely absent in this process.

More importantly, this district had the experience of a migrant, called Issam Faris, who returned to Lebanon and used his enormous wealth not only to the benefit of developing the communities of *Akkar*, but also to convert his economic capital into building his social networks (social capital) and his political capital. He founded the Issam Faris Foundation in 1987 to provide educational, health and employment services; street lighting, sidewalks and other public infrastructure necessities; and agricultural irrigation canals and agricultural roads. Among the larger projects, the Foundation built entirely five municipal buildings in *Akkar* district.³⁰ In the 2000 general elections, Issam Faris was elected a member of parliament and became a Deputy Prime Minister from 2000 until 2005.

What is striking about the *I'aal* Village Association, as well as others like it tying the Lebanese Diaspora to villages and towns throughout Lebanon, is that they contribute significantly to the financial, social and even political sustenance of these villages and towns. Indeed, many Lebanese in the Diaspora note that given the failure of the Lebanese state to meet many of the basic infrastructure needs throughout the country, those in the Diaspora feel compelled to contribute not only their hard-earned money but also often their time and/or expertise to act in lieu of the state. Here, we thus see the Lebanese Diaspora as a powerful actor in its own right, sometimes acting as a partner in local development projects via the village associations but often taking on a leading role in the planning, fundraising and implementation of road, school, hospital, church/mosque building projects. While we collected numerous quotations of members of the Diaspora who felt that they could not affect the changes that they had hoped regarding education, politics, health outcomes and many other issues, due to corruption or local inaction, those citing successful Diaspora-led development projects were more numerous. Further analysis of this is included in the conclusion.

Auxilia

Unlike political parties or village associations, charities that are universal in their scope – that is, geared towards the betterment of Lebanese throughout Lebanon – were relatively rare in the three countries included in our project. For the Lebanese Diaspora, charity is more often funneled through political parties and/or village associations as well as religious

establishments. Still, Auxilia is an organisation that has strived to portray itself as non-sectarian and, at least in the Diaspora, has largely succeeded in doing so; however, its work inside Lebanon as well as its reputation in the country reflects the sectarian divisions that so often define the Diaspora's relationship to its homeland.

Founded in Lebanon in 1993 by a group of dentists and doctors who had graduated from the Lebanese University, Auxilia is rather unique among Diaspora organisations. This is not only because it was founded in Lebanon and only later moved to become a means for the Lebanese Diaspora to provide support to their homeland, but because it attempts (and seems to largely succeed) in being non-sectarian. The main objective of the organisation, which has significant branches in all three of our countries of research, is to keep the family together after the death or disability of its breadwinner and to enable children previously forced to enter orphanages to return to their nuclear families. By providing monthly stipends for food, school tuition and other general but necessary support for families, Auxilia also provides training and rehabilitation for mothers to become able to financially support their families. Last, the organisation provides support as needed, usually in the form of medical treatment and food aid, to some of the most marginalised villages in Lebanon, those in the borderlands.

Significant time and energy are put into fundraising for Auxilia in the USA and Canada and to a lesser extent in Australia, where the organisation is less institutionalised. Fundraising includes annual galas, sporting events and fund drives, in addition to the sponsoring option that is available year round. Each Auxilia chapter works directly with Auxilia in Lebanon and relies on the central office to identify and coordinate with children and families in need. Overhead costs in the Diaspora are kept purposefully low in order to send as much money as possible back to Lebanon.

According to Magida Chaiban, one of the leaders of Auxilia in Canada, neither politics nor sect has a place in Auxilia's work. She has endeavoured to make support for the organisation non-political by expressly approaching all members of the Lebanese community in Ottawa (as well as other interested individuals) in the framework of the need for Lebanese migrants to support their homeland, particularly those who are in such need. By staying clear of Lebanese and Lebanese Diaspora politics, and most importantly, by putting on a successful gala and university sporting event each year, Chaiban has seemingly been able to build a reputation for Auxilia that is non-partisan and non-sectarian.

As noted in the beginning of this section, however, while Auxilia does seem to try to work inside Lebanon without regard to sect, the

geographical reflection of sect divisions in the country have thus far made this an unreachable goal. Started in the overwhelmingly Christian region surround *Jbeil* (Byblos), Auxilia has indeed expanded to meet the needs of those most vulnerable; yet, when they have tried to 'set up shop' in areas dominated by *Hizbullah* and other social-service organisations, they have been met with quiet hostility and found that they could not operate effectively. Thus, the organisation provides most of its support to the needy in 'Christian' regions of Lebanon and those are in fact mostly Christian in background.

