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DIASPORA, TRANSNATIONALISM, POLITICAL REMITTANCES AND LEBANESE MIGRANTS

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Conceptual clarification

Literature on migration is abundant, with an interchangeable use of the terms "transnational" and "diasporic" when referring to the relationships of migrants with their home of origin. What makes this habit persistent is the fact that the two terms overlap. But at a time when all diasporic relations are transnational, not all transnational relations are diasporic. Hence the need to make a clear and distinct differentiation between the two terms.

Let's start with the term "transnational": a relation becomes transnational when it refers to an issue or a concern that is not confined to one particular nation or national community. In other words, when relations and implicated matters refer to and involve people and places across national borders, then we can refer to them as transnational. To fight for peace in the world, or for a nuclear free world, or for universal human rights, or for a clean environment and the protection of our eco-system, and so on, is to be part of a transnational activity and to advocate for a transnational cause. In addition, people who take part in these activities are not necessarily confined to a particular national community or ethnicity. They are drawn and mobilized from across national borders and their emerging identity could even be described as transnational. Those who advocate for such causes can be named as transnationalist and their beliefs could be subsumed under the term transnationalism.

In this sense, I agree with Portes (1999) when he makes a further distinction between globalization and transnationalism. Accordingly, he states that transnationalism is globalization from below, whereas transnationalism is globalization from above.

Similarly, diasporic relations and issues are transnational in character but they assume different characteristics. The space of activities involving diasporic relations and issues spreads across national borders. However, they ultimately focus on one specific country; that is, the homeland of the people

engaged in them. Not only are relations and issues country specific but those who are engaged in them are also driven by a common sense of belonging to that country of origin. In this respect, at a time when transnationalism is global in focus and orientation, diasporic relations and issues are country specific and are mainly activated by people who originate from the same country. For this reason, it is analytically important to differentiate conceptually between the two realities: that which belongs to diaspora and migration, and the other to transnationalism and globalization.

Diasporic field

Migrants and their continuous engagement with "home" affairs generates what I call a "diasporic field". Like any other field, the diasporic field consists of unequal relations generated by the unequal distribution of the "diasporic capital" among its occupants (the migrants). On the other hand, "diasporic capital" refers to the totality of activities, skills, thoughts, affects, and so on, that migrants are capable of transmitting in the context of their interaction with their home of origin. However, different groups and individuals in the field have different views (i.e. position takings) about the proper diasporic capital they and other field occupants should subscribe to. This continuous struggle not only over the legitimacy of diasporic capital but also over its possession is what essentially makes the relations of the diasporic field relations of power. The more the field "players" succeed in changing the terms for what makes the diasporic capital legitimate, the more powerful they become, and this power is distributed unequally among them depending on the outcome of their struggle over the possession of this capital. It is worth noting at this point that the home state's acknowledgment of the diasporic capital plays a decisive role in confirming its legitimacy and domination.

Lastly, diasporic capital has many sub-capitals. They include but are not limited to economic, political, social and cultural sub-capitals. This leads us to the next part of this presentation.

Remittances

In the context of migration studies, remittances first emerged to refer to financial remittances, migrant money earned abroad and transferred to the home of origin. Later on, Peggy Levitt (1998, 2011) coined the term social remittances to indicate that migrants do not only transfer money to their home of origin but they also send what she called "social remittances"; that is, ideas and practices that are shaped by the migrant presence abroad. Upon further reflection on the topic, one realizes that additional types of remittances are also transmitted to the migrant home of origin, which include political and cultural remittances. Once more, Peggy Levitt's concept of social remittances was too general and it needed some further unpacking. At a time when economic remittances are clearly differentiated from social remittances, the latter could further be differentiated into other types of remittances that would have an impact on various corresponding fields in the country of origin.

More importantly, at this point of analysis, we argue for the need to conceptualize all types of "remittances" using the "field" lens to better understand these remittances, the process of their

formation, and their specific impact on the home of origin. Undoubtedly, the place of settlement and the way in which it is experienced by migrants would have an important impact on the formation of the various resources acquired by these migrants. In addition, these resources are not only distributed unequally among migrants, they are also valorized differentially depending on the terms according to which particular resources (capital specific to the receiving field) are made legitimate. And as mentioned earlier, the state of the receiving country plays a crucial role in setting the terms for their valorization. Furthermore, remittances as expressions of different types of capital (i.e. social, political, cultural and economic) are convertible to one another, and the rate of exchange at which the conversion is accomplished is ultimately set by the power relationships between the various capitals. The more powerful a particular capital is, the greater its purchasing power would be. In Lebanon, for example, it took someone with huge wealth like the late Rafiq Hariri, accrued initially from abroad, to be able to convert his migrant economic capital into social capital and eventually "delegated political power" (Swartz, 2013, pp. 65-66) that made him not only a prime minister but also the most popular Sunni Za 'im (political leader) and even a national one (Tabar & Maaloof, 2021). On a smaller scale, sending financial remittances to help cover the cost of education for a family member would eventually result in making this family member accrue sufficient "cultural capital" that will eventually enable him/her to become a professional and earn a middle class salary.

Put differently, remittances could be differentiated into various types: economic, political, social and cultural, to name but a few. Moreover, to better analyze the character and role of these remittances, it would be more appropriate to do so by using the lens of the Bourdieusian field. In so doing, we better capture their relational character and their integration into the broader context in which they end up circulating. This context will also reveal their contested character and show the extent of their legitimate efficacy and power.

Remittances and the case of Lebanese-Australians

If we examine the Lebanese community in Australia, we will encounter a rich case study that would provide substantial evidence in support of the aforementioned analytical approach. Lebanese migration to Australia dates back to the last quarter of the 19th century (Batrouney & Batrouney, 2019). According to the 2016 census, the number of Australians claiming a Lebanese ancestry is 230,880 persons and 76,450 persons are born in Lebanon. About 90% of the Lebanese in Australia live in Sydney (70%) and Melbourne (20%), the largest two cities in Australia. Their community associations are diverse and abundant. Their relations to Lebanon is multifaceted. They range from being family related to being oriented to religious matters and "home" politics. Of course, they also include activities concerned with their settlement needs, but these activities are not the focus this paper.

Home-related diasporic activities do not happen in a vacuum. They are part of sub-diasporic fields whose capitals, whether economic, political or otherwise, are highly contested by field actors and their

positions in the overarching "field of power", the mother of all fields[1] (Swartz, 2013, pp. 61-64,). In this context, the field of the state plays a key role in setting the terms of exchange between the various capitals and their valorization, and, consequently, in accepting, rejecting or accommodating diasporic relations and activities in the form of remittances received by corresponding fields in the home of origin.

Many Lebanese migrants in Australia remit politically to the home country Lebanon. Their political remittances are predominantly in line with the political standards set down by the Lebanese state and its political elites. In times of general elections, most migrants who participate in these elections cast their votes in favor of the guardians of the regime. In addition, they help in reproducing the dominant regime in forms other than voting, including but not limited to, small and huge financial donations and support to their preferred candidates in Lebanon. They also engage in lobbying activities targeting major political parties in Australia (and other more influential western countries, such as France and the United States) to interfere in their capacity and advocate for the cause of their leaders back home. Further exploration of the role of migration in "home" politics reveals many other forms of diasporic contribution in "home" politics. In the case of Lebanon (and many other migrant countries as well), new and sometimes influential political leaders are created due to their migration from Lebanon. Apart from many MPs whose previous migration was crucial in getting elected to the parliament, three return migrants were able to become prime ministers of Lebanon because of the wealth they accumulated abroad: Hussein al Ouwayni, Rafiq Hariri and the current prime minister, Najib Miqati (for further elaboration on this theme, see Tabar & Maalouf, 2021).

That said, it does not mean that challenging political remittances are also not transferred to Lebanon. Most recently, the October 17 Uprising that broke out in 2019 provides a prime example. In the wake of this uprising, many Lebanese abroad demonstrated in support of the demands of the protesters advocating for change and reform. They donated financially for the protesting groups and provided aids-in-kind to the Lebanese people who were affected by the blast of Beirut Port in August 2020. They are still engaged in lobbying western governments to subject the dominant political elites to accountability for bringing the economy down and for creating a failed state.

Clearly, in times when the state and the ruling elites are in crisis, the struggle over the terms for a valorized and legitimate political capital becomes heightened. The point is to avoid marginalizing

[1] "The field of power is that arena of struggle among the different power fields themselves (particularly the economic and cultural fields-referring to modern capitalist societies) for the right to dominate *throughout the social order.* It is in the field of power where the predominate types of capital in each of the fields of struggle themselves become the instruments of struggle, one against the other, for the right to be the legitimate form of domination for the whole society. In the field of power, it is no longer a question of struggling to accumulate a particular form of capital or to monopolize the definition of one form (such as cultural form) but a struggle among different forms of power for the power to be recognized as the most legitimate. It is the struggle over the standard for exchange among all forms of capital… This struggle…is largely over the control of the state [which has] the power to control the exchange rates of capitals between the various fields. The field of power is a level of struggle for control over that institutional function". p. 62, Swartz, 2013. On page 63, the same author adds: 'the state is conceptually distinct from the field of power though it is the central organizing mechanism that adjudicates relations among power fields within the field of power. That the state is a key field, or subfield, in Bourdieu's field o power…".

or even ignoring the role of the diaspora in this process, as well as to better situate this role in the overall social order (and disorder) of the country concerned.

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