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# **Lebanese Diaspora and Homeland Relations\***

**By  
Guita Hourani\*\***

**Paper Prepared for the  
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Africa**

**The Forced Migration & Refugee Studies Program  
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\* The views expressed in this paper do not imply the expression of any opinion on the part of the Lebanese Emigration Research Center or Notre Dame University. No parts of this paper shall be used without prior written permission of the author.

\*\* Director of the Lebanese Emigration Research Center

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### **Abstract**

*Although Lebanese emigrants have always been part of Lebanon's life, Lebanon has not actually had a specific diaspora policy. This discussion paper will not deal with the migration process, or the motives for migration. It will focus, instead, on some selected aspects of the Lebanese diaspora and homeland relations. It will draw attention to some of the important networks connecting the Lebanese diaspora with Lebanon and will review courses of action undertaken by the Lebanese government to strengthen ties with its diaspora.*

**Keywords:** Lebanon, diaspora, migrant, diaspora policy, remittances, development, philanthropy, and citizenship.

# Discussion Paper

## Lebanese Diaspora and Homeland Relations

### I. Introduction

It is almost an uncontested truth that every Lebanese household has been touched by migration be it a family member, a relative, or a friend. Although the number of Lebanese emigrants may not be sizeable, about 4 to 6 million, their presence in the countries of migration was and continues to be visible and their impact on the Lebanese political, economic and cultural life has been and continues to be significant.

Despite the fact that the Lebanese government considers Lebanon as a phoenix with two wings -- the resident and the migrant-- and that it can not survive without its other wing, i.e. the migrant, and notwithstanding the fact that the government also considers *Al intishar Al Lubani* 'the Lebanese expansion' to be an integral part of Lebanon, the Lebanese government has never had a diaspora policy to strengthen diaspora-homeland relations.

Lebanese migrants have maintained pulsating networks with each other and with their homeland. Their memory and vision of the homeland further stirred by visits or news and their commitment to restoring Lebanon to its old glory has driven them to maintain and nurture a continuing relationship with the homeland.<sup>1</sup> While living in various countries in North and South America, Australia, Africa, Europe and the Gulf, Lebanese migrants have established migrant communities, some of whose migration history can be traced back to nearly 150 years. Whether individually or collectively, Lebanese migrants have always created solidarity with Lebanon and maintained it. This solidarity was and is "the main basis for the diasporas' cultural, social, political and economic activities."<sup>2</sup> To maintain this solidarity, diasporic communities

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<sup>1</sup> For further discussion on the subject of myth and homeland see W. Safran, "Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return," *Diaspora*, Vol. 1, No.1, 1991, pp. 83-99.

<sup>2</sup> Sheffer, G. Middle Eastern Diasporas: Introduction and Readings, *Journal Middle East Review of*

“preserve regular contacts with their homelands... create elaborate networks that permit and encourage exchanges of money, political support and cultural influence with their homelands and other segments of the diaspora whenever these exist.”<sup>3</sup> In his renowned historical study, Akram Khater proves that the Lebanese diaspora was instrumental in developing the Lebanese middle class, as well as in assisting in the modernization of Lebanon, especially in the late 19<sup>th</sup> - early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. He also confirms that a large number of the Lebanese diaspora migrants maintained close contact with their families in Lebanon and have sent remittances.<sup>4</sup>

In terms of economic relations, Lebanese migrants have assisted Lebanon and its people by sending remittances, by visiting the country, by creating businesses and trades and through philanthropic activities. Social relations include contributions to organizations that deal with social problems in villages and towns in Lebanon. Lebanese migrants have also responded with generosity and compassion whenever a natural calamity or a manmade disaster engulfed the country. Lebanese migrants have built hospitals, schools and orphanages, constructed roads and other infrastructures, and erected monuments such as community centers, church halls and even municipal palaces. During war or disasters, they sent funds to support their loved ones and their compatriots in situations such as the aftermath of the disintegration of the silk industries in the late 1800s, during World Wars I and II, during the earthquakes in the 1950s, or during the protracted conflicts from 1975 to date. Lest we forget, only a year ago, thousands of bank accounts were opened in Lebanon and worldwide that collected funds from Lebanese migrants for those affected by the summer 2006 Israeli War on Lebanon.

While the Lebanese government is neglecting to enact a diaspora policy, Lebanese diaspora communities have, through their successive visits to Lebanon and through the visits of Lebanese officials to the diaspora, called on the government to make decisions in regard to two main policies – to restore the right of citizenship to the

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*International Affairs*, Vol. 1, No. 2, July 1997, n.p. [<http://meria.idc.ac.il/journal/1997/issue2/jvol1no2in.html>].

<sup>3</sup> Sheffer 1997, n.p.

<sup>4</sup> See A. Khater, *Inventing Home: Emigration, Gender, and the Middle Class in Lebanon, 19870-1920*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 2001.

descendants of Lebanese migrants and to grant Lebanese residing abroad the right to vote in *Absentia*.

## II. Lebanese Diaspora-Lebanon Relations

Lebanese emigrants along with their descendants are more culturally prone to communicate with and assist their nuclear and extended family in Lebanon. The extended family constitutes the basic institution of Lebanese society and provides the main support to which family members and kin turn in times of need. The extended family is the main source of networks for social, economic, and political survival of the individual and the clan, and, consequently, of Lebanon.<sup>5</sup>

These networks were and continue to be vital in linking Lebanese residents with their transnational emigrants and *vice versa*. They help in sponsoring new emigrants and in facilitating their lives in the receiving countries. They are also responsible, in the case of Lebanon, for much of the prosperity of the tourist industry through their repetitive visits. However, the most valuable tangible output of these networks is the immense monetary transfer that the emigrants send back to their families in Lebanon.

