'Political Remittances': The Case of Lebanese Expatriates Voting in National Elections

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This paper examines a particular event that occurred in Australia within the Australian-Lebanese community: it is the political mobilisation of a substantial number of this community to participate in the general elections that took place in Lebanon in June 2009. This event is analysed by looking into the various components of what we call 'the Lebanese diasporic public sphere'. It is argued that this diasporic public sphere generates different political views and positions entertained by various members of the Australian-Lebanese community and materialised into specific 'political remittances' sent to Lebanon. Finally, an analysis of the impact of this political transfer to Lebanon is made in terms of a broader discussion of 'political remittances' as represented in the current literature.

Keywords: Diaspora Politics; Migration; Transnationalism; Voting; Remittances; Lebanese Diaspora; Lebanese-Australian

This paper examines the role of the Lebanese-Australians in the last general elections in Lebanon that took place in June 2009. It argues that these elections provide a good case study of a particular form of political remittance with a specific impact on 'homeland politics'. Identifying this form of political remittance and analysing its impact will be framed in a broader discussion of the current literature on political remittances, which will enable us to revisit this concept in order to further refine its meaning. In brief, it is argued that when the current literature moves to generalities in the context of defining 'political remittances', it becomes mostly framed in reductionist dichotomies that fail to capture the complexities of this phenomenon. In addition, more often than not scholars use the concept restrictively without thinking about the process of its formation, transmission and implementation. Our discussion

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of the relevant literature will also show that 'political remittances' are used interchangeably with terms such as 'transnational political practice' and 'globalisation of domestic politics', leading to further conceptual confusion and reflecting the inability to justify the distinct usage of 'political remittances'. This paper aims to provide a strong case for the deployment of 'political remittances' as a distinct and useful concept in the study of the political links between Lebanese immigrants and their country of origin. Finally, it looks at this type of political engagement from the perspective of the sending country and the role of the major Lebanese political forces in this process.

Research Methodology

This study draws on the findings of a fieldwork that mainly involved conducting semi-structured interviews. It did not engage in a quantitative survey that would have required more time and funding that were not available to the author. However, using the ethnographic approach allowed for more in-depth analysis, which hopefully will compensate for the pitfalls that are normally encountered in survey-based studies.

More specifically, the fieldwork conducted for this paper involved interviews with leaders of political groups in Sydney as well as political activists and other stakeholders (20 interviewees in Sydney altogether). In addition, further information was collected from Arabic newspapers published in Australia which covered the events surrounding the June 2009 elections. It should be mentioned too that the author has lived in Australia since 1971, and was an active member of a diaspora group that has engaged in homeland politics for over 15 years. This past experience placed the author in a privileged position to have an insider insight into, and empathy with, the research field pertaining to the present paper. Objectivity in this case was secured, among other things, by the fact that the author has ceased to be an activist for the last 15 years.

The Debate on Political Transnationalism

Scholars in recent decades have challenged the strongly entrenched idea about the well-bounded nation-state, arguing that processes of globalisation have affected this conventional nation-state model and have rendered it an outdated form of social and political organisation (Strange 1996; Sassen 1996; Albrow 1997; Carnoy and Castells 2001; Vertovec and Cohen 2002). In fact, some have taken an extreme position in this debate by concluding that we are witnessing the 'death of the nation-state'. In response to this argument, Vertovec (2009: 25) takes a transformationalist position by claiming that 'while not necessarily dying, the nation-state is transforming into a type of political organisation or apparatus involving more multiple and overlapping jurisdictions, sets of identities and social orders no longer really contained by borders' (see, for example, Beck 2002).

More generally 'homeland politics' is sometimes referred to in the literature as 'long distance nationalism' (e.g. Anderson 1995), 'deterritorialised' national practice (Basch *et al.* 1993) or 'the globalisation of domestic politics' (Koslowski 2001). These are general concepts that are surely useful in delineating the broader contours of the diasporic political relations, but they fall short of generating knowledge about the complexities of these relations, let alone their various impacts on 'home' politics. In this vein, some scholars including Smith and Stares (2007) use the same broad brush strokes having identified two main effects impinging on the country of origin by the diaspora. Accordingly, the diaspora is divided into either a group of peacemakers or of peace-wreckers. This classification is too simplistic to say the least. It fails to raise the complexities of diaspora involvement, particularly in confessional or multi-ethnic politics, such as when one individual's peacemaker is another's peace-wrecker. Diasporic engagement can also have a reforming impact on its country of origin; such an impact can be the result of a dramatic process (e.g. the recent Arab uprisings), or it can be the result of a cumulative process (e.g. long-term impact on homeland political norms and values) (Khater 2001).

