

THE EMERGENCE OF A TRANSLOCAL COMMUNITY THE CASE OF A SOUTH LEBANESE VILLAGE AND ITS MIGRANT CONNECTIONS TO IVORY COAST

Anja PELEIKIS

When the Israelis bombarded Lebanon in February 2000, Fatima, a young South Lebanese woman, was fast asleep in her grandfather's house in the village of Zrarie in South Lebanon. She woke up at 4 a.m. unaware of what was happening. When she checked her e-mail account a few hours later, she found a message from her brother in Ivory Coast saying: "Daddy did not sleep all night. He was watching the bombardments via satellite TV. We are all worried."

Fatima and her family belong to a South Lebanese village whose population is no longer confined to this relatively small place in South Lebanon but has moved out all over the world, predominantly to Abidjan in West Africa. However, people's life-worlds are still closely linked, and kinship and village origins remain central in terms of identification, loyalty and everyday social interaction.

By focusing on the case of this South Lebanese village and its migrant connections to Ivory Coast¹, I would like to take up the question formulated by Arjun Appadurai: "What is the nature of locality as a lived experience in a globalized deterritorialized world?"²

As a rule, concepts of locality and local communities have predominantly been associated with a bounded entity where people's interaction is marked

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² Appadurai, Arjun, *Global Ethnoscapes. Notes and Queries for a Transnational Anthropology*, Richard Fox ed., *Recapturing Anthropology*, Santa Fe, New Mexico, School of American Research Press, 1991, p. 196.

by face-to-face relations and repetitive enactment of daily practices.³ In the context of recent debates on globalization, mobility and migrant/diasporic communities, this view of locality has been greatly challenged.

Arjun Appadurai, in particular, has argued that locality can no longer be perceived as a given social reality placed in a bounded site. In contrast, he suggests that one should focus on the question of how locality is in fact produced⁴. According to him, producing locality is a constant struggle. Different social actors are continuously involved in ongoing negotiations to define and produce locality. By emphasizing the role played by migrants, refugees and tourists in the process of locality production, he leads up to the question: What role does distance play in this process ?

In taking the empirical case of a South Lebanese village I want to show how and by what means people are involved in the processes of constructing and producing their 'village' beyond local, regional and national borders. I argue that their locality has developed into a 'translocal community-in-the-making' which emerges from the practices and identities of social actors residing at home and abroad.

The translocal village Zrarie

The village of Zrarie⁵ is shown to be in the South of Lebanon on the official map. It belongs to the Saida district (*mohafazat*) and is situated in the triangle between the southern towns of Saida (Sidon), Sour (Tyre) and Nabatiye. Located on a plateau approximately 300 metres above sea level, the village lies between the Mediterranean coast in the West and Mount Hermon (*Jabal al Sheikh*) in the East. According to Taraf-Najib its population amounted to approximately 2 000 inhabitants in 1950⁶. Today, the mayor (*mukhtar*) of the village declares there is a population of 16,000 people. However, the dynamics of internal as well as international migration make it very difficult to estimate the actual village population. Deciding on who should be counted poses a problem. Should only 'full' residents be included or also those who live in Saida and Beirut, and only spend the weekends and summers in the village? What about the migrants overseas,

³ See the debates on 'local communities' in the context of the 'Chicago School' studies between 1920 and 1970; for example Park and Burgess (1925) *The City, Chicago*, University of Chicago Press. See as well the British locality debates of the 1980s; for example Cooke (1989) (ed.), *Localities*. London, Unwin Hyman.

⁴ Appadurai, Arjun, «The Production of Locality», Fardon, Richard (ed.) *Counterworks. Managing the Diversity of Knowledge*, London, Routledge, 1995, pp. 204-225.

⁵ There are numerous forms of spelling the Arabic term. Most common are: Zrarie, Zrariyé, Zrariah.

⁶ Taraf-Najib, *Zrariye village chiite du Liban-Sud de 1900 à nos jours*, Beirut, Cermoc, 1992, p. 45.

many of whom own a house in the village? Some are able to come regularly for visits, while others cannot afford the journey home. Yet they all call themselves members of the village community. It is obvious for the old *mukhtar* that anyone registered in his books belongs to the village, regardless of her or his actual place of residence. In this view, the village reaches beyond its physical boundaries. Nowadays, family ties historically linked to this specific place are spread all over the world and shape the idea of a 'village' in contemporary Lebanon. In the words of Patricia Nabti : "The village is, instead, based on the sense of a shared history of its people, and the intimate relationships created by a myriad of overlapping social networks."⁷

An individual is always identified by his or her family ties, which are strongly linked to the paternal place of birth. This applies to everyone, whether they were born in Lebanon or in one of the Lebanese migrant communities throughout the world. The Lebanese personal status law reinforces the strong link to the father's village, since all personal affairs are registