The Lebanese diasporic field: the impact of sending and receiving states

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ABSTRACT
What is a diaspora? Can it be distinguished from a 'transnational community'? This paper discusses the Lebanese migrants abroad and their relationships with Lebanon by deploying the Bourdieusian concept of 'field'. It argues that Bourdieu's concept of field helps to capture the dynamic character of diasporic relations and the power relations that underpin them. It also enables the researcher to better delineate the boundary of a diasporic community and at the same time to treat this boundary as flexible enough to identify the specific terms for entering and exiting the 'diasporic field'. It also argues that at a time when diasporic relations are cross-national, that specifically revolve around a real or imaginary 'homeland', they encompass individual, group and institutional actors that belong with varying degrees to the country of origin and the countries of settlement. Finally, the paper concludes that the 'diasporic field' is a useful analytical tool to capture the complexities of increasingly ubiquitous diasporic relations.

This paper develops the concept of a 'diasporic field' with reference to the Lebanese community in Australia. In it, I use the Bourdieusian concept of 'field', arguing that it enables me to overcome the limitations encountered in the current writings on diaspora and transnational activities.[1]

Broadly speaking, a field consists of unequal power positions with differential access to the field capital. It is historically contingent and therefore socially constructed and deconstructed. A field of relations with unequal power positions becomes a contentious arena with 'two distinct dimensions': one to accumulate valued capital or to convert one into another more valued form, and the other is about 'a struggle for symbolic power, a classification struggle, over the right to monopolise the legitimate definition of what is to be the most legitimate form of capital for a particular field'. Field struggle, therefore, involves these two broad types of power struggle: 'struggle for valued resources, and struggle

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over defining what [are] valued resources.'[2] In addition, Bourdieu argues that the state holds the power to control the exchange rates of capital between the various fields and, furthermore, he argues that it is best analysed in reference to what he calls the 'field of power'. Struggles that take place within this field are essentially struggles over the institutional functions of the state.[3]

Studying diaspora as a 'field' allows for a full appreciation and understanding of the fluid nature of diaspora, that is, as a situated community which is constantly subject to change and always 'in the making'. In this context, we argue that home-states, when present, could become significant players in 'diasporic fields' because of their important role in valorising the 'diasporic capitals' which are specific to these fields.[4] This is not to say that diasporic fields are self-enclosed and have no interface with other fields existing in countries connected by diasporic relations. In the case of Australia, the Lebanese diasporic field exists at an intersection between many other fields in both Australia and Lebanon, including social, cultural and economic fields. Capital accumulated from these fields can be converted into 'diasporic capital', and in doing so, the 'owner' of the latter becomes an agent in the Lebanese diasporic field occupying a specific power position.

The concept of a 'diasporic field', therefore, addresses diaspora not as an accomplished entity, but as a *process* comprising changing and frequently contested power relations. Being a member of a diaspora is always a specificity that is structured by the general logic of the diasporic field. This paper argues that diaspora is about becoming diasporic according to the (contested) terms laid down by the recognised diasporic capital encountered within the diasporic field.[5]

In choosing the concept of a 'diasporic field', I want to simultaneously accept and transcend the main conclusion drawn by Brubaker in his discussion of the concept of diaspora: that it should be used as a category of practice rather than a category of analysis.[6] Brubaker's argument could be interpreted as providing a case for underlying the processual nature of diaspora(-isation) and bringing it to the forefront of analyses. This paper uses an approach that combines the *analytical* and *processual* method in investigating diaspora relations. Furthermore, it argues that approaching diaspora as a practice does not sufficiently capture the *systemic* dimension of diasporic activities.

Another important attempt to analyse diaspora is made by Sokefeld.[7] Sokefeld argues in favour of using concepts borrowed from the field of social movements (political opportunities, mobilising structures and practices and framing) to demonstrate the constructed and situated character of diaspora *and* to shed light on its systematic character. However, his analysis still falls short of articulating the central role played by the 'home' state (when it exists) in ordering and legitimising the diasporic field and 'valorising' its associated capital that has, like any other capital, a differentiating and stratifying effect between individuals and groups within the field.[8] For this reason, Sokefeld's model fails

to identify an important, if not a central, player encountered in the diasporic field without which analysts miss an important dimension of the character and dynamic of diasporic relations.

Application of Bourdieu's concept of capital also generates a new understanding of diaspora, which cannot be revealed when using the social movement perspective. According to Bourdieu's theory, there are different forms of capital (economic, social, and cultural), which are convertible to one another.[9] Consequently, if a migrant has economic or social capital and decides to engage in diasporic affairs, this capital will essentially buy him/her a position of power within the diasporic field; this position would be in line with its potential value following conversion into diasporic capital. This point of entry into the diasporic field, its terms and impact, could not be captured by Sokefeld's frame of analysis.

Other scholars have studied important aspects of diasporic activities utilising various concepts including 'social remittances', 'political remittances', 'the emigrant state', 'transnational fields' and 'transnational social formations.[10] With the exception of the last two, each of these concepts focuses on a particular aspect of diaspora activities without managing to place these activities within a concept of diaspora broad enough to include other equally important diasporic relations, i.e. the concepts are self-limiting. 'Transnational fields' and 'transnational social formations', on the other hand, while referring to a more systematic and inclusive field of research are at the same time too general to focus on the specificity of diasporic relations, practices and level of systematisation.