What is striking about Auxilia is that we found relatively few organisations like it: organisations that were perceived as non-partisan and non-sectarian and yet enjoyed significant support in the community (at least in the Diaspora). While we found numerous charitable organisations, they tend to be either religiously based (Sadr Foundation or Maronite Foundation in the World) or village-based (which are almost always based on the sect of the village). Beyond its relative uniqueness in these respects, why is Auxilia so striking? As will be analysed in greater depth in the subsequent section, given the chronic weakness and relative poverty of the Lebanese state and the concurrent 'strength' of the Lebanese Diaspora in terms not only of its aggregate wealth but especially its social networks (that tend to be overwhelmingly sect-based), there are significant social needs that go unmet while at the same time there are also significant numbers of diaspora organisations seeking to support their communities at home. Auxilia represents a rather novel approach for diaspora engagement in Lebanese public affairs: non-partisan, non-sectarian support for general social development throughout Lebanon.

Analysis and Conclusions

We started this project coming from the perspective of studying the Lebanese Diaspora and trying to find better ways to accurately describe their activities vis-à-vis Lebanese public affairs. We also assumed (and desired to further investigate) that the Lebanese Diaspora can be described as strong in that it is numerous, spread around the world, often (relatively) wealthy, and well-integrated in their host states. Thus, we sought to understand when and how the Lebanese Diaspora could harness its power to affect Lebanese public affairs in pursuit of specific and broad goals. What we found is that while the activities of Lebanese Diaspora undermine the assumption that nation-states are well-bounded, *territorially* exclusive political and socio-cultural entities, the transnational activities in which the Diaspora and domestic actors are included further demonstrate how

the state can be marginalised/partially replaced even when not territorially challenged.

However, as discussion of the cases of Hizbullah, P'al Village Association, and Auxilia illustrate, the Diaspora is never completely autonomous in its activities. Rather, it is strongest when tied into organisations that are strong at the national level inside Lebanon (e.g. Hizbullah) or when the Diaspora restricts its activities to the local level (e.g. P'al Village Association) but also takes the lead. What the Auxilia case seems to demonstrate is that the Lebanese Diaspora cannot be simultaneously strong (i.e. able to attain their stated goals) *and* autonomous from homeland sect and political structures at the *national* level.

Many of the stronger Diaspora organisations seek to carve out niches for themselves that substitute for what is often state activity, such as building the infrastructure and renovating schools. This differs from recognisable Diaspora charitable activity the world over in which these organisations are often tied to a specific locale and have *de facto* assumed authority for such activities, usually contending that the state is unable or unwilling to provide the implied services. In this way, while not seeking to supplant the state completely, such organisations seek to curtail the development of the state and at the same time build their own capacity to develop a specific area as they see fit. Village/hometown, charitable and religious organisations among the Lebanese Diaspora in the three countries under study were often involved in such activities – even when these organisations emphasised their desire to see the development of the Lebanese state to better meet the needs of Lebanese citizens.

We also argue in this paper that the Lebanese state (and society) shapes to a large degree the 'public' activities undertaken by Lebanese Diaspora groups, 'allowing' the Diaspora to engage in state challenging activities when it does not decrease the strength (potential or actual) of domestic actors. More specifically, the state in Lebanon is a set of 'weak' institutions vis-à-vis 'strong' communal groups and institutions that are predominant in Lebanese society. As a result, the state and political practice in Lebanon are hardly driven by a sense of a general public interest when dealing with Lebanese subjects including those who are settling abroad. Over the years, this has yielded by contrast a very active 'society' made up of sub-national groups, i.e. communal groups, who seek to use state resources to fulfill their particular needs, and in so doing contribute to keeping the state 'weak' and unable to rise above narrow (and shifting) communal interests and represent the general interest of the Lebanese people. This relationship between the state and society in Lebanon is best described as a relationship of a closed vicious circle: the more the state is controlled by sub-national

communal interests, the weaker it becomes, and the weaker the state is, the greater the possibility for subnational groups to control it.

Our research reveals that this closed vicious circle is reproduced to a large degree in the context of the relationship between the Lebanese Diaspora and the state in Lebanon. Accordingly, our research demonstrates that the 'public' engagement of the Lebanese Diaspora groups replicates to a large degree what their counterparts in Lebanon are doing in their relationship with the state: they 'prop up' the strength of the sub-national groups vis-à-vis the state and in so doing reinforce the weakness of the latter. Lebanese Diaspora groups provide their counterparts in Lebanon with resources needed to fulfill their communal needs and serve their narrow interests and by extension they perpetuate the structural weakness of the Lebanese state as defined above.