In more recent writings, scholars appear to have come up with a more nuanced concept of 'homeland politics'. Guarnizo *et al.* elaborate the concept when they describe the major modes of transnational political participation and divide them into 'transnational electoral participation' and 'transnational non-electoral politics'. (Guarnizo *et al.* 2003: 1223) They further argue that non-electoral activities are political because they influence local and regional governments by determining which public projects receive migrants' financial support. In the words of Vertovec, 'homeland politics' takes a variety of forms overlapping with those mentioned by Guarnizo *et al.* They include:

> […] exile groups organizing themselves for return, groups lobbying on behalf of a homeland, external offices of political parties, migrant hometown associations, and opposition groups campaigning or planning actions to effect political change in the homeland. Some migrant associations also manage to carry out dual programmes of action aimed at both sending and receiving countries. (Vertovec 2009: 94)

In this paper, I show the benefits of using the concept of 'political remittances' to capture the complexities and dynamism of diasporic political activities. I argue that, in focusing on a particular electoral mode of 'diasporic political participation', this concept allows us to clearly identify not only the character of what is being transferred, but also the process of its formation, its trajectory and its impact on the receiving country. The paper shows that the process of remitting politically goes through three main stages as follows: (1) genesis or formation of political remittances and their embedding in groups and associations, (2) travelling back 'home' through specific conduits and (3) impacting on the political structures and power relations in the country to which they are remitted. Our case study provides the opportunity to show the utility of discussing this triad process as part and parcel of a proper understanding of 'political remittances'. Failing to discuss these phases will result in an incomplete understanding of this cross-border phenomenon.

More generally, political remittances are shaped not only by the country of origin, but also by the country of destination. This is so because the act of remitting politically is by definition an act generated under the impact of 'sending' and 'receiving' countries. So, the formation (genesis), the vectors and the impact of political remittances all depend to a large degree on the political environment and its development in both the sending country and the country of destination. Moreover, discussing the genesis and the conduits of 'political remittances' will lead us to deploy the concept of 'diasporic public sphere' (Webner 2002). We find this concept to be crucial to shed light on the formative process of 'political remittances'. This paper argues that in line with the emergence of diasporic political links between the Lebanese immigrants and their country of origin, a vibrant 'diasporic public sphere' has emerged in which immigrants engage in debating and discussing homeland affairs. This development has been greatly aided by the latest development in communication and transport technology, as well as the various forms of political campaigning in Australia conducted by migrant political groups and party leaders coming from Lebanon.

Existing Literature on 'Political Remittances'

'Political remittance' as a theoretical term has already been conceptualised to an extent. In broad terms, scholars define it as a 'change in political identities, demands and practices associated with migration' (Goldring 2003: 3). It has been used not only to identify a specific reality, but also to explore its spatial dimension. In this context, the term is deployed descriptively to explore the experiences of the exile, where political remittances are thought to be activities through which diasporic communities *reconnect to* the homeland. (Um 2007: 256)

On the other hand, political remittances are conceived as being a 'sub-issue' of 'social remittances' (Piper 2009), a term first coined by Peggy Levitt and defined broadly as 'a local-level, migration-driven form of cultural diffusion […] the ideas, behaviours, identities and social capital that flow from receiving to sending-country communities' (Levitt 1998: 926). Yet, this understanding of political remittances is differentiated by stating that they 'denote ideas about democratization and practices of political advocacy (that is, attempts to influence policy in order to democratise unequal power relations)' (Piper 2009: 218). The differences here in conceptualisation lie primarily in the context where Piper has extended the concept from the study of diaspora politics, particularly those which are occurring between Hometown Associations and the homeland (Goldring 2003), to other forms of transnational organisations, primarily those concerning the labour rights of temporary migrant workers.

Scholars further developed the spatial dimension of the term by emphasising that 'political remittances' are multidirectional flows and hence are not limited to influences flowing from the receiving country to the sending country (Rother 2009: 247; Piper 2009: 235). This is further developed when transnational political practice

is said to 'concentrate[s] on the continuous feedback mechanism through which migrants' transnational practices are being influenced by – and influence – their political institutional environment' (Ostergaard-Nielsen 2001: 760).

We consider that a basic problem with the existing understanding of the term 'political remittances' is that as a concept, it has not been expanded to its full potential. It is time, therefore, to conceptualise the term and make it clearly distinguishable from the concept of 'social remittances'. In so doing, we make it broad enough to encompass a range of political activities and behaviours that are both tangible and symbolic, measurable and immeasurable. Measurable political remittances include a migrant vote and a tangible political act of being sent back to the home country. Immeasurable political remittances can be remitting political values, practices and identities or simply being active in various forms in lending support to a politician, a party or a movement (such as democratisation) back home. The important difference in this understanding is that there need not be a *change* in the political identity or behaviour of the migrant in order to remit politically. What is important is the 'continuous feedback mechanism' through which migrants participate in the politics of the home country meaningfully and actively, remitting support to a political end.

Furthermore, this paper states that in order to examine the political activities between immigrants and their country of origin, it is crucial to de-couple transnational relations from diasporic ones, contrary to what Portes does in his typology of 'crossborder activities' (Portes 2011: 198). In fact, it is more accurate to use the concept 'diasporic political participation' instead of 'transnational political participation', for the latter does not necessarily focus on the country of origin of those who are engaged in it. Transnational relations may include diasporic relations but are not limited to them. Furthermore, what is common between migrant 'political remittances' and 'diasporic political participation' is that in both instances, the participants consider their 'homeland' as the locus of their activities. For this reason, we propose replacing 'transnational political participation' with 'diasporic political participation' and consider the latter and 'political remittances' to be a subset activity within the broader field of diasporic relations (Tabar 2012).

A Brief History of Lebanese Migration to Australia and the Political Environment

In broad terms, the history of Lebanese migration to Australia is divided into three phases, which were shaped by pre- and post-war immigration policy: the first phase started roughly in 1880 and ended in 1947; the second lasted from 1947 until 1975; and the last phase began in 1975 during the Lebanese Civil War and is still unfolding to date. However, the number of Lebanese entering Australia has dropped considerably since 1990, compared to the period during the civil war between 1975 and 1990. During the first phase, the number of immigrants did not exceed 2000 persons, and they were mostly Christians with a few number of Druze. During the second phase, a greater number of Lebanese immigrants arrived in Australia,

especially after 1966 and the Arab–Israeli war in June 1967. The 1976 census figures show that the number of immigrants born in Lebanon amounted to 33,000 people who mostly came from villages scattered in the Northern part of Mount Lebanon. During the third phase, Lebanese immigration to Australia was characterised by a prominent increase in the number of migrants coming from both the Christian and Muslim communities. In fact, the number of Muslim immigrants rose from 7,000 in 1976 to 15,600 in 1981. At a time when the percentage of Lebanese Muslims of the total number of immigrants born in Lebanon in 1971 was 14 per cent, this percentage reached 31 per cent in 1981 (Humphrey 2001: 563). Humphrey also suggests that in 1988, the proportion of Sunni Muslims to Shiites was two-thirds to one (2001: 563). The majority of Sunni Muslims came from the North of Lebanon, too, while the Shiite Muslims came from the South, especially from villages adjacent to the border with Israel.

After 1990, the number of Lebanese immigrants began to decline considerably. This was mainly due to the restructuring of the Australian economy, which started in 1980s, leading to the downsizing of the industrial sector and the expansion of the service sector and the so-called knowledge economy. Today there are almost 75,000 Australians who were born in Lebanon and over 180,000 who claim Lebanese ancestry. Over half identify themselves as Christians and 40 per cent as Muslims (Tabar *et al.* 2010). Village chain migration dictated that Lebanese migration was concentrated in specific areas, which has resulted in 75 per cent residing in suburban Sydney. Coupled with strong cultural preferences for kinship- and sectarian-based networks, this has resulted in the proliferation of village and religious associations as community social structures.

The Roles of Sending and Receiving Countries

Australia's multiculturalist policies of the 1970s coincided with the peak of immigration from Lebanon, and were highly conducive to the creation and growth of ethnic community organisations and institutions. These groups included community and religious councils as overarching community organisations to centralise government control and support of these organisations (Tabar 2009: 8). The 1970s also saw the emergence of Australian offshoots of Lebanese political parties, which was largely in response to the Lebanese Civil War between 1975 and 1990.

Arabic language media also grew, and is now well established in the community. Community newspapers include '*el-Telegraph*', '*an-Nahar*', '*al-Anwar*' and '*al-Mustaqbal*', which, according to owners, have a readership of approximately 6,000 readers per week, excluding those who procure their news online. Arabic language radio is broadcasted by both public and private providers, including *Radio 2moro* that broadcasts in Arabic 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and 2ME and SBS Radio that has a part-time schedule. Hourly bulletins intermittently report the latest developments in Lebanon and, to a lesser degree, events happening within the

Lebanese-Australian community. They also transmit live interviews with politicians in Lebanon as well local interviews with local community leaders (Internet interview with Tony Isaac, Director of WMI on 24 August 2009). These media outlets function as a platform for diaspora political discourse, particularly during election campaigns. Privately owned media tend to split along factional lines and push certain home-related political agendas.

In addition to this, the number of viewers of Arabic-language television stations has notably increased in recent years. According to the owner and the Director of World media International (WMI), which has an exclusive right to distributing TV Broadcasting service in Australia of many TV stations including *FTV*, *LBCI*, *MTV*, *OTV*, *al-Arabia* and *Al Jazeera*, the number of households that have access to this service is 25,000, equivalent to 60 per cent of the volume of the Arab viewers market in Australia. Furthermore, the director added that the annual growth rate of subscribers to Arabic TV stations ranges from 5 to 15 per cent. It is worth mentioning at this point that Lebanese families constitute 75 per cent of the total number of Arab families subscribing to this cable TV broadcasting service.

The above settlement patterns, the creation of community organisations including political parties and the proliferation of Arabic media within the Lebanese community in Australia generated the conditions that were conducive to the 'genesis' of a diasporic political discourse centred on Lebanon. Australian multiculturalism since the 1970s has provided the opportunity for the development of a '*diasporic public sphere*' in which Lebanese migrants are able to debate, develop and diffuse political ideas. This diasporic public sphere refers to the space in which political discourse and activities occur, whether in a structured and institutionalised community environment or in general public space. It includes almost daily engagement in political debates in migrant households, workplaces and public spaces such as shopping malls, cafés and community gatherings. The presence of Arabic media enhances this phenomenon by making it easier for Lebanese expatriates in Australia to follow the news and events pertaining to home politics. It constitutes a crucial element in the construction of the political opinion and counter opinion, and fuels political engagement.

Looking at this process from the perspective of the sending country, the Lebanese state has reinvigorated its interest in the Lebanese diaspora particularly since the last presidential election in May 2008.[1] Its aim was to build stronger relationships with the Lebanese abroad and their descendants through various channels including the semi-state organisation called Lebanese World Cultural Union (WLCU). Additionally, a bill was passed in Parliament, granting the holders of Lebanese citizenship who live outside of Lebanon the right to vote in absentia, beginning with the next general elections in 2013. In April 2012, President Sleiman undertook a landmark visit to Australia, the first by an incumbent Lebanese President, with a host of scheduled events aimed at engaging both Australian Government officials and the Lebanese community. During this visit, the issues of expatriate voting, migrant investment and the promotion of applying for the Lebanese citizenship were the principal points of

discussion with migrant groups (interview with the President's adviser on Emigrant Affairs, 14 March 2012).[2]

In terms of the main Lebanese political parties which have chapters in Australia, they have recently restructured their party organisations to include emigrant representation. The Lebanese Forces (LF), for example, has an expatriate party leader in Lebanon who oversees the 63 'Expatriate Bureaus' worldwide (interview with the general secretary of LF in Australia, 29 July 2009). The Free Patriotic Movement (FPM) also has a Diaspora Committee, as does the Future Movement (FM). These party offices facilitate the channelling of the latest political directives and their dissemination among their supporters in Australia (interview with leader of the FM conducted 21 August 2009), as well as the transfer of political remittances by the Lebanese in Australia.

The encouraging conditions of Australian multiculturalism, and the simultaneous engagement tactics of political bodies in Lebanon, underscored by a vibrant Lebanese–Australian diasporic public sphere, pave the way for the genesis of diasporic political discourse among migrants in Australia. Diasporic political links between the two countries have also been facilitated, as mentioned previously, by the latest development in the technology of human mobility and communications.

Genesis – Diasporic Political Activities and Institutions

Evidence of both of Guarnizo *et al.*' s classifications of 'transnational' political activity can be found in the Lebanese community in Australia, but in this paper we only focus on a particular form of 'political remittances' best described as argued above as part of 'diasporic political participation'. During the civil war (1975–1990) in Lebanon, Australia witnessed the emergence of political organisations which reflected to a large extent all the protagonists in that war. This resulted in the mobilisation of the Lebanese community and the organisation of many activities to support the opposing parties in the homeland and provide them with political and material assistance. These activities were promoted by the existence of a large number of party members who had left Lebanon during the war years, settled in Sydney and Melbourne, and played a leading role in organising and mobilising the Lebanese migrants in Australia. Political factions aligned themselves along pro-Palestinian leftist or nationalist rightist lines, and remained polarised in this manner until the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982. Since then, the political landscape in Lebanon has changed dramatically and became increasingly shaped by confessional politics. Lebanese political groups in Australia have mirrored this new development, culminating more recently in the so-called 'March 14' versus 'March 8' alliances which emerged in Lebanon in 2005 after the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri.[3]

At the moment, Sydney and Melbourne house party branches of all the major political parties operating in Lebanon. Having said this, it does not mean that the political engagements of members of the community only reflect what is going on at

'home' (Tabar *et al.* 2003). In fact, what comes into the constitution of migrant political engagements is a number of factors relating to developments in Australia as well as in Lebanon. This includes personal and group initiatives, the structure of political opportunity in Australia, the migrant policy of the sending country, 'homeland' politics and the impact of globalisation.

Fieldwork conducted over the course of the 2009 elections revealed that these political forces did not enjoy equal popularity in the community, nor did they have the same party organisational structure. However, all of them had leading party organs which usually consisted of a handful of party activists. This was true of the LF, the Phalange Party (PP), the FM, the Marada Movement (MM), the FPM, the Communist Party (CP) and others. In the case of *Hezbollah*, its public presence in Australia is illegal, and therefore its activities are focused on educational, religious and welfare issues.

Activities common to the majority of political parties include regular meetings, online communication and organising social events such as barbecues, annual gala dinners and balls. Fundraising activities also make up a large part of their activities and they enjoy significant success (for the activities of LF, FPM, FM and MM in Australia, see www.lebanese-forces.com; www.ualm.org.au; www.futuremovement australia.com; www.elmaradaaustralia.com.au); for example, MM used the funds raised from donations at the aforementioned events and party subscriptions, to purchase property which they converted into a branch centre (interview with MM leader, Sydney 18 July 2009). As part of the strategy to strengthen their presence in Australia, party branches host prominent political figures from their parties in Lebanon. MM insists on having prominent attendees at their annual balls including the party diaspora liaison, members of parliament and family members of the party leader, Suleiman Franjieh. Similarly, FM hosts delegations from Lebanon, including the visits by FM members of parliament to advocate for their political outlook, increase their political support in Australia and above all, maintain direct contact with their diasporic base. Political parties also tend to interact with other kinds of community organisations, particularly village and religious associations, seeking their support, especially during elections. It becomes clear from this discussion that 'political remittances' are 'multi-directional', and what is eventually transferred to homeland could be greatly shaped by the latter.

The Conduit – Political Parties and the 2009 Parliamentary Election

When the campaign for the general elections in June 2009 was launched in Lebanon, the Lebanese community in Australia was ready to fully engage in it. The competing political forces in Lebanon already had their representatives in Australia, with party branches and broad alliances duplicating the division between March 14 and March 8 forces. However, their level of readiness was further augmented by the many visits paid to them and to other village and religious associations, by the competing political forces prior to the 2009 elections. The following section documents some of

these activities and others during the lead up to the election. Of particular interest was the purchase of airfares to Lebanon, thereby facilitating migrant participation and rendering them conduits in this particular instance of the transfer of political remittances.

Before entering into a detailed analysis of electoral participation in Sydney, we should note this will not include the activities of *Hezbollah*, *Amal*, the Syrian Social Nationalist Party (SSNP) and the leftist groups. In the case of *Hezbollah*, the role of its supporters during the election campaign was mainly restricted to providing logistical support for their allies in MM and FPM and the SSNP, due to its illegal status in Australia. This role was reinforced by two additional factors: first, the fact that the majority of the Lebanese *Shi'a* in Australia originated from the South of Lebanon (and *Baalbek-Hermel*), where *Hezbollah* faces no real political competition, negated the party's need to canvass for votes; second, the strong public presence of MM and FPM in Sydney and Melbourne enabled them to spearhead March 8 election campaign in the community. Finally, given the resulting clandestine nature of *Hezbollah* activities, we could not meet with party members to obtain information about their role in the election campaign. As for *Amal*, despite the presence of many *Shi'i* migrants who support it, it did not possess the organisational capacity needed for such a campaign. Nevertheless, our examination of the local Arabic newspapers revealed that *Amal* organised two main activities during the period before the due date of the elections: the first was a public gathering marking the celebration of the Resistance and Liberation Day, nearly two weeks before the due date of parliamentary elections (*An-Nahar*, 28 May 2009 and 25 May 2009: 32 and 7, respectively, and *El-Telegraph*, 27 May 2009: 7), and the second was the publication of political statements in local Arabic newspapers in support of March 8 Alliance (statement published in 24 February 2009: 27, in *El-Telegraph*). With regard to SSNP, this group focused primarily on gathering names of people who were ready to fly back home to cast their votes in favour of the party's list of candidates in the *Koura* and *Zghartah* districts, north of Lebanon. Apart from these measures, SSNP did not campaign openly like others but followed a quiet style of campaigning, relying on a blind loyalty of party members and supporters.

Registration and Surveying of Supporters

The FPM in Australia functions under the auspices of an organisation called 'The United Australian Lebanese Movement' (UALM). Its leader in Australia declared in the lead up to the elections that UALM had founded a special committee called the Elections Committee, which was charged with working on the general elections in Lebanon. To this end, a comprehensive survey was conducted via the FPM website, in which respondents were asked their names and questions about their willingness to return to Lebanon to cast their votes. UALM leaders also contacted FPM supporters by paying visits to their homes requesting the same information. MM formed a similar committee which conducted a comprehensive survey of its

sympathisers for the same purpose. In this context, the MM informant relayed that on one occasion, an annual ball was organised before the election date during which people willing to travel to Lebanon for election purposes were asked to give their personal details, and the total number of people who attended the event on this occasion was close to 1,200.

Visits

The competing political parties and movements in the election campaign relied also on dispatching representatives to Australia to win the immigrants' support. In a migrant culture (especially one made up largely of first-generation migrants in which ties are based around personal and communal relations), the personal presence of the party representative adds enthusiasm among the immigrants and fuels their diasporic political attachment to 'home' politics. More often than not, the leaders of March 14 and March 8 coalitions could not themselves come to Australia, but sent representatives instead who had a tremendous effect on the mobilisation of their respective supporters. These representatives engaged in media and propaganda activities in a variety of political, social and religious settings.

The FPM in Lebanon sent two representatives to Australia, both in charge of Lebanese Diaspora affairs inside the Movement. In March 2009, UALM organised a large festival in honour of these two members, which included a dinner and a diverse programme of entertainment. Revenue from ticket costs and donations from the event were put towards FPM political cause. As part of their tour to major Australian cities, Sadek and Shami delivered public lectures, which were attended by a crowd of supporters. The delegation also held a press conference and paid visits to the Maronite, Orthodox and the Roman Catholic bishops to enhance their image as champions of the Christian cause over and ahead of the LF and PP (*El-Telegraph*, 16 March 2009 and *An-Nahar*, 17 March 2009).

FM also received delegations from two groups: one whose nomination on the FM list of candidates was nearly settled (i.e. Ahmed Fatfat and Mustafa Hashem) and the other was made up of persons whose nomination was not yet confirmed (Musbah Ahdab, Ali Ghoul and Mohammed Alemeddine). The first group had several contacts and meetings with various forces and formal parties including Lebanese consuls and the Lebanese Ambassador, deputies from the Australian parliament (some of whom were of Lebanese origin) Aldermen and Mayors of local governments of Lebanese background, hometown and family associations (*Zreika* clan from *Menieh,* for example) and sectarian religious institutions. They also conducted interviews on Arabic radio stations and with local Lebanese journalists and participated in recreational trips and barbeques, which had been organised by sympathetic political and hometown associations. Fatfat participated in two large public gatherings, one in Sydney and the other in Melbourne, to commemorate the 'martyrdom' of Rafik Hariri.[4]

The visit of the second group to Australia was done in the context of its quest to win the nomination on the FM list in their electoral district, a move that successfully mobilised the community to collect 1,000 signatures to petition Saad Hariri, the FM leader in Lebanon, to nominate M. Alameddine as the FM candidate in *Menieh* for the upcoming election.

Pro-March 14 candidates who also visited Australia included Michel Moawad, Yussef Douwahi and a representative of Jawad Boulus, the third candidate for *Zghartah* district. They were also escorted by seven Mayors from the district to facilitate the process of obtaining Lebanese identity cards for migrants who did not possess them. Voting without an ID would not be possible. During this visit, the delegation campaigned extensively in support of their political choices and urged the people of *Zghartah* and its neighbouring villages to actively participate in the upcoming elections by returning to Lebanon. They also met with the main religious, village and charitable associations and opened an election office which kept campaigning until the election was over (*An-Nahar* in 10 February 2009: 21 and 23, for more details on the delegation's activities in Australia). In contrast, the LF in Australia did not receive a delegation from Lebanon prior to the elections, but several election events were organised, at which it was not uncommon for the party leader, Samir Geagea, to speak to his supporters by telephone. MM, on the other hand, relied on a televised screening of their leader Suleiman Franjieh addressing his supporters in Sydney during their annual dinner held prior to the 2009 elections (*El-Telegraph*, 6 March 2009: 18, and *An-Nahar*, 3 March 2009: 6).

Facilitating Migrant Return

With respect to securing the participation of their supporters on the day of elections, the UALM purchased discounted tickets in bulk and urged those supporters who had obtained free tickets from opposition parties, to 'accept the offer', but cast their votes for the FPM candidates. A UALM informant added that when voters arrived in Lebanon, FPM offered them practical assistance to secure 'their participation in the voting'. More importantly, he stated: 'we focused on Christian areas and we brought expatriates belonging to these areas, such as *Ba'abda*, *Matn*, *Kisirwan*, *Jizzine*, *Batroun* and *Koura*', where the election battle was perceived to be tied.

Moreover, the FM General Secretary in Australia revealed to us that the decision to fly their supporters over to Lebanon to partake in the June 2009 elections was taken two weeks prior to the due date of the upcoming voting day. This decision, he alleged, was taken in the wake of discovering that March 8 political groups had already decided to do the same. The informant also asserted that the March 8 plan was to take its supporters to Lebanon focusing on the highly contested districts of *Zghartah*, *Batroun*, *Koura*, *Mount Lebanon* (excluding *Shouf* and *Aleih*), *Zahleh* and *Western Bekaa Valley*.

Impact – Electoral Participation

There are conflicting figures regarding the total number of expatriates who came to Lebanon to cast their votes in the June 2009 elections. Immediately after the appearance of these figures in Lebanon, they were subjected to opposing interpretations: on the one hand, March 8 coalitions were quick in attributing the victory of March 14 forces in the Districts of *Koura*, *Batroun*, *Zahleh* and Western *Beqa'a*, to the decisive role of expatriate votes (in *Zghartah*, though, March 8 candidates won the election). These figures ranged from 48,000 to 121,000 votes; however, what was certainly true in this context was the arrival of thousands of emigrants from many countries, including the Gulf States, West Africa, Eastern and Western European countries, Canada, the USA, South America and Australia (*As-Safir*, 23 June 2009: 5). Figure 1 shows the breakdown of Lebanese arrivals by country between the 25th of May and 7th of June as estimated using data obtained from customs records at the Rafik Hariri International Airport (Information International 2009).

Clearly, it was impossible in our fieldwork to get accurate figures on the number of expatriates who voted in the June 2009 elections. Perhaps an approximate figure could be obtained by collecting the data from all the election committees of all parties concerned, but even then one will encounter the gross difficulty of breaking the 'wall of silence' of the competing candidates who would like to keep this information confidential.

Additionally, there is no entirely accurate way of determining the exact number of Lebanese citizens travelled from Australia to Lebanon in order to vote in 2009. However, the Immigration authorities in Australia do keep records of the nationality and intended destination of all outgoing passengers from Australian airports, through which we can identify broad patterns of travel between Australia and Lebanon at that time. Table 1 shows the number of outgoing passengers from Melbourne and Sydney international airports who recorded Lebanon as their country of disembarkation or country of future residence prior to the 9th June election in 2009, and in 2008 and 2007 as a comparison. The 2007 travel data are taken into
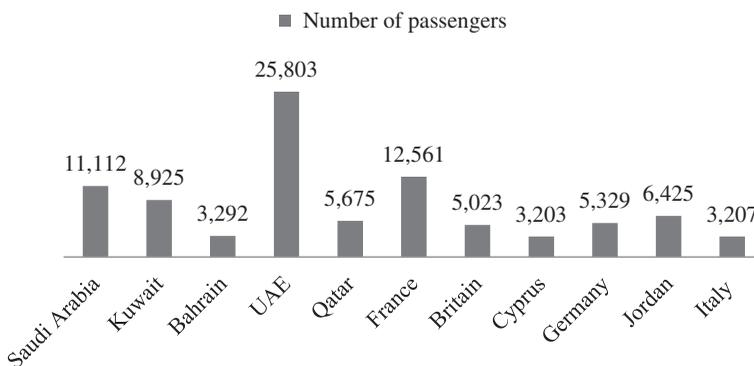
Figure 1 Breakdown of Lebanese arrivals, by country, between May 25th and June 7th, 2009.

Table 1 Number of outgoing passengers from Melbourne and Sydney who recorded Lebanon as country of destination.

| | Number of passengers | | | | | |
| | 2007 | | 2008[a] | | 2009 | |
	May	June	May	June	May	June
Lebanese citizens recording Lebanon as their country of disembarkation	334	324	273	470	607	512
Lebanese citizens recording Lebanon as their country of future residence	613	531	556	761	1,002	898
Australian citizens recording Lebanon as their country of disembarkation	914	939	798	2,205	2,745	3,987
Australian citizens recording Lebanon as their country of future residence	1,656	1,715	1,652	4,069	5,621	9,333
Total numbers of departures to Lebanon by month	3,517	3,509	3,279	7,505	9,975	14,730
Total number of passengers	7,026		10,784		24,705	

[a]Irregularities in data to be considered due to the closure of Rafik Hariri International Airport in 2008 because of civil unrest.

account because of irregularities in the 2008 numbers, due to the fact that Rafik Hariri International Airport was closed between 7th and 22nd of May owing to the outbreak of sectarian violence in the city.

These figures show there was a 129 per cent increase between 2008 and 2009 in the number of passengers that recorded Lebanon either as their country of disembarkation or future residence and a 251 per cent increase between 2007 and 2009. There is no way of knowing how many of the Australian citizens recorded also held Lebanese nationality, nor how many of the total 24,705 passengers returned with the ability to, let alone the intention of, voting (voting is not mandatory), but there is still a noteworthy upsurge in the number of passengers travelling from Australia to Lebanon in time to participate.

The number of Australian participants was alternatively estimated from data collected from travel agents in Sydney, who were involved in selling and issuing tickets to March 14 and March 8 groups and sympathetic hometown associations. It should be noted that this method of counting the participants is not entirely accurate either. It may include those who visited Lebanon independent of party assistance, and those who planned their visits to their country of origin prior to the launching of the election campaigns in Australia. Lastly, it may also include those who used their free tickets to vote for a candidate other than the one whose party donated the price of his/her ticket (a choice taken by one of the interviewees).

Fieldwork showed that March 14 relied on three main travel agents to purchase tickets for their supporters. In the interview with the first agent, the informant declared that the supporters of LF and 'the list of *Zghartah* District' (candidates sponsored by March 14) had bought tickets in two phases: the first batch, consisting of 1,800 tickets, was bought between 8th and 18th of April 2009, when the price of

tickets to Lebanon were still low. The second batch (1,890 tickets) was purchased two weeks before the election date. With regard to March 8 groups, they also bought from the same agent approximately 520 tickets. In addition to this, March 8 representatives revealed that Franjieh's supporters bought 1,300 tickets, divided into 500 to send people to the *Zghartah* District and 800 to the *Koura* District, and the total number of tickets bought by FPM leaders in Sydney was 1,500 (interviews with MM leader in Sydney, 17 July 2009 and 18 July 2009).

The second agent had sold FM committee in Sydney 3,174 tickets, and they included 219 tickets for Muslim migrants who were residents of *Zghartah* District, and 30 tickets for Christians who originated from *Zghartah*, *Koura* and *Zahleh* Districts. The third travel agent also informed that he issued around 1,450 tickets to FM committee and 200 to FM supporters who travelled to Lebanon at their own expense. Furthermore, the first and the second travel agents stated that 150 supporters of the March 14 Independent candidate, Boutrus Harb, who were mostly from the Harb clan, paid for their own ticket to Lebanon (interview with a member in Tannourine association, Sydney, 8 August 2009). Another two travel agents who originated from the hometown of *Zghartah* (hence, they capture most of the ticket market among migrants who originated from *Zghartah*) revealed to me that they sold around 400 tickets during the month of May and until the 5th of June, 2009. It is common knowledge that one of the two agents was a supporter of MM, which means that more likely than not the 200 tickets that he claimed to have sold would have gone to MM sympathisers.

According to these collected figures, the approximate number of participants in the June 2009 elections coming from Sydney was 9,600 persons (i.e. 91.4 per cent) for March 14 and 825 people (or 8.6 per cent) for March 8. These 10,425 persons make up 7.85 per cent of the total number of individuals who identified themselves as of Lebanese ancestry in New South Wales in the 2006 national census (ABS 2006). To estimate the approximate number of participants from Victoria, we can calculate the same percentage of those who identified their ancestry as Lebanese in that state, which comes to 2,727 people. This totals at approximately 13,152 participants for both states. Applying the same ratios as New South Wales to Victoria, this would be 2,493 supporting March 14 and 234 supporting March 8. Notwithstanding that these figures are estimations, and levels of political activity may vary between the two states, they still provide a broad indication of Lebanese–Australian participation in 2009 elections.

Moreover, our estimates indicate that the vast majority of those who travelled from Australia to Lebanon for the purpose of voting were from the districts of *Zghartah* (three seats), *Koura* (three seats), *Batroun* (two seats) and *Dunnieh* (three seats), and the highest difference between the winners and the losers in the first three areas did not exceed 6,000 votes, whereas the lowest was 900 (both figures pertain to *Zghartah* district). Assuming other variables remain the same, it is obvious that migrant participation in the 2009 elections (amounting to at least 13,000 voters from Australia) was decisive in determining the final outcomes in at least three electoral

districts. In addition, if we add the total number of the above seats (11 seats) to the number of seats in *Zahle* district (7), another area won by March 14 which witnessed a large participation by returning migrants, we will get 18 seats whose final results were arguably determined by returned migrants. It is worth noting here that the overall difference between the two competing alliances was 14 seats.

Analysis

Let me begin by stating that the boundaries between the genesis, the conduit and the impact of political remittances are not rigidly closed. A particular conduit such as the visits by political leaders to the diaspora can also contribute to the genesis of particular political remittances. Similarly, impacting on home politics can also enhance the widespread acceptance of particular political views and the proliferation of more political supporters (i.e. conduits) for channelling them to homeland. This is often the case when the impact on home politics yields positive results in line with the wishes of the diasporic actors.

Our case study indicates that political forces in the home country are capable of dealing with the diaspora in purely utilitarian terms; they invited them to vote on their own terms and for their particular interests. First, the diaspora in this instance had no say into the issues they voted for. Instead they were completely overwhelmed by the political debate that was exported to them by home politicians. Finally, the competing political forces in Lebanon managed to tailor the political participation of the Lebanese in Australia in the 2009 elections to serve their specific electoral needs. Only members of the diaspora who were needed to cast their votes in unsafe seats had their tickets bought or were encouraged to come to Lebanon. In other words, the impact of the political remittances was neatly regulated to serve specific candidates in specific localities. It was an exclusively instrumental act of incorporating the impact of Lebanese diasporic political remittances into the dominant political structure in Lebanon and was far from being an effort to incorporate any changed or reformed political ideals from the diaspora. Under these conditions, homeland political forces were able to ignore unwanted diasporic voices and focus only on the ones that were needed for their narrow political gains.

As an example of political remittances, facilitating migrant return for elections is one that is tangible and measurable. The diasporic public sphere cultivates political interest and political parties drive participation. The result was a clear, numerical increase in votes which had tangible outcomes in certain electorates where the election hung in the balance. Migrants who did not return to vote also offered tangible as well as symbolic political remittances in various forms. Many of them donated money in support of their political party in Lebanon and others have exerted their personal influence to persuade people in their hometown to vote for their preferred candidates (interview with leader of the *Dunieh* Association in Sydney, 9 September 2009). In relation to symbolic political remittances, many migrants actively participated in electoral campaigns organised in Sydney or Melbourne by

their favourite political groups. They also assisted in organising events to disseminate particular political views and mobilise support for specific candidates. Leaders of village and family associations contributed by offering the centres in which they hold their meetings and even their private houses as campaigning platforms. In fact, providing a comprehensive description of all measurable and symbolic political remittances would require additional fieldwork and a partition of this task into separate ethnographic/anthropological projects that are beyond the scope of this paper.

Conclusions

Political remittances are to be framed within, yet differentiated from, a broader understanding of non-monetary remittances such as social remittances. Political remittances on their own serve to embrace a broad range of tangible and symbolic activities pertaining to power structures and relations in the homeland. Their triadic structure consists of a genesis, conduit and impact stage through which political remittances are constructed, mobilised and sent selected political actors at 'home'. In fact, as shown above, the process of generating all forms of political remittances is best captured when analysed as part of the 'diasporic public sphere'. It is within this sphere that migrant political views concerning 'homeland' are constructed and then transformed into 'political acts' that are remitted back 'home'. Our paper has shown the extent to which the Lebanese–Australian 'diasporic public sphere' is vibrant and resourceful. It covers a wide range of associations (village, charitable, religious and political associations) and many media platforms that are directly engaged in transmitting electronic, printed and visual 'news' about Lebanon. It also entails frequent visits by 'public' figures coming from Lebanon to Australia and vice versa. All of these activities are underscored by communication and transport technology that dramatically facilitates the execution of these activities.

In this paper, we have also argued for locating the concept of 'political remittances' in the field of 'diasporic relations' and, more specifically, as a significant part of 'diasporic political participation'. This made our analysis of migrants' engagement in 'home' politics more conceptually precise than when reliant on the broader concept of 'transnational political participation'. 'Diasporic political participation' including 'political remittances' refers to specific political relations linking diasporic communities to their 'home' politics.

Finally, this research is a showcase of an incorporationalist form of political remittance; it was engineered to suit the needs of the dominant political elites in Lebanon, with little to no regard for the political aspirations of the diaspora. Other noted forms of political remittances observed by Goldring (2003); Piper (2009); Rother (2009); and Fakhoury (2012) are much more transformationalist, such as the migrants' role in the democratisation of the home country. Political remittances in the context of the Lebanese situation have the potential to become increasingly transformationalist if plans for expatriate voting come to fruition, and even more so if it were based on the

principle of independent emigrant representation. The current debate in Lebanon on the electoral law for the forthcoming June elections, 2014, included a proposal put forward by the Cabinet suggesting the allocation of a quota of seats (6) to all Lebanese living abroad. Indeed, broadening the participation in upcoming elections to those who were not in the scope of the dominant political parties could lead to casting migrant votes free from home-based political calculations determined exclusively by home politicians. Through direct political representation, perhaps migrants will have the political opportunity to make independent political demands and benefit more from government policies.

Acknowledgement

Notes

[1]   Note the inaugural speech by Michel Suleiman, the President of Lebanon, which can be retrieved from: http://www.presidency.gov.lb/Arabic/Pages/default.aspx
[2]   For a full coverage of the visit confirming our anticipation, see http://www.presidency.gov.lb/Arabic/Pages/default.aspx
[3]   For a useful discussion of the differences between March 14 and March 8 alliances and the political issues over which they fought 2009 elections, see Knudsen and Kerr (2012).
[4]   For more details on Fatfat's meetings with Zreika Clan and other activities, see *Al-Anwar* in 12 March 2009: 14; and *El-Telegraph* in 24 February 2009: 24, 2 March 2009: 14, 3 March 2009: 23, 4 March 2009: 5, 6 March 2009: 14 and 13 March 2009: 21. For his activities in Melbourne, see, *El-Telegraph* in 13 March 2009: 17).

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