This paper contends that the use of the concept of 'diasporic field' enables us to restore the specificity of diasporic relations, including the structured and conflictual (agentive) dimensions. This is demonstrated by contextually examining the formation of the Lebanese diasporic field in reference to the Lebanese diasporic community in Australia, and its interaction with its 'home' state.[11]

The Lebanese state and the Lebanese diasporic field

Throughout modern history, Lebanon has continued to experience waves of emigration, which can be broadly divided into five main phases.[12] Prior to 1975, the majority of emigrants were Christian. In contrast, post-1975 witnessed an increase in the number of Muslim Lebanese leaving their country to work and settle abroad. Broadly speaking, this long and continuous history of Lebanese emigration is largely the result of a combination of lopsided economic development and communal-cum-political conflicts. In addition, Lebanon's geographic location, in a region ridden with national and international conflicts, has also contributed to Lebanese emigration throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

This long history of migration resulted in the formation of Lebanese communities scattered in many countries around the world: the Gulf States, many European states, West African countries, North and South America, and

Australia. Evidence has shown that throughout these years, many members of these communities have continued to express an interest in 'homeland' politics and have engaged in different activities that were directed at a particular issue pertaining to their country of origin.[13] The overall purpose of this paper was to provide a theoretical model that enables us to best understand this reality, while focusing on the Lebanese emigrants in Australia.

Since the year of its foundation, the Lebanese state has long been dependent on the mobilisation of sectarian groups and their narrow interests. This is best manifested in the constitution of 1926, the National Pact of 1943, and at a later stage, the constitution following the *Ta'ef* Accord (1989–1990), which put an end to the Lebanese civil war (1975–1989). Both the National Pact of 1943 and the post-civil war constitution were fundamental moments in the history of the Lebanese nation, resulting in the formation of the Lebanese state structure as a political entity that intrinsically accommodated and represented the particularistic interests of the leaders of major sectarian groups. Stated differently, the state structure in Lebanon is restrained by *de jure* confessionalism, which is specifically inscribed in the constitution, as well as by *de facto* traditional political practices and conventions. It is within this context that the role of the Lebanese state in the emergence of a Lebanese diasporic field must be examined.

Continuing interactions between the home country (i.e. state and society groups) and the Lebanese migrant communities have helped to build migrant community organisations and associations in Australia; these organisations and associations have come to replicate the social, religious and political divisions that are prevalent in Lebanon.[14] Politically, these community groups have lent their support to the political elites and groups with whom they were strongly affiliated. Within this context, the dominant sectarian elites in Lebanon have always sought to 'valorize' the diasporic activities that suit their hegemonic interests while rivals strive to 'de-valorize' these activities, advocating diasporic activities (read diasporic capital) that suit their own strategy in efforts to enhance their power position within the overall structure of the Lebanese state.

Since the end of the civil war in 1989, the power position of the Christian political elites in Lebanon has formally and substantially diminished. Externally, the process leading to this new political reality coincided with a considerable post-1975 spike in the number of Muslim Lebanese emigrating from Lebanon, resulting in an increase in the number of Muslim members of the Lebanese Diaspora. More importantly, this wave of migrants was willing to lend its financial and political support to anti-Christian political elites who, back 'home', were engaged in a process to undermine the dominant position of their Christian counterparts during the civil war (1975–1989).

Beginning in the 1970s, this challenge to the position of Christian elites in Lebanon went through two phases, culminating in a constitutional change in 1989–1990: the first phase, lasting from early 1970s until around 1978,

consisted of challenges led by Leftist and secular forces, who were aided by the Palestine Liberation Organization in their fight against the dominant Christian elites. During the second phase (1978–1989), overtly Islamic political forces gradually took over the leadership in the battle against the Christian elites, and soon became the main contenders in the battle over the control of the Lebanese state. In parallel with this homeland development, and during both phases, growing numbers of (mostly) Muslim members of the Lebanese diaspora were participating in this 'battle' in Australia (and elsewhere). Firstly, diasporic members participated via the mobilisation of community associations who supported the secular and leftist political forces and their Palestinian ally in Lebanon, and secondly, through the sectarian associations who supported their counterparts in the 'homeland'. Throughout these two phases, legitimate diasporic activities as perceived by the Christian elites controlling the state pre-1975 were undermined on two fronts: on the one hand, the opposition forces were seeking to enforce a different 'symbolic' narrative of what constitutes a valorised diasporic capital, and at the same time, this new narrative was adopted and advocated by opposition supporters among the Lebanese abroad.

The Lebanese diasporic field: the role of the sending state and society

Gamlen is the first scholar to have systematically studied 'the emigration state' by focusing on 'diaspora engagement policies'.[15] Drawing on a Foucaultian perspective, he argues that 'diaspora engagement policies' (re) produce citizen–sovereign relationships with expatriates, thus transnationalising governmentality (i.e. the means by which a population is rendered governable), through the construction, machination and normalisation of a set of governmental apparatuses and knowledge.[16] In a similar vein, I contend that the state does not transform the nation into a 'transnational social field', but rather facilitates the construction of a 'diasporic field'. In fact, it is through emigration policies that the power of the sending states is extended over to its diasporic communities, and simultaneously, a particular 'diasporic capital' is valorised and propagated.