This said, we also claim that the 'form' in which the engagement of the Lebanese Diaspora in home 'public' activities takes place is also influenced by the political institutions and political culture of the receiving/host/adopted countries. Put differently, we argue that the 'opportunities' generated by the political structure of the host/adopted state shape not only the organisational form of 'public' activities performed by members of the Lebanese Diaspora inside Lebanon, but also the specific character of their 'public' intervention. A case in point is the existence of numerous 'lobbying' groups in the Lebanese Diaspora in the USA and the near absence of such groups in either Canada or Australia; while Diaspora groups in all three countries engage in lobbying activities vis-à-vis their host/adopted states regarding Lebanon, only in the USA is lobbying considered a specific activity in need of a formalised organisational structure.

It needs to be further highlighted here that the Lebanese Diaspora almost always acts with, or more accurately, as a part of, transnational organisations that include Lebanese domestic actors. These hybrid, transnational organisations might better be thought of as 'transfamilial', 'translocal' and 'transconfessional'. Being based on family, locality and confessional structures, their interconnections with their homeland mainly serve the interests of the constituents they represent. Once again, the social and structural constraints of these Diaspora organisations help reinforce the divisive and parasitic relationships that their counterparts in the homeland have with the Lebanese state.

In brief, the political system that was created in Lebanon in 1943 was moulded in such a manner that it precluded the state from developing into a (relatively) independent entity capable of forging national loyalty and a national interest – that is, a unified social contract. One could argue that it

was formed to prevent the assimilation of its subjects into citizens with equal rights and duties. This condition created the necessary space for the Lebanese Diaspora organisations, further removed from homeland constraints and enriched by host/adopted states, as well as Diaspora-supported organisations to increasingly assume many responsibilities that are supposed to be state-related. By abstaining from and being prevented from performing its role in the domain of social services as well as political and economic development,³¹ the Lebanese state not only created the space for communal groups (i.e. familial, regional and confessional forces) to step in and perform some of its putative responsibilities, but also for Diasporic Lebanese organisations to actively contribute to this process.

More importantly, up until now, the Lebanese Diasporic organisations have not developed the capability to free themselves from the constraints of the fragmented political system in Lebanon and act in a way that would encourage the building of a central and unified state rising above communal interests that is able to treat citizens equally. Instead, they are almost fully integrated by the fragmentary logic of the political system in Lebanon and, more often than not, they echo the need of their counterparts in their country of origin. Indeed, for many groups, particularly the political parties but also the village associations, the boundaries between Diaspora and domestic members/participants are quite relaxed to the extent that the Diaspora represents just another territorial unit of the country as a whole, much as Northern Lebanon or the Bekaa. This clearly has implications for how these groups act vis-à-vis Lebanese politics as well as in the international arena.

This issue pertains to the more important question about the capacity of Diaspora associations to make decisions independent of their counterparts in Lebanon. Our research shows that normally village and charitable associations have a greater say in the decision-making process affecting public activities in their place of origin; indeed, sometimes they initiate and lead development activities. Political associations in the diaspora, on the other hand, have a more complex relationship. Their impact on the decision-making process in Lebanon varies depending on the issue concerned: broadly speaking, if the issue under consideration is related to an activity and a policy stand adopted by the mother party, then the impact of the diasporan counterpart in the decision-making process is minimal. However, if the Diaspora seeks to contribute to various traditional development projects at the local level, it is able to often attain such goals as long as the scope of their activities remains local and not national (or universal, pan-Lebanese). Moreover, it is appropriate to anticipate that the decision-making capacity of the Diaspora will increase in the domain

of diasporan and homeland affairs if the immigrants are given the right to vote in absentia and even more so if the Diaspora is turned into an independent electoral district(s), with candidates selected from abroad.

Most often, the Lebanese Diaspora intentionally and unintentionally participates in preventing the building of a national state by unquestionably supporting the major political parties in Lebanon whose ultimate aim is to serve their respective communal interests. In so doing, they reinforce the dominant tendency among the political protagonists in Lebanon to deal with the state and its apparatuses as a 'war bounty'. The aim of each major political force (and many community-based organisations) in Lebanon is to ultimately control parts of the state in order to utilise its resources in support of its sectional interests. As this article demonstrates, too often in its dealings with the homeland, the Lebanese Diaspora intentionally and unintentionally not only seeks to replace the state in many of its functions but also assists in precluding it (much like their counterparts at home) from developing into an independent entity capable of developing a 'national will' and capably representing the Lebanese 'national interest'.

The strength of the Lebanese Diaspora, and its very real desire to remain connected to the homeland, enables and propels it to engage in public affairs in Lebanon. This strength is real and is based on the Lebanese Diaspora's financial success, high levels of education and incorporation into the host/adopted state society in Australia, Canada and the USA. This is also the case across the sects. Nevertheless, the Diaspora, as a group and as individuals or sub-groups, seems unable to effectively challenge the institutions and processes maintained by what scholars and the public generally define as a weak Lebanese state. Thus, the formal and informal institutions of politics and society in Lebanon continue to facilitate engagement in Lebanese public affairs that is virtually mirrored in the diaspora while, at the same time, national development at all levels remains lagging. Thus, the 'strong' Lebanese Diaspora remains too 'weak' to affect significant change in its homeland.