### *Networking through Remittances*

The most visible and tangible form of financial capital transmitted by Lebanese expatriates is remittances. Lebanese expatriates remitted an estimated \$4.9 billion dollars in 2005 and \$5.6 billion in 2004.<sup>6</sup> In 2001, Lebanon ranked seventh among the top ten countries recipient of workers remittances, following India, Mexico, the Philippines, Morocco, Egypt, and Turkey.<sup>7</sup>

Lebanese remit due to strong family ties and fervent nationalistic feelings toward Lebanon, but also because of the free flow of capital and hard currency, the stable

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<sup>5</sup> See S. Joseph, Connectivity and Patriarchy Among Urban Working Class Families in Lebanon, *Ethos*, Vol. 21, No. 4, pp. 478-479.

<sup>6</sup> IMF, BDL, and Dilip Ratha and Zhimei Xu, *Migration and Remittances Factbook*, World Bank, [<http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTPROSPECTS/Resources/334934-1181678518183/Lebanon.pdf>]

<sup>7</sup> Silva-Jauregui, C. "Remittances and Microfinance in MENA: Second Largest Source of External Funding in the World as Development Tool", *Microfinance Matters*, July 2005. [[http://www.uncdf.org/english/microfinance/newsletter/pages/2005\\_07/news\\_remittances.php](http://www.uncdf.org/english/microfinance/newsletter/pages/2005_07/news_remittances.php)]

exchange rate and the very developed Lebanese banking system with international standards that survived almost intact during the armed conflict, occupations and post war turmoil of the last 30 years.

According to Ghobril, formally channelled remittances were estimated at \$2.7 billion US dollars in 2003, which made Lebanon rank first in the world in terms of per capita recipient of workers' remittances (\$575 per capita). Lebanon ranked eighth in the top ten recipients of workers' remittances as percentage of GDP (13.8%).<sup>8</sup> Remittances sent to Lebanon are mainly used for household consumption (housing, durable goods, everyday expenses, education and health care); a part of the remittances goes into savings, and a smaller part goes into job-creating investment in the retail and services sectors. Remittances account for 22% of average Lebanese household income and 88% of its savings.<sup>9</sup>

Other contributions by the diaspora include participation in the subscription of treasury bonds. To give an example, in 1991, a special treasury account was initiated targeting mainly the Lebanese diaspora to assist in reducing the Lebanese debt. The expatriates responded by contributing 52 billion Lebanese pounds (about \$35 million dollars) in this account.<sup>10</sup> The diaspora could have probably contributed more if the successive governments continued the campaign.

The following table summarizes the main variety of Lebanese diaspora networks tied with Lebanon.

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<sup>8</sup> Ghobril, N. "Expatriates' Remittances and the Lebanese Economy: Brain Drain or Economic Gain?", Lecture at the Lebanese Emigration Research Center (LERC), Notre Dame University, Lebanon, April 21, 2004.

<sup>9</sup> Ghobril 2004.

<sup>10</sup> For more information see Corm, G. *Al Fursa Al Da'at fi al Islah al Mali*, Sharikat al Matbouat lil Tawzi' wa al Nasher, Beirut, 2001.

<b>Table I. Selected Types of Lebanese Diaspora Networks with Homeland</b>				
<b>Economic/ Financial</b>	<b>Political</b>	<b>Social</b>	<b>Cultural</b>	<b>Religious</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Remittances</li> <li>▪ Tourism</li> <li>▪ Government bonds</li> <li>▪ Businesses</li> <li>▪ Property investments</li> <li>▪ Property improvements</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Lobbying groups</li> <li>▪ Overseas branches of main political parties and movements</li> <li>▪ Advocacy groups</li> <li>▪ Human rights organizations</li> <li>▪ Testimonies</li> <li>▪ Political media</li> <li>▪ Funding political candidates or groups</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Social remittances such as ideas and values</li> <li>▪ Village associations and organizations</li> <li>▪ Family associations</li> <li>▪ Development organizations</li> <li>▪ Philanthropic projects</li> <li>▪ Charitable organizations</li> <li>▪ Hospital support</li> <li>▪ Educational support</li> <li>▪ Village infrastructure</li> <li>▪ Municipal support</li> <li>▪ Village websites</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Cultural tourism</li> <li>▪ Cultural festivals</li> <li>▪ Musical exchanges</li> <li>▪ Educational exchanges</li> <li>▪ Internet websites</li> <li>▪ Blogs and other internet discussion groups</li> <li>▪ Printed media</li> <li>▪ Visual media</li> <li>▪ Satellite TV</li> <li>▪ Art exhibits</li> <li>▪ Theater</li> <li>▪ Sports exchanges</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Building religious edifices</li> <li>▪ Religious pilgrimages</li> <li>▪ Printed material</li> <li>▪ Visual material</li> <li>▪ Satellite TV programs</li> <li>▪ Religious ceremonies</li> <li>▪ Religious feasts</li> <li>▪ Religious websites</li> </ul>
<i>Source: The author</i>				

### *Networking through Social and Philanthropic Contributions*

According to Sheffer “economic situations in the homelands also influence diasporas’ attitudes and actions. Thus when diaspora members become involved in extending aid to their homelands... those renewed contacts tend to ... evoke memories and dormant association.”<sup>11</sup> In the case of Lebanon, the wars that engulfed the country from 1975 to date have rekindled quiescent association between the Lebanese diasporic communities and Lebanon. Sheffer remarked that this rekindled association consequently increased the involvement of the Lebanese South Americans, for example, “in supportive activities, regularly remitting funds to their families and transferring financial resources to support their factions in Lebanon.”<sup>12</sup>

Migrants invest part of their remittances in social and economic development projects in their home villages. Transnational philanthropy is “a process in which migrants in

<sup>11</sup> Sheffer, G. *Diaspora Politics At Home Abroad*, Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003, p. 208.