More precisely, devising governmental apparatuses for integrating the Lebanese abroad is always accompanied with specific discourses aimed at creating the terms according to which a diasporic 'symbolic capital' will be constructed ('symbolic capital' is another form of power that legitimates the stratified social order).[17] In Gamlen's terms, this first depends on the imagined (or discursive) existence of a cohesive transnational [diasporic] community, based around a common, state-centric national identity around which policies can be directed, and secondly, on the existence of corresponding governmental apparatuses within the home-state system.[18]

Symbolic power, state-building and the Lebanese diaspora

Historically, Lebanese state representatives have always actively engaged in the discursive construction of the Lebanese *émigrés* as an important and con-stituent element of the Lebanese nation. The myth-making process, which was essential in the building of the Lebanese nation-state, never failed to allude to the importance of *al-Mughtareb a-lubanani* (the Lebanese émigré) as a crucial contributor to the building of Lebanon, and its image as an adventurous and prosperous nation. Of course, subsuming the Lebanese diaspora under this homogenising theme was not a seamless process. It is constantly challenged by a multitude of identities and class realities that are continuously faced by the Lebanese abroad; however, this central theme was state-sponsored and widely diffused through official discourse and popular arts (e.g. songs and folk poetry, *zajal*). As a result, they have become dominant themes attributed to what constituted a legitimate Lebanese 'diasporic capital'.

In attempting to 'reinforce claims of shared identity',[19] the Lebanese state rarely misses the opportunity to celebrate the annual Lebanese Independence Day with members of the diaspora, and arrangements are made with Lebanese consulates and embassies all over the world. In the same vein, the state also participates in cultural events organised by the community abroad, or spon-sors such events itself through its diplomatic missions.[20] In addition, succes-sive Lebanese Presidents have frequently bestowed prizes and accolades upon prominent members of the Lebanese diaspora when they visit or return to Lebanon. More generally, since independence in 1943, inaugural speeches of newly elected presidents have always included a clear reference to the Lebanese abroad and their crucial role in supporting their countrymen back home. All of these activities are essential in creating a 'symbolic capital' needed for maintain-ing the legitimacy of a specific Lebanese 'diasporic capital'.

Institution-building targeting the Lebanese abroad

If symbolic nation-building aims at legitimising the 'diasporic capital' needed to incorporate diasporic actors into the dominant regime in Lebanon, then institution-building policies are implemented with the aim of furnishing the home-state with technologies, systems and institutions to practically govern diaspora communities. The process, however, is complex and highly contested.

The first state institution created to 'govern' Lebanese diaspora was the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and the Emigrants (MFAE), which was established in 1946 with the expressed purpose of maintaining and developing relationships with emigrants. By 2011, Lebanon had established a large number of diplo-matic missions across the world. Their role in providing consular services, issuing passports and visas, responding to crises experienced by the Lebanese abroad, and supplying Power of Attorney, could be translated as 'a set of disciplinary

subject-making' services that facilitate the diasporisation of the Lebanese 'model of citizenship'.[21] Within Lebanon, a new decree (No. 1306) rendered the MFAE specifically responsible for 'looking after the emigrants' affairs', and two separate departments were created under the auspices of the Directorate of Emigrants Affairs to deal with Lebanese abroad and their interests in Lebanon.[22] Collectively, these state measures consolidate a particular sense of belonging in the Lebanese diaspora as defined by the dominant political elite in Lebanon.

The World Lebanese Cultural Union

The Maronite presidents of the Lebanese Republic have always expressed a keen interest in the Lebanese abroad, with an eye on mobilising them to bolster the dominance of the Maronite elites within Lebanon. Since the 1950s, they stood out as being mostly active in this regard. It was always clear to both the presidents and the major Maronite political forces including the Phalange Party that strengthening economic and political linkages between Lebanon and the Lebanese abroad not only would result in benefitting Lebanon economically, but also would shore up their power position.

In September 1960, the state organised the first international conference for Lebanese emigrants and formed the *Lebanese World Union* (LWU) as the first non-governmental umbrella organisation for Lebanese abroad to be sponsored by the Lebanese state. The main driving force behind the formation of LWU was Pierre Jmayel, the founder of the Christian Phalangist Party and a former minister in the ruling government. During the opening of this distinctively diasporic event, in which emigrants from 36 countries were present, President Chehab delivered a speech in which he commended the role of Lebanese emigrants in supporting and developing their homeland. Among other things, LWU was devised to encourage diaspora investment in their 'homeland' and to act as a facilitator of trade and commercial relations with countries abroad, as well as to advocate for the political outlook of the dominant elites among members of the Lebanese migrants and foreign governments.[23]

Even though a great number of these plans were not implemented, the dominant Christian elites were able, until the early 1980s, to exclusively use LWU as a platform for the articulation of their political views against opponents. The Christian elements within the diaspora also used LWU to lobby for the political cause of their political counterparts back 'home' and to transfer to them their financial and 'political' remittances. However, by the time the ninth conference was held in 1985, under the auspices of President Amine Jmayel (son of Pierre Jmayel and president of Lebanon in 1982–88), the organisational unity of LWU (by now renamed the World Lebanese Cultural Union [WLCU]) collapsed in the face of the ongoing conflicts and the fundamental divisions in Lebanon since the outbreak of the Civil War in 1975.

Soon after this conference, the WLCU split into two factions, each supporting one of the two main warring groups in Lebanon.[24] The fundamental split over power sharing among the elite groups representing the main sects in Lebanon (i.e. the Maronites, the Sunni, the Shi'a and the Druze) and the division inside the WLCU by extension did not stop after the conclusion of the civil war in 1989–1990. Currently, WLCU is divided broadly between March 14 and March 8 alliances,[25] reflecting the ongoing and renewed conflicts in Lebanon. As a result, no singular group's diasporic capital can exclusively be valorised by a deeply fragmented state.

The lack of a unitary, coordinated state diaspora strategy

As Gamlen aptly noted, diaspora engagement policies should not necessarily be seen as part of a unitary, coordinated state strategy.[26] Rather, they form a constellation of institutional and legislative arrangements and programmes that come into being at different times, for different reasons and operate across different timescales at different levels within the home state. But in the case of Lebanon post-1989, the lack of a 'unitary, coordinated state strategy' towards the Lebanese abroad is also due to the deep division between the political elites in Lebanon over a unanimous national diaspora engagement policy. Each confessional-cum-political group raises the issue of diaspora to serve its particular political strategy against the opposing confessional groups and none is capable of imposing its 'hegemony' on the others.