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Notes

- [1] Garabet, "Lebanese Diaspora."
- [2] Cohen, *Global Diasporas*, 94.
- [3] Abdelhady, *Lebanese Diaspora*; Perlman, "Emigration and Power"; Hourani and Shehadi, *Lebanese in the World*.
- [4] See Abdelhady, "Beyond Home/Host Networks."
- [5] Adamson and Demetriou, "Remapping the Boundaries"; Shain and Barth, "Diasporas and International Relations Theory"; Portes, Escobar, and Arana, "Bridging the Gap," among others.
- [6] Shain and Barth, "Diasporas and International Relations Theory," 475.
- [7] Adamson and Demetriou, "Remapping the Boundaries."
- [8] *Ibid.*, 491.
- [9] Agnew, "Mapping Political Power"; Gamlen, "Emigration State"; Sheffer, *Modern Diaspora*, among others.
- [10] Danforth, "National Conflict," 332.
- [11] See note 4 above.
- [12] Brand, *Citizens Abroad*.
- [13] Although see note 6 above; Portes, Escobar, and Walton Radford, "Immigrant Transnational Organizations and Development," and a few others are exceptions, the focus is predominantly on Latin American Diaspora communities and their relationships with the USA.
- [14] See Esmán, "Chinese Diaspora."
- [15] Maktabi, "Citizenship in Lebanon."
- [16] See the WLCU website at <http://www.wlcu.org/>; Hourani, "Lebanese Diaspora," among others, for more information.
- [17] See Tabar, "Mobilisation for National Voting Abroad."
- [18] Mr Sherif Khoury, president of the Canadian lobby group *Liban 2013*, Montreal Canada, 15 March 2011.
- [19] See Trent, "American Diaspora Diplomacy."
- [20] As of November 2013, Hizbullah is the leading party in a 'caretaker' Government until a new government is decided upon.
- [21] Byman, "Friends Like These."
- [22] For a good discussion of *Hizbullah's* social and educational services, see Hamzeh, *In the Path of Hizbullah*; Cammet and Issar, "Bricks and Mortar Clientelism."
- [23] Harb and Leenders, "Know Thy Enemy."
- [24] See Arabic newspapers published in Sydney: *el-Telegraph*, August 6, 2010, December 17, 2010 and January 19, 2011, pp. 18, 18 and 19, respectively; and *el-Anwar*, December 16, 2010 and January 20, 2011, pp. 12 and 10, respectively.
- [25] Mr Ali Hussein (name changed to protect confidentiality of respondent) Sydney, 24 January 2011.
- [26] Fitzgerald, "Colonies of the Little Motherland"; Faist, "Transnationalisation and Development(s)"; Moja, "Immigrants and Associations"; Hirabayashi, "Migrant Village," among others.
- [27] Portes, Escobar, and Arana, "Bridging the Gap," 207–60.
- [28] Mr Nasser Al Dein Dieb, I'aal, Lebanon, 3 May 2009.

[29] See note 17 above.

[30] See, http://www.fares.org.lb/Act_infra.asp; <http://www.issamfares.org>, last retrieved, August 25, 2013.

[31] Even the role of defending Lebanon's sovereignty in the face of external threats has historically been performed by non-state actors (e.g. the Lebanese Patriotic Front between 1982 and 1985, and *Hizbullah* thereafter).

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Appendix**Chart 1** Total Interviews Conducted – by Type of Association and Country

	USA	Canada	Lebanon	Australia	Total
Political party	9	14	24	16	63
Charity	14	9	12	10	45
Religious	14	14	8	15	51
Economic	2	4	2	0	8
Village	5	3	13	32	53
Significant persons	1	3	16	–	20
Municipalities	–	–	39	–	39
Embassies	2	1	–	1	4
Focus groups	1	–	–	5	6
Universities	5	9	3	–	17
Lobbies	10	3	–	–	13
UN organisations	–	–	2	–	2
Miscellaneous	1	–	–	–	1
Total	64	60	119	79	322

Notes: (1) Numbers reflect an attempt to balance between drawing an accurate reflection of the active groups in the three countries and seeking to engage groups across all of the major Lebanese sects in each of the countries under study. (2) Totals reflect number of actual interviews conducted; numerous organisations exist in multiple countries and interviews were conducted with the same organisation across countries whenever possible. Thus, for example, 63 interviews were conducted with political parties across the four countries; only 15 distinct political parties/organisations are included in this sample.