<sup>12</sup> Sheffer 2003, p. 208.



the diaspora allocate a certain portion of their remittances to fund development projects in their origin societies.”<sup>13</sup> Migrants formal structure of giving their philanthropic donations include giving through religious and village organizations, organizations of common locality or interest, public relations and lobbying associations abroad, etc., while the informal structures include giving through families, kin and friends.<sup>14</sup> Lebanese migrants give for building or renovation of religious schools or edifices, burial sites, health facilities, elderly resthomes, orphanages, etc., or because of fundraising chapters abroad.

Diaspora giving or migrant philanthropy may take different forms, it could be considered the amount of money given to family and friends during migrants’ visits, or funds given directly to philanthropic projects, or funds given to families to indirectly contribute to ongoing projects or fundraising events. It could also include funds given to associations and fraternities promoting projects or activities related to the community.<sup>15</sup>

According to the Mayor of Ehden/Zgharta, twin cities in northern Lebanon, emigrants built the Municipal Palace, paid for the construction of an important avenue in Ehden that was named “The Emigrants Street,” paid for the paving of the historical Midan Square, and contributed to the renovation of the public school. They also contributed to city beautification by financing the sculpting of two lions at the entrance of Ehden, as well as the sculptures that commemorated three important Ehdenian personalities famous for their learning and patriotism.<sup>16</sup>

In a recent study on Lebanese diaspora philanthropic donation which took as a case study The Lebanese Children’s Fund Association, Rahme found that the Lebanese

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<sup>13</sup> Opiniano, J. "The Dynamics of Transnational Philanthropy by Migrant Workers to their Communities of Origin: The Case of Pozorrubio, Philippines", Fifth International Society for Third-Sector Research (ISTR), International Conference, July 10, 2002, University of Cape Town, South Africa, p. 2.

<sup>14</sup> Opiniano 2002, pp. 5-6.

<sup>15</sup> Hanafi, Sari. "Palestinian Diaspora Contribution to Investment and Philanthropy in Palestine", 2000, [www.palesta.net/academic/publication/diaspora.htm], Internet consulted on January 21, 2005.

<sup>16</sup> For more information about the impact of migrants’ contributions in village development: M. El Hashem, *Al Hijra wal Tanmia fi Saida*, D.E.A. thesis, Institute of Social Sciences, Lebanese University, Rabieh, 1981; and B. Labaki, *Capitiaux d’Émigrés et Reconstruction du Liban, Le Commerce du Levant*, December, 10, 1984; and H. Amery, "The Effects of Migration and Remittances on Two Lebanese Villages", Ph.D. dissertation, McMaster University, Canada, 1992.

Children's Fund (LCF) was founded in 1995 in Cyprus and later opened offices in Lebanon, Canada, and Dubai to collect funds from Lebanese migrants in order to assist around 24 institutes in Lebanon such as AFEL, IRAP, CAPHO, St Vincent de Paul, and AL Amal for the disabled.<sup>17</sup>

Lebanese migrants have also contributed to the health sector in Lebanon either through building hospitals, dispensaries and health centers or by sending equipment and vehicles. These include the health center in Bkassine/Jezzine, the St. Louis Hospital in Jounieh, the Imam Al-Sadr health center, the Kfarfalous hospital, the dispensary in Bejdarfel, the Eye and Ear Hospital and the Clemenceau Medical Center. The social services supported by migrants also include the S.O. S. Orphan's villages in Bhersaf, Sfaray and Boksmaya.<sup>18</sup>

Once migrants donate, they are encouraged to visit to see what their contributions have done. This impacts return migration, and, hence, becomes a mechanism for migrants to not just see the physical benefits of their donations, but also to maintain transnational relations between origin and host societies.<sup>19</sup>

*Political Networking in the Form of Long-Distance Nationalism or Homeland Politics*  
Diaspora communities are not only interested in immigrant politics which affect their lives in the host countries, but also in homeland politics. They remain interested and involved in the political situation and development of their homeland through what has been coined as "transnational political practices"<sup>20</sup> or labeled as "long-distance nationalism" or "diaspora nationalism."<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Rahme, J. "Transnational Philanthropy by Migrant Organization: The Case of The Lebanese Children's Fund Association", study presented for the fulfillment of summer training at the Third Session of the Florence School on Euro-Mediterranean Migration and Development, September 2007, p. 22.

<sup>18</sup> For more details see Labaki, B. "The Role of Transnational Communities in Fostering Development in Countries of Origin: The Case of Lebanon", ESCWA, Beirut, 15-17 May 2006.

<sup>19</sup> Opiniano 2002.

<sup>20</sup> See E. Østergaard-Nielsen, "The Politics of Migrants' Transnational Political Practices", Working Paper # WPTC-01-22, Oxford: Transnational Communities Programme, 2001; N. Schiller and G. Fouron, *Georges Woke Up Laughing: Long-Distance Nationalism and the Search for Home*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001; and Z. Skrbis, *Long-Distance Nationalism: Diasporas, Homelands and Identities*, Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 1999.

<sup>21</sup> See B. Anderson, *The Specter of Comparison: Nationalism Southeast Asia, and the World*. London: Verso, 1998.

Lebanese communities which have been well established in different parts of the world, including the USA, Canada, Mexico, Australia, France, Nigeria, South Africa and the like, have played important and sometimes vital roles in homeland politics.<sup>22</sup> These diasporas have, in the past in Egypt, the United States, Brazil, Argentina and Mexico, been active in supporting a free and independent Lebanon from the Ottoman Rule and later from the French Mandate. New Lebanese diasporic communities have been lobbying governments and international organizations throughout the last 30 years of turmoil in Lebanon. These political activities have rallied around them descendants of the Lebanese pioneer migrants and the offspring of the new expatriates and have been able to reawaken concerns towards Lebanon and renewed their contacts with the country of origin which, in return, strengthened the diasporic-homeland relations.

Organizations were established in most of the diasporic countries aiming at lobbying host governments and international organizations. Among these diasporic organizations are the Lebanese Information & Research Center, the American Lebanese League, the American Task Force for Lebanon, the Lebanese American Council for Democracy, the United States Committee for a Free Lebanon in the United States of America; the Association Franco-Libanaise in France; the Canadian Lebanese Association, Rassemblement Canadien Pour Le Liban and the Lebanese Student Association in Canada; and Grupo Parlamentar Brasileiro de Origem Libanesa and Confederação das Entidades Líbano-Brasileiras in Brazil.<sup>23</sup>

Although the Lebanese diaspora is diverse in its political views and not totally immune from divisions, it was able to play a vital role lobbying for Lebanon's sovereignty before foreign governments and international organizations. Many

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<sup>22</sup> For the role of the Lebanese diaspora in the formation of Greater Lebanon see A. Kaufman, "Reviving Phoenicia: The Search for an Identity in Lebanon", Ph.D. dissertation, Brandeis University, 2000; and for the role of the Lebanese migrants during and following the war of 1975 see Ch. Besecker-Kassab, "Immigrant Use of Political Media in the U.S.: A Case Study of the Maronite Lebanese of South Florida", Ph. D. dissertation, University of Miami, 1992.

<sup>23</sup> See L. Ferkh, *Conflict & Migration: The Lebanese Emigrants' Potential Role in the Development of Lebanon*, Doctoral Thesis, University of Limerick, 1991; T. N. Aoun, *Encyclopedia of the Lebanese Migration to Australia: The Onset of Migration and its Development*, Vol. I, Melbourne, Australia : Nu Concept, 2001; C. Gates, "The Lebanese Lobby in the US", *MERIP Reports*, No.73, December 1978, pp. 17-19; and R. Massoud, "Émigration-Crainte d'une Quatrième Vague en Raison de la Crise Économique la Présence Libanaise au Canada Remonte à Plus d'un Siècle", *L'Orient Le Jour*, Octobre 28, 2002.

influential Lebanese emigrants have used their social and political clout to persuade presidents, congressmen, senators and parliamentarians worldwide to support Lebanon's sovereignty and freedom. Through networking with other Lebanese diasporas in other immigration countries, by cooperating with other interested groups, and by lobbying in their host societies and before international entities, the Lebanese diasporas were able to propose and to lobby for the approval of bills in the US Congress and the Canadian Parliament, the adoption of a resolution by the United Nations Security Council and the declarations by Amnesty International in favor of the Lebanese people and the sovereignty of Lebanon.

Participation in the political life of Lebanon, particularly in Parliament, by the Lebanese migrants has been evident. In 1992, 8.59% of the deputies in Parliament were Lebanese with migrant experience. This percentage increased to (16.4%) in 2000 and (19.53%) in 2005. Today, one out of five Lebanese deputies was at one time a migrant.<sup>24</sup>

#### *Networking through Tourism and Yearly Visits*

To the majority of the Lebanese expatriates, Lebanon is sacralized as a spiritual homeland visited as part of a pilgrimage "to affirm link identification between the people, saint and place."<sup>25</sup> In the years since the war ended, a renewed interest in Lebanon was rekindled, and records of visitors coming to Lebanon show that the predominant numbers of visitors were expatriates or their descendants visiting their families or getting to know the homeland of their ancestors or both.<sup>26</sup>

Statistics available do not differentiate expatriates from tourists and many Lebanese expatriates hold more than one citizenship and travel using foreign passports. Hence, it is difficult to provide the total number of visiting expatriates per year.<sup>27</sup> However,

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<sup>24</sup> Labaki, B. "The Role of Transnational Communities in Fostering Development in Countries of Origin: The Case of Lebanon", ESCWA, Beirut, 15-17 May 2006, p. 13.

<sup>25</sup> Vertovec, S. "Religion and Diaspora", paper presented at the conference on New Landscapes of Religion in the West, School of Geography and the Environment, University of Oxford, 27-29 September 2000: 10, 25.

<sup>26</sup> See Batrouney, T. "Australian-Lebanese: Return Visits to Lebanon and Issues of Identity", in *Lebanese Diaspora: History, Racism and Belonging*, edited by Paul Tabar, Beirut, Lebanon: Lebanese American University, 2005.

<sup>27</sup> European Commission, "Tourism Trends in Mediterranean Countries," Theme 4: Industry, Trade and Services, EU, 2001, [[http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY\\_OFFPUB/KS-40-01-666/EN/KS-40-](http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY_OFFPUB/KS-40-01-666/EN/KS-40-)

the evacuation, mainly of Lebanese dual citizens, which occurred during the July 2006 War, was an apparent proof of the immense number of Lebanese expats who visit the country.<sup>28</sup>

### *Building Schools and Universities*

The Lebanese diaspora, as individuals or as communities, have always invested in education, especially in building new educational institutions such as universities and schools.

Out of these schools, one can easily recall the IT training network built in North Lebanon, the University of Balamand, Amiliya network schools, the Yafeth Library at the American University of Beirut, the Religious Centers in Maarub and Juaya, the cultural center in Bcharré and the sports club and library in Zefta/Nabatiyeh, to name only a few.<sup>29</sup>

### **III. Lebanese Government-Diaspora Relations**

Prior to 1943, Lebanon formed part of the vast Ottoman Empire. As such, the provisions of the Ottoman citizenship law decreed on January 19, 1869, which dictated that all those who resided within the empire were hence citizens of the Empire, applied to those living in Lebanon at the time.<sup>30</sup> Accordingly, the Ottoman Empire through its foreign missions was responsible for the affairs of its citizens abroad.

Following the Treaty of Pease, Lebanon was put under the French Mandate, and with that, the French government was consequently responsible for the foreign affairs of Lebanon and for the protection of its citizens.<sup>31</sup>

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01-666-EN.PDF].

<sup>28</sup> For detailed information see G. Hourani, *The Impact of the Summer 2006 War on Migration in Lebanon: Emigration, Re-Migration, Evacuation and Return*, NDU Press, 2006.

<sup>29</sup> Labaki 2006, pp. 7, 46.

<sup>30</sup> Karam, J. A. *Lebanese Citizenship between Law and Reality*, Beirut: Joseph al-Hajj Publisher, 1993, p. 26.

<sup>31</sup> 'Akl, F. S. *Wamadat min al Tarikh al Lubnani* Beirut, n.p. p. 130.

Although the Lebanese Constitution was first announced in 1926, it was not until 1938 that the Lebanese authority was rendered responsible for the foreign affairs of Lebanon. As such, a new ministry was established, first under the name “The Ministry of Foreign Affairs,” then the “Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Welfare of the Lebanese Abroad.”<sup>32</sup>

Since independence in 1943 and until 1989, the affairs of the Lebanese migrants were the responsibility of what was then called the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA). The name changed again in 1946 to incorporate the word Migrants, hence becoming the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Migrants (MFAM). During this period, the MFAM was responsible for the affairs of Lebanese emigrants and their descendants through its newly established Directorate for Migrants and its diplomatic missions abroad, in cooperation with other concerned ministries. Once more the MFAM was changed to become only the MFA, following the establishment of a new ministry in 1994, that of the Ministry of Migrants. The latter was incorporated again within the MFA in 2000 and the MFA regained its name as MFAM and its responsibility for the migrants.<sup>33</sup>

Although successive governments in Lebanon recognized the potential role and contribution of the migrants, “the Lebanese state has largely failed to marshal their energies”.<sup>34</sup> In other words, despite the fact that the government showed some concerns towards the diaspora, there was never a formal policy framework to govern relations between Lebanon and its expatriate communities, nor a clear socio-economic plan to seriously involve the diaspora in the development of their homeland.

Successive governments have, however, to one degree or another, attempted to link the diaspora and Lebanon through efforts such as the creation and expansion of Lebanon’s diplomatic and consular missions; the extension of the Turkish-Lebanese accord to allow the emigrants to choose Lebanese citizenship; the founding of the

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<sup>32</sup> Al-‘Akl, J. N. *Al Hijrat al Hadithat min Lubanon wa Ta’ati al Mu’assassat al Rasmiyat wa al Ahliyat ma’aha 1860-2000*, Dar wa Maktatbat al Turath al Adabi, Beirut, 2002, p. 225.

<sup>33</sup> Al-‘Akl 2002, p. 225-226; and N. Diab, “Liban: Le Cadre Juridique de la Migration”, in *Méditerranéen Migration 2005 Report*, Edited by Philippe Fargues, European University Institute, the European Commission and Europe Aid Cooperation Office, 2005, p. 192.

<sup>34</sup> Brand, L. “State, Citizenship, and Diaspora: the Cases of Jordan and Lebanon”, The Center for Comparative Immigration Studies, University of California, San Diego, Working Paper 146, February 2007, p. 6.

World Lebanese Cultural Union (WLCU); permitting organizations and institutions related to migrant relations to be created on Lebanese soil; targeting diaspora interests for homeland investment; and presenting a bill to Parliament to create a migrant identification card. And most recently, the draft election law, developed by the Fouad Boutros Special National Committee for Parliamentary Electoral Reform, a commission established by the Council of Ministers, included provisions for Lebanese abroad holding valid Lebanese passports to vote in Lebanese elections in their country of residence. This, however, means that only those who qualify as citizens and who are willing to spend the money to maintain valid passports will be able to vote.<sup>35</sup> These actions by the Lebanese government will be discussed in more detail below.

#### *The Creation and Expansion of Lebanon's Diplomatic and Consular Missions*

Following the independence of Lebanon and the creation of a Ministry of Foreign Affairs, a series of appointments followed to expand the Lebanese diplomatic and consular representation in the world to encompass most of the countries where there was a large Lebanese diaspora.<sup>36</sup>

#### *The Extension of the Turkish-Lebanese Accord Concerning the Selection of the Lebanese Citizenship*

Following the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire, Lebanese citizenship was governed by the Treaty of Lausanne which decreed "Turkish subjects habitually resident in territory which in accordance with the provisions of the present Treaty is detached from Turkey will become *ipso facto*, in the conditions laid down by the local law, nationals of the State to which such territory is transferred."<sup>37</sup> In the case of Lebanon, those who resided in Lebanon at the time became consequentially Lebanese and, as such, they were eligible for Lebanese citizenship.

Article 32 of the same treaty stipulated persons over eighteen years of age have "within two years from the coming into force of the present Treaty, be entitled to opt

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<sup>35</sup> Draft Electoral Law, Special National Committee for Parliamentary Electoral Reform Chapter VI, Articles 115-117, [[http://www.elections-lebanon.org/elections/docs\\_2\\_1\\_1.aspx?lg=ar](http://www.elections-lebanon.org/elections/docs_2_1_1.aspx?lg=ar)], Internet consulted on October 18, 2007.

<sup>36</sup> Al-'Akl 2000, p. 226.

<sup>37</sup> Article 30 of Section II on Nationality, the Treaty of Peace, *The American Journal of International Law*, Vol. 18, No. 1, Supplement: Official Documents, January 1924, pp. 4-53.

for the nationality of one of the States in which the majority of the population is of the same race as the person exercising the right to opt, subject to the consent of that State.”<sup>38</sup> The French Consulates were put in charge of communicating the decisions, disseminating the paperwork, and assisting those who wished to take up Lebanese citizenship to fulfill the requirements according to the above mentioned articles of the said treaty.<sup>39</sup>

However, many Lebanese living outside Lebanon at the time were not able to choose Lebanese citizenship within the two years period for diverse reasons including, but not limiting to, deficiency by the French Consulates in disseminating the information to Lebanese communities abroad; lack of funds to launch dissemination campaigns; Lebanese migrants’ fear of retaliation if the Ottoman Empire regained power; Lebanese migrants’ anxiety about loosing their host countries’ citizenship if they chose another; and lack of full understanding by the migrants of the long term impact of not acquiring Lebanese citizenship.

Understanding the obstacles that prevented many Lebanese from choosing the Lebanese nationality and following appeals made by the Lebanese migrants, the Lebanese government, with the agreement of the Turkish State, has extended Article 34 of the Lausanne Treaty in 1951, 1954 and 1957 respectively to permit those who wish to obtain their Lebanese nationality to act accordingly.<sup>40</sup> The extension of 1954 recorded the registration of a good number of migrants<sup>41</sup> most probably because of the efforts exhorted by President Camile Chamoun and his government to establish relations with the Lebanese diaspora.

#### *The Founding of the World Lebanese Cultural Union (WLCU)*

The Lebanese government, in 1960, founded a non-partisan, non-sectarian and independent organization “The World Lebanese Cultural Union”. WLCU’s mandate

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<sup>38</sup> Davis, U. *Citizenship and the State: A Comparative Study of Citizenship Legislation in Israel, Jordan, Palestine, Syria and Lebanon*, Ithica Press, 1997, p. 114.

<sup>39</sup> See Fersan, E. *Les Immigrés Syro-Libanais au Brésil de 1920 A 1926 Perception du Corps Consulaire Français*, paper presented for The International Conference on Arab Immigration in the Americas, Universidade Federal de Mato Grosso do Sul (UFMS), September 28-October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2005.

<sup>40</sup> Bakhos, A. *Al Moughtaribun wa al Jinsiyat al Lubnaniyat*, Ministry of Migrants, October 1998, P. 83-90.

<sup>41</sup> Al-‘Akl 2000, p. 227.



was established to defend the interests of Lebanese nationals residing outside the homeland and to assist them in resolving issues that face them and to facilitate their relations with Lebanon. Further objectives of the organization were to develop cultural contacts with the Lebanese migrants and their descendants, especially the youth, to link them to the homeland, to establish and promote links of friendship between its members and the peoples of the host countries and to make known the cultural heritage of Lebanon.<sup>42</sup>

Between 1960 and 1985, the WLCU expanded in all of the countries where Lebanese diasporic communities existed and played a vibrant, impressive and important role in serving as a bridge between Lebanon and its diaspora. The WLCU succeeded first and foremost in gaining the trust of the diaspora. Furthermore, the WLCU succeeded in collecting and publishing directories on the Lebanese migrants and in organizing international and regional conventions and meetings to fortify the relations between the different Lebanese geographic diasporas, including several congresses for the youth. It was also instrumental in founding many bilateral chambers of commerce such as the Lebanese-French Chamber of Commerce in Marseille, the Lebanese-Uruguayan Chamber of Commerce in Montevideo, the Lebanese-Australian Chamber of Commerce in Sydney, the Lebanese-Egyptian Chamber of Commerce in Cairo, the Lebanese-Kenyan Chamber of Commerce in Nairobi, the Lebanese-Venezuelan Chamber of Commerce in Caracas among many others. It also lobbied host governments, in certain countries, obtaining special prerogatives for Lebanese migrants; it publicized the presence of Lebanese migrants in the host countries and highlighted their success in all aspects of life; and it reinvigorated national celebrations and cultural awareness among the expatriate communities.<sup>43</sup>

The mobility and integrity of the organization, however, has been greatly damaged by the wars in Lebanon, government interference, Syrian occupation and political schisms. It has, furthermore, split it in two rival organizations. This was culminated

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<sup>42</sup> Harfouch, N. *Al Houdour Al Loubnani fi Al 'Alam 1985-1988*, Jounieh, Lebanon: Kreim Pulbishers, p. 226-230.