Prior to the *Ta'ef* Accord (1989–1990), the Sunni prime ministers in Lebanon were mostly lukewarm in their support of the Maronite Presidents' moves towards the Lebanese abroad. This was quite understandable when seen in the context of sectarian (Muslim–Christian) competition over the control of state power. However, the reality shifted slightly post-*Ta'ef*: the relative increase in the power share of the Sunni Prime Minister has raised the stakes of the Sunni leaders in the running of the Lebanese state. This new development, partly explains why the late Sunni Prime Minister, Rafic Hariri, took the initiative in 1994 of creating an autonomous government agency called The Investment Development Authority of Lebanon, which aimed at encouraging investment in Lebanon not only by foreigners but also by businesspeople drawn from the Lebanese diaspora.[27] Later on, the assassination of Rafic Hariri in 2005 and the withdrawal of the Syrian Army from Lebanon resulted in drawing the Sunni elite into closer association with significant Christian political forces (e.g. the *Phalange* Party, and the Party of the Lebanese Forces against their Shi'a political opponents. As a consequence, the political agenda of the Sunni political forces (mainly the pro-Hariri Future Movement) was drawn closer to their Christian allies over the long-standing issue of emigrants' rights to nationality and to vote *in absentia* in hopes of further enhancing their power position *vis-à-vis* their Shi'a opponent.

In the pre-*Ta'ef* Accord era, it was the Maronite political elites who were almost exclusively the champions of emigrants abroad. Some of their objectives were achieved (e.g. the foundation of the WLCU and emigrants' investment in Lebanon), and others remained on paper (e.g. granting Lebanese citizenship to emigrant descendants in November 2015 and conducting a census on Lebanese abroad); such failures were primarily due to the opposition by leading Sunni Muslim political elites. After the *Ta'ef* Accord, the Maronite and Sunni leaders joined forces in their concern over state policy on Lebanese abroad. This is witnessed in the ministerial statements of successive Sunni prime ministers, who began to adopt more seriously the political demands of the Christian leaders with regard to Lebanese emigrants and their descendants.[28] However, the persistent and deep split between March 14 (Christian and Sunni) and March 8 (Christian and Shi'a) leaders is precluding the emergence of a 'hegemonic' state-sponsored diasporic policy. In addition, the fragmentation of WLCU, which was previously a Maronite domain, is a severe blow to the Maronite elite's strategy to dominate the 'diaspora field' via its control over the WLCU leadership. Even the hard work of Michel Suleiman, who became President of Lebanon between 2008 and 2014, could not restore the unity of the WLCU.

The above discussion demonstrates that the state's inability to dominate the 'diasporic field' and incorporate the Lebanese abroad under one dominant diasporic policy is due to the existence of opposing political strategies by different sectarian elites in control of the Lebanese state. Each strategy is based on a particular perception of the Lebanese diaspora aimed at forging a legitimate diasporic policy (or a valorised diasporic capital) according to its particular terms of political control.

Lebanese political parties and religious institutions

Political parties in Lebanon also contribute to the formation of the Lebanese 'diasporic field' and its dynamic and unstable reality. In the 1990s, political parties in Lebanon began to get directly involved in the Lebanese diaspora by creating special offices for this purpose and appointing party officers to take charge of the party branches abroad. Prior to this, the fact that this relationship was initiated more by Lebanese abroad than by their mother parties in Lebanon is true of almost all major Lebanese political parties. Moreover, the link forged since 1990 between political parties abroad and in Lebanon is facilitated by the recent developments in communication technologies, the importance of which is seen in the presence of websites for all parties concerned.

To further illustrate this point, I will consider the case of the Lebanese Brigades for Resistance (AMAL), a Shi'a movement led by the current Speaker of the House, Nabih Berri, which witnessed a growth in popular support during and after the end of the Civil War in 1990. Ever since its inception in the late 1960s under the leadership of the charismatic Imam Moussa Sadr,[29] AMAL has

maintained a strong relationship with Lebanese Shi'a emigrants, especially in West African countries, seeking their financial support for its political, military and welfare activities in Lebanon. In addition, AMAL was even able to recruit wealthy emigrants to run for election and/or provide funding for the election campaigns that were conducted after the end of the civil war in 1990. Some of the ministers representing AMAL in the cabinets were even returnee migrants.

So, as with the experiences of Syrian Social National Party (with a tiny representation in the Lebanese parliament) and the Free Patriotic Movement (representing more than half of the Christian share of parliament), AMAL's early years of formation (and right up until today) were organically linked with the Lebanese (*Shi'i*) emigrant communities and the financial and human capital that they invested in the movement. Presently, AMAL has an organisational division, the 'Emigrants Department', which is charged with maintaining the party's relationships with its supporters abroad; it has many branches spreading across West Africa, South and North American countries, Australia, Europe and the Gulf States.

Leaders of most major political parties frequently visit their supporters and party organisations in countries abroad. They are driven by a number of aims: to better organise their supporters and boost their morale; to participate in the celebration of an event which has a significant symbolic meaning to the party concerned (e.g. the commemoration of the dates in which Bashir Jmayel or Rafic Hariri were assassinated); to harness support for their political views; to cultivate stronger links with their supporters; and more recently, to mobilise emigrants to participate in general elections.[30]

On the whole, political parties in Lebanon are increasingly engaging in the 'diasporic field' to ensure that diasporic activities of the Lebanese abroad are in line with their political strategies at 'home'. Presently, Lebanese abroad are invited to support, both financially and politically, the parties belonging to the two major political blocs in Lebanon, March 14 and March 8 coalitions. Furthermore, they are mobilised to oppose any 'home' state policy that is perceived to undermine the position of their mother party back 'home'. This type of relationship between Lebanon and Lebanese abroad precludes the 'Lebanese state' from valorising a single 'diasporic capital' and transforming it into a dominant one.

Religious institutions and the process of diasporisation

The pioneering role of the Maronite Church (and to a lesser degree, the Orthodox and the Melkite Churches), in reaching out to Christian Lebanese emigrants, and helping them in the process of settlement in their new countries, is due mainly to the large number of Christians who have left Lebanon and who have been emigrating since the beginning of the 1870s. The strength and scope of the relationships that these churches have established throughout the years

are illustrated materially in the number of parishes, churches, schools, nursing homes and community halls that are found in countries abroad including Australia and USA.[31] The Maronite Church had even secured relative autonomy *vis-à-vis* the Latin Catholic Church authorities in diasporic countries. During the Maronite Synod, which was held between 2003 and 2006, the Maronite Church went as far as to redefine itself as a diasporic institution, in recognition of the growing influence of the Maronite presence in the world.[32] The attempts of the Lebanese Shi'a, Sunni, Druze and Alawite religious institutions to link with Lebanese abroad came at a later stage, owing partly to the smaller number of emigrants from these communities, and more importantly, to their delayed entrance as powerful actors into Lebanon's sectarian government.

The Shi'a community began to crystalise into an independent political actor with individual political claims in the late 1960s, and more clearly in the middle of the civil war period. Similarly, the Sunni community had to wait until the end of the civil war in 1990, and the rise and fall (2005) of Rafic Hariri to become more integrated into the Lebanese nation-state, with a decisive commitment to invest in the viability of its independence and sovereignty. Put differently, the *Lebanisation* of both the Sunni and the Shi'a communities or their transformation into sectarian political actors similar to the model originally presented by the Maronite leaders since 1920 has led their religious authorities to start earnestly linking with their followers abroad.[33] Effectively, this was translated into their emergence into the Lebanese 'diasporic field' as new competitors over the terms of valorising Lebanese 'diasporic capital'.[34]

As a result, the Christian (mainly Maronite) Churches lost the exclusivity of their presence in the Lebanese diasporic field. In February 2004, the Supreme Islamic Shi'a Council, the highest Shi'a religious institution in Lebanon, began to appoint representatives in countries including Australia; such actions were soon copied by *Dar Al-Fatwa*, the highest Sunni religious authority in Lebanon. The gradual transformation of the Lebanese religious institutions into political institutions, and their growing concern with their communities abroad, resulted in the creation of a number of Christian and Islamic institutions, which compete with each other in the 'Lebanese diasporic field'. As this competition is an extension of the one already existing in Lebanon, Lebanese religious institutions abroad add more momentum to the fragmentation of the Lebanese diasporic field and its inability to generate a unified dominant diasporic capital.

The diasporisation of the Lebanese abroad: receiving state and its opportunity structure

The emergence and working of a Lebanese 'diasporic field' is also shaped by the opportunity structure engendered by the unfolding history of the receiving state and its existing policy towards its migrant communities.[35] Australia is an immigration country, and as such, it has 'encouraged family reunion and

settlement and treated most legal immigrants as citizens'.[36] However, its colonial history has had an impact on its immigration policies, which are, as a result, racially selective; implementation of these policies resulted in the emergence of a nation-state and national identity that was closely affiliated with the culture of the British colonial founders of Australia. Post-1970s, however, the Australian government adopted a policy of multiculturalism, which militated against racist policies towards non-Anglo and non-northern European migrants. It is precisely within this framework that I intend to also analyse the role of the receiving state in creating the opportunity for the formation of a Lebanese 'diasporic field' in Australia.

Recent diasporisation in Australia

The racist conditions encountered by the Lebanese immigrants in Australia in the late nineteenth century lasted with varying intensity until the beginning of the 1970s. Such an environment encouraged Lebanese immigrants to live close to each other and form their own associations based on their village, religious and sometimes national backgrounds. In Sydney alone, for example, which is home to around two-thirds of the Lebanese immigrants in Australia, there are at least two hundred associations of this kind. A similar situation is also found in Melbourne, in which around one-third of the total Lebanese immigrants in Australia reside. However, Australia's policy of multiculturalism since the 1970s has fostered anti-racism and anti-discrimination while encouraged cultural plu-ralism as a constituent feature of its national identity. This allowed Lebanese diasporic institutions to further consolidate their structures and develop their local and diasporic activities by drawing not only on their individual and col-lective resources but also on the resources of the Australian state, which could be increasingly derived from its emerging multicultural policies.

As a result of this new policy, local, state and federal authorities supported community organisations by providing funds for their cultural, welfare and edu-cational activities. State and Federal authorities even bolstered Arabic news-papers produced in Australia by buying government advertisement space. By adopting multiculturalism and supporting the settlement activities of the Lebanese associations as part of this policy, the receiving state becomes indi-rectly a key facilitator in, and a significant shaper of, the process of diasporising the Lebanese migrant community.

Broadly speaking, these community associations had a twofold function: first, they addressed the settlement needs of the newly arrived immigrants, and second, they assisted them in maintaining ties with their homeland.[37] These two functions complemented each other: the more organised the commu-nity and diverse its associations, the more it was capable of engaging with its 'home' country. In other words, the resources of the community associations were mostly mobilised not only to overcome migrants' alienation and fulfil

their settlement needs, but also to support a political cause in the homeland (e.g. against the Israeli war on Lebanon) or to hold a *hafli* (i.e. annual dinner) to raise funding for a development project in a village. More importantly, it was these associations that would become the major contenders over the terms that valorise the diasporic capital of the 'Lebanese diasporic field'.

Within this context, Lebanese migrants are found in political organisations abroad working for political and financial support of their mother party in Lebanon. All of the major political parties (representing the different religious communities in Lebanon) have branches in Sydney and Melbourne, which regularly engage in activities such as demonstrations, lobbying Australian politicians, organising political rallies to raise funds and receiving politicians from Lebanon. Furthermore, migrants have also grouped themselves in hometown village associations, which often take part in diasporic activities that support and develop their local community in their home country (building a church or a mosque, sending medical equipment and medicine, developing the village water system, building a local school). Such hometown associations are also mobilised occasionally to support the activities of the political groups mentioned previously, due in large part to the community-based politics in Lebanon and the politicisation of communal identities.

These groups and associations are the domain in which other forms of capital (cultural, social and economic) are converted into 'diasporic capital'. In Bourdieusian terms, members of the Lebanese diasporic community become 'field players' with different amount of accumulated 'diasporic capital', depending not only on their level of engagement in valorised diasporic activities, but also on the amount of other forms of capital converted into 'diasporic capital' and the rate at which they are converted.

Accordingly, among the leaders encountered in the diasporic field, we find successful businessmen who have used part of their 'economic capital' to 'buy' sufficient 'diasporic capital', which in turn, enabled them to become leaders in the field; this is usually done through the donation of money towards a home-related cause. Other leaders have converted their 'social' or 'cultural' capital to acquire the required amount of 'diasporic capital' that enabled them to lead in the production of 'symbolic capital' required by the diasporic field. Leadership in the diasporic field, however, is not the result of converting one type of capital. Rather, it could be the result of converting a combination of two or more types of capital as well as the outcome of direct engagement in recognised diasporic activities. Whether converting one's capital into a diasporic capital or contesting the 'legitimacy' of the latter, the state and its representatives remain the ultimate force that validates the capital of the diasporic field.

For more clarification, I will give two more examples. Tannourine Charity Association is a typical village association whose engagement in the Lebanese diasporic field is shaped by links to both their country of settlement and their country of origin. Recently, Tannourine Charity Association successfully used

its networks in Sydney to raise AUD $120,000 to build a new ward for their hometown hospital in Lebanon. They also secured donated medical equipment, magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) equipment and hospital beds for Tannourine Hospital from Westmead Hospital in Sydney, through their connections with a Sydney-based group of doctors. Members of Tannourine Association have successfully used the resources provided by members, by supporters and by the broader Sydney community to engage actively in the diasporic field encompassing both Lebanon and Australia.

It is worth noting that members of the association initially elected the president of the association due to his leadership skills (which were acquired by converting his cultural capital; he was a political activist and a senior employee of the State Department of Education) and his full dedication to the work of the association. Above all, the vast majority of the members of the association endorsed him, because his work for the association converged with the accepted terms that defined the preferred (village) diasporic capital. However, when this leader opposed a more recent demand made by the dominant political figure in Tannourine (a current minister in Lebanese Government), his leadership was contested and eventually he was replaced with a leader who supported the minister concerned.

The Lebanese Muslim (Sunni) Association (LMA), founded in 1956 in Sydney, represents another typical case of the main Lebanese religious associations.[38] At present, this is a huge organisation whose total equity in 2007 was AUD $18,427,356. It has a wide range of welfare, settlement, education, counselling, youth services, funeral services and pilgrimage activities. In a speech delivered in August 2008,[39] the vice president of LMA (a lawyer who converted his 'cultural capital' to become a leader in LMA) declared major plans to expand the Lakemba mosque and build a private Islamic school, a childcare facility and a care centre for the aged.[40] It must be stressed that LMA resources and assets are, to a large degree, the product of the generous support by the Lebanese Sunni migrant community and the generous donations and grants provided to them by the Australian authorities as part of their multicultural policies.

In relation to the homeland, since 2002, LMA has managed to confer more legitimacy on its leading role in the community politics of the Sunni migrants and their descendants in Australia by accommodating a representative of the Sunni 'Dar al-iftaa', the supreme religious office that is normally under the political domination of the Sunni prime Minister. This office looks after the personal status laws of the Lebanese Sunnis in Australia and ensures the registration of marriages, divorces, births and deaths in Lebanon. In addition, LMA has been a major hub for the Lebanese Muslims in Sydney not only to engage in community politics, but also to participate in development and political activities at 'home'.[41]

In broad terms, the evidence above raises many important issues pertaining to the formation of the Lebanese diasporic field and the way it operates.

In this regard, the role of the sending and receiving states is crucial in capturing the form of diasporic groups, their resources and work objectives. As we have seen, the receiving state is particularly important in creating opportunities for migrant diasporic engagements in the 'homeland'. In relation to the internal structure of the field, its conflictual and dynamic character is revealed first by the struggle over what constitutes 'diasporic capital' and the central role that is played by state elites in this process. Second, the dynamism of the field is manifested by the differentiated process of capital conversion and its crucial role in helping to explain not only the new entrants into the field, but also their unequal power relations depending on the attributes of the diasporic capital they would eventually possess.

The Lebanese diasporic field

On a more general level, this essay has addressed two questions: first, 'how does a diasporic field form?' and second, 'what makes it different to a transnational field?' As explained above, the formation and working of a Lebanese diasporic field implies a degree of mutual relationship between the Lebanese immigrants and their home in Lebanon – state and society. By deploying the concept of 'field' in analysing the practices of the Lebanese diaspora, the major players in Lebanese diasporic activities have been identified: sending state; individuals and groups from abroad engaged in home-centred activities; and those at home engaged with the diaspora. In contrast, those who are engaged in cross-border activities, but are not exclusively driven by home-related issues, belong to the transnational field.

The case of Lebanon as shown above clarifies this distinction even further: on this view, the 'players' within the Lebanese diasporic field have a shared identity which ultimately makes the home country the focus of their diverse activities and the space in which social, cultural, economic and *emotional* capitals are *invested*.[42] 'Players' in the 'diasporic field', therefore, not only have a shared identity, but because of this identity, they are also driven by 'home-based' issues. Moreover, this 'field' is a hierarchical space and its investigation necessarily implies a top-down and a bottom-up approach. It is a site of struggle where the 'sending' state plays a regulatory role, and because of this, a Bourdieusian concept of 'field' is proposed to analyse diasporic relations existing between the Lebanese in Lebanon and abroad.

On the other hand, 'players' in a transnational space have a multinational (and ethnic) background and are motivated by issues that are independent of this background. In this space, their activities are typically grass roots and the state as such is not present as a constitutive element within its boundaries. The only common feature found between the diasporic field and the transnational space is that the relations encountered in both are cross-border relations.[43]

The paper has also argued that activities and conflicts within the Lebanese diasporic field have increased due to the recent progress in transport and communication technology and the gradual reconfiguration of the nation-state from a culturally and politically exclusive territorial entity to one that increasingly accommodates extra-territorial activities and multiple national belongings; best exemplified by dual citizenship, cultural pluralisation and immigrants' participation in elections in their country of origin. This is what Gamlen has aptly referred to as 'the emigrant state'.

My fieldwork in Australia reveals that the engagement of Lebanese emigrants in their home country includes a wide range of activities characterised mainly by charitable, social and political events – recently, these activities have been escalated in both intensity and volume. It also shows that the sending state and society play a crucial role in shaping and orienting these engagements and providing the structural opportunity for their emergence and development. Furthermore, it broadly demonstrates that Australian multicultural policy has created the opportunity structure that allows the development of resources of Lebanese associations, which are used when members of these associations engage in 'home' affairs. More significantly, it shows the centrality of the sending state in determining the preferred 'diasporic capital', which in the case of Lebanon remains highly contested due to the fragmented and subnational character of the Lebanese state and the various players' interests in the diasporic field.

Concluding remarks

This paper sets out to show that any proper understanding of a diasporic group, its activities and identity, must examine three factors. First, there must be an examination of what the sending state (and society) has done to reach out to its emigrants and their descendants; and second, we must examine the treatment of this community by the 'host-land'; immigrants' initiatives and reactions towards their homeland and the country of their new settlement are also crucially important. I argued throughout this paper that the examination of this two-way process – which could be called the process of *diasporisation* – largely shapes the diasporic field and its structured positions. I also put forward that recent developments in communication and transport technology have greatly enhanced diaspora–homeland relationships leading to a more intense process of *diasporisation*.[44] The intensification of diasporic activities has in turn affected different aspects of the diasporisation process (i.e. the growing emergence of a virtual diasporic identity) and the mode of homeland–diaspora relationships (e.g. stronger 'bi-directional institutionalization' of this relationship and its transformation into an instantaneous and regular one).

Broadly speaking, the players in this 'field' are not restricted to members of the diaspora (defined in the most general terms of dispersion to two or more

locations, ongoing orientation towards homeland and group boundary main-
tenance over time); they also include players from the country of origin (state
and society linking with their diaspora community). Receiving state and society,
on the other hand, provide at best an opportunity structure for the emergence,
development and maintenance of the diasporic field, and at times, they become
'transient' players in the diasporic field when supporting to some extent claims
made by members of the diaspora towards their 'homeland'. What players in
the diasporic field have in common, however, is their *significant*, but *differenti-
ated*, impact on shaping diasporic capital. More importantly, the concept of a
Lebanese 'diasporic field' enabled me to introduce the power dimension into
the very process of defining and redefining this capital.

Using the field analytic perspective, I was able to show the centrality of the
sending state in so far as it is the main target for the diasporic field players
to impose their competing terms to valorise the 'Lebanese diasporic capital'.
The state as a central agent for valorising the 'diasporic capital' specific to the
'diasporic field' gives additional substance to Gamlen's concept of the 'emigrant
state' and to the 'on-going orientation towards homeland' as a basic character-
istic of a diasporic community. Conversion of other forms of capital sheds light
not only on the socio-economic identity of the new entrants into the diasporic
field, but also on their power position within the field which depends on their
accumulated diasporic capital.

Finally, since the case study in this paper is Lebanon and its immigrant com-
munity in Australia, future research should focus on other diasporic communities
to further test the validity of the diasporic field in understanding the formation
and reformation of these communities, their complexities and the power struc-
ture in which they are embedded.

Notes

1. See Tölölyan, "Rethinking Diaspora(s)," 3–35; Sheffer, *Modern Diasporas in International Politics*, 1–15; Safran, "Diasporas in Modern Societies," 83–99; Brubaker "The 'Diaspora' Diaspora." Sokefeld, "Mobilizing in Transnational Space," 265–284.
2. Swartz, *Symbolic Power, Politics, and Intellectuals*, 59–60.
3. Swartz, *Symbolic Power, Politics, and Intellectuals*, 62.
4. For stateless diaspora communities, the struggle over the defining terms of projected and imagined homelands plays a principal role in valorising and legitimising emergent 'diasporic capitals'.
5. Swartz, *Symbolic Power, Politics, and Intellectuals*, 6.
6. Brubaker, "The 'Diaspora' Diaspora," 1–19.
7. Sokefeld, "Mobilizing in Transnational Space," 265–284.
8. Swartz, *Symbolic Power, Politics and Intellectuals*, 51.
9. See Swartz, *Symbolic Power, Politics and Intellectuals*.
10. For 'social remittances', see Levitt and Lamba-Nieves, "Social Remittances Revisited," 1–22; for 'political remittances', see Østergaard-Nielsen, "The Politics

of Migrants' Transnational Political Practices," 760–786; for 'the emigrant state', see Gamlen, "The Emigration State," 840–856; for 'transnational fields' and 'transnational social formations', see Vertovec, *Transnationalism*.

11. As part of a broader research project on the Lebanese diaspora communities, we conducted 81 interviews and five focus group discussions in Sydney and Melbourne.

12. See Tabar, "Lebanon: A Country of Emigration and Immigration."

13. Tabar, "Lebanon: A Country of Emigration and Immigration," 162–334.

14. See Smith, "How Durable and New is Transnational Life?"; I am referring here to what Smith (2000) in another context has called 'bi-directional institutionalization'.

15. Gamlen, "The Emigration State," 840–856.

16. See Gamlen, "Diaspora Engagement Policies," 4–5.

17. Swartz, *Symbolic Power, Politics and Intellectuals*, 37.

18. Gamlen, "Diaspora Engagement Policies," 6.

19. Gamlen "Diaspora Engagement Policies," 7.

20. Between 4 December 2010 and 11 February 2011, for example, the Lebanese Ministry of Culture sponsored an exhibition of Khalil Gibran's paintings in New South Wales State Library, in Sydney.

21. Gamlen, "Diaspora Engagement Policies," 12.

22. 'Akl, *al-Hijra al-Haditha min Lubnan*, 227.

23. Harfoush, *Al-Hudour al-Lubnani fil 'Alam*, 184.

24. One faction supported the Lebanese Forces and the Christian President, Amine Jmayel, and the other supported Amal and other sectarian political groups who were sponsored by the Syrian government.

25. The March 8 and March 14 alliances are the two major political groupings in Lebanon, which were formed after the assassination of Prime Minister Rafic Hariri in 2005. They are divided in relation to Lebanon's regional and international alliances and on the respective power share for each major sectarian group.

26. Gamlen, "Diaspora Engagement Policies," 4–5.

27. See, http://www.idal.com.lb (cited February 17, 2015).

28. *Al-Mughtareb* (Anonymous 2011: 20–30).

29. See Ajami, *The Vanished Imam: Musa al Sadr and the Shia of Lebanon*.

30. See Tabar, "Elections Mobilization Abroad: Emigrants' Voting the Case of Sydney."

31. Tabar, "The Maronite Church in Lebanon: From Nation-building to a Diasporan/ Transnational Institution," 185–201.

32. Ibid.

33. On the concept of *Lebanisation* and the process of state-building and state fragmentation in Lebanon, see Tabar, "The Dialectics of Unity and Disunity: Class, Communalism and State in Lebanon."

34. Tabar, "The Dialectics of Unity and Disunity: Class, Communalism and State in Lebanon."

35. See Castles and Miller, *The Age of Migration*, 220.

36. See Castles and Miller, *The Age of Migration*, 221.

37. Tabar, "Elections Mobilization Abroad: Emigrants' Voting the Case of Sydney," 185–201.

38. LMA Vice President's speech during the launch of a new Islamic cemetery in August 2008. See Bel-Air, *Migration Et Politique*, 185–201.

39. For more details, see LMA Annual Report 2008, http://www.lma.org.au/index.php

40. For details, see Tabar and Skulte-Ouaiss in *Politics, Culture and the Lebanese Diaspora*, 294–334.

41. See Tabar and Skulte-Ouaiss, *Politics, Culture and the Lebanese Diaspora*, 294–334.

42. I introduce the concept of *emotional* capital to indicate that in the context of migrant experience in particular, emotional ties are often mobilised by diaspora activists to produce material effects pertaining to country of origin and/or to assist in fulfilling the needs of their fellow migrants in the country of settlement. For the concept of emotional transnationalism and its formation among second-generation migrants, see Wolf in P. Levitt and M.C. Waters, (eds.) *The Changing Face of Home*, 255–294.

43. For more info, see Steven Vertovec, *Transnationalism* and Faist, "Towards Transnational Studies," 1665–1687.

44. As indicated in note 2, I undertook a research project (2008–2011) examining the Lebanese diaspora in USA, Canada and Australia, and the relationship with Lebanon. In total, 316 interviews and six focus group discussions were conducted, including political groups (63), village associations (53), charity and cultural groups (45), and religious associations (51). The study examined the engagement of the Lebanese diaspora in the above three countries in the domain of 'home' politics and public affairs. Among many other findings, the study showed that all of the above groups rely on phone calls (at least on a weekly basis) to maintain contact with their members and with their counterparts in Lebanon. In relation with other channels of communication, it was evidently clear that all of these associations (212) including their counterparts in Lebanon (57) use the Internet (emails), but they differ in the frequency and intensity of its use and not all of them use social media. That said, it was also found that regular visits in both directions, especially by party leaders and politicians, are regularly made. Finally, out of the 4 types of association, political groups were the most frequent and intense users of the Internet, social media and air travel.

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