<sup>43</sup> See Harfouch, N. *Al Houdour Al Loubnani fi Al 'Alam 1974-1988*, 3 Vols., Jounieh, Lebanon: Kreim Pulbishers.

with the government decision to legally dissolve the Union in 1993.<sup>44</sup> The decision increased the divisions within the Union which refused the government's decision. In 1996, the newly appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs reinstated the Union and in 1999, a committee was established under the presidency of the Council of Ministers to draft a study of the situation of the WLCU.

Although the Elie Hakmeh's branch of the WLCU won a court case against the Ahmad Naser's branch,<sup>45</sup> the WLCU has been inflicted with severe blows to its legitimacy and currently faces the immense challenge of regaining the trust of the diaspora communities and its old influence.

*Permitting Organizations and Institutions Related to Migrant Relations to Be Created on Lebanese Soil*

The Lebanese government does not invoke severe restrictions on establishing civil society institutions. In fact, Lebanon is a country that respects the freedom of assembly and association. This freedom has allowed hundreds of organizations related to migrant relations to be created in Lebanon, institutions such as the Lebanese-American Chamber of Commerce, the Brazil-Lebanon Chamber of Commerce, the Bolivian League, the Nigeria Lebanon Friendship Society, the Services Institution of the Druze Migrants, the Cultural and Developmental Center for Migrants, the House of the Migrant, the Migrants Festival Committee, and the like.<sup>46</sup>

*Targeting Diaspora Interest in Homeland Investment*

Diaspora investment in the homeland has been documented in several studies [of countries other than Lebanon].<sup>47</sup> According to Gillespie et al. "overseas Chinese and

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<sup>44</sup> Al-'Akl 2000, p. 376.

<sup>45</sup> Masoud, Gh. Al Jami' at Al Lubnaniyat al Thakafiyat... *Al Akhbar*, 29 August, 2007, [<http://www.al-akhbar.com/ar/node/45125>], Internet consulted on November 1, 2007.

<sup>46</sup> *Al Jaridat al Rasmiyat Al Lubnaniyat 1921 -2007*.

<sup>47</sup> See J. Kao, "The Worldwide Web of Chinese Business", *Harvard Business Review*, March-April, 1993, pp. 24-36; L. Riddle, "Diaspora Attitudes Toward Homeland Investment in the Middle East", *Academy of International Business Annual Meeting*, Monterrey, Mexico, October 1997; K. Gillespie, E. Sayre, and L. Riddle, "Changes in Palestinian-American Interest in Homeland Investment 1994-1999", *Middle East Studies Journal*, Vol. 55, No. 2, 2001, pp. 237-255;

Egyptians played significant roles as investors in their homeland at times in which these countries were considered unattractive by most multinational corporations.”<sup>48</sup>

Following the armed conflict which ended in 1990, successive Lebanese governments recognized the challenges in attracting foreign investments and endeavored to develop programs to attract, first and foremost, Lebanese diaspora investors. The government hoped that the expatriates would invest because of their sympathy, altruism and solidarity with Lebanon despite the fact that it is considered by multinational corporations and multinational investors an “unattractive investment environment.”<sup>49</sup>

In June 2000, for example, the Minister of the Economy, Dr. George Corm, launched the initiative to issue 0% rate bonds at a Seminar for Lebanese emigrant businessmen organized by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Migrants. Migrants subscribing to this initiative would receive “The Migrant Medal” which was created specially for this purpose.<sup>50</sup> The initiative was based on the proposal of a Lebanese-Belgian businessman, Mr. Hikmat Kassir. At the launch in the Seminar, Mr. Kassir subscribed 100,000 dollars of bonds without interest for a period of four years. A month later other subscriptions followed in the amount of 225,000. However, this initiative was not followed up with the changing of the Minister.<sup>51</sup>

Other efforts have been attempted by the Investment Development Authority of Lebanon (IDAL). IDAL has, for example, been signing bilateral investment agreements especially with nations having large Lebanese diaspora communities such as Sweden, Bahrain, Belgium, Canada, France, Germany, Kuwait, UAE and UK. These agreements create a legal framework whereby investors and investments are granted the most favorable treatment.

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<sup>48</sup> K. Gillespie, L. Riddle, E. Sayre, and D. Sturges, “Diaspora Homeland Investment”, *Journal of International Business Studies*, Vol. 30, No. 3, 1999, pp. 624.

<sup>49</sup> FDI in Lebanon at \$2.79bn in 2006, Economy is Third in the Region in FDI Performance but 12<sup>th</sup> in Terms of Potential, *Economic Research and Analysis Department*, Byblos Bank, Issue # 39, October 15-19, 2007, p. 2.

<sup>50</sup> Tahlil Ikhbari li an al Wakt Farad Wak’an Yas’ub ma’ahu Ilgha al Jinsiyat, *An-Nahar*, July 4, 2000, p. 3.

<sup>51</sup> For further information see G. Corm, *Le Liban Contemporain. Histoire et Société*, La Découverte, Paris, 2005.

Unfortunately, these and other efforts have been sabotaged by the insecurity situations that sweep Lebanon.

*Presenting a Bill to Create the Migrant Identification Card*

In 2004, the Council of Ministers decided to establish a committee to draft a law that would create what is being termed the “Migrant Identification Card.” The committee proposed that such a card be given to those who are of or descendents of Lebanese origin, hence originating from the land of greater Lebanon and have found themselves living outside Lebanon on 30 August 1924 and have failed to choose the Lebanese nationality either during the indicated period in Article 34 of the Treaty of Lausanne or in the course of the succeeding periods made available to extend the right to choose. The draft law stipulates that it is also the right of a Lebanese who has lawfully, for reasons such as the non-recognition of dual citizenship by the host country, relinquished his Lebanese citizenship.<sup>52</sup>

This card would give Lebanese migrants special rights such as entry to Lebanon without a visa, the right to own land and all the rights that any Lebanese citizen enjoys except for the political rights which are the sole privilege of those holding citizenship.

This proposed bill received mixed responses from the diaspora communities. Some welcomed it as a timid step towards giving the Lebanese abroad their natural rights, i.e. their nationality; others considered it a deceptive or cunning way to deny nationality.<sup>53</sup> The Vice President of the WLCU stated that “we refuse the migrant identification card because Lebanon is for all its children and because it is the right of all the descendents to have their Lebanese nationality.”<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Mashru' Qanun Yarmi ila Insha al Bataka al Ightirabiyat (Draft Law aiming at creating Migrant Identification Card), document provided by the Directorate of Migrants, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Beirut, Lebanon, Council of Ministers Record # 51, Decision #26, July 27, 2004.

<sup>53</sup> See Al Taqsir al Rasmi fi Malaf al Ightirab (Official Negligence in the Migrant File), *An-Nahar*, August 14, 2004, p. 9; 'Allaka 'ala Iqrar al Bataka al Ightirabiyat... (Commenting on the Migrant ID: Abi Nasser and Bishop Chedrawi Question why the Nationality is not given to the Descendents; *An-Nahar*, July 29, 2004, p. 5.

<sup>54</sup> Wafd mina al Mughtaribin Rafada al Bitaka al Ightirabiyat (A Diasporic Delegation Refuses the Migrant ID), *An-Nahar*, August 11, 2004, p. 3.

Some believe that this bill could be seen as part of the efforts exhorted by the Lebanese government to correct a mistake made in the 1994 Naturalization Act which unlawfully and unjustly naturalized non-Lebanese and neglected the Lebanese and their descendants who have, for no fault of their own, lost their citizenship. Others, yet, see it as a compromise for not giving the Lebanese migrants and their descendants what is rightfully theirs – Lebanese nationality.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

Successive Lebanese governments have dealt with migration from Lebanon on the basis of *laissez faire laissez passer* which played a significant role in the increase of the migratory outflow. Lebanese governments employed the freedom of mobility, the labor-recruitment policies of the Gulf countries and Europe and the skilled immigration policy of Canada, among others, to indirectly use migration as a tool to reduce unemployment and to increase foreign-exchange flow through transfers remitted to the country.

What this brief examination of the Lebanese diaspora-state and state-diaspora relationships tell us is that the Lebanese state believes that caring for migrant's affairs is part of its foreign policy and that most of the efforts exhorted by the successive Lebanese governments were not intended to assist the diaspora itself, but rather to exploit the wealth and solidarity of the diaspora to benefit Lebanon without reciprocating in any meaningful way.

This examination also shows that the Lebanese government has not, as of yet, produced any diaspora policy. It has been said that the Lebanese government wants to benefit from its expatriates without giving them the right to vote in *absentia* because it believes that by doing so it is ceding part of its sovereignty or that the votes would be influenced by their host countries politics. It has also been circulating that the Lebanese government is not granting the Lebanese expatriates their nationality because it sees a conflict of interests or doubts the loyalty of those who have already pledged allegiance to their host countries. Ironically, these pretexts were not taken

into consideration when the government enacted and implemented the Naturalization Law of 1994 which naturalized Syrians, Bedouins and Palestinians.

The question of regaining Lebanese citizenship continues to be the most debated issue in the diaspora-homeland relations and the most 'sensitive' issue in local Lebanese politics. The question has and continues to generate confessional and political disputes, particularly because some believe that by granting citizenship to the diaspora would mean tipping the demographic balance toward the Christian scale because the Christians form the majority of the pioneer expatriates.

Lebanon is now facing a great number of problems and is in critical of not only international support but also its expatriates' support. Indeed, the diaspora, with the substantial financial and technical resources at its disposal, cares for Lebanon and, if properly marshaled would play a vital role in the economic recovery of the country. However, this diaspora can no longer be rallied altruistically. It wants to be officially recognized as Lebanese. And the only way is to grant it what is rightfully its right – Lebanese nationality. The diaspora is not demanding privileges, but rather its constitutional rights. Those who are citizens of Lebanon but live abroad and transfer this immense amount of foreign exchange also feel that they have the right to political participation and to vote while in *absentia*.

It is certain that the Lebanese diaspora will continue to assist Lebanon through its kith and kin, but the large investments to create jobs would await serious and sincere change of position by the government regarding the above mentioned diaspora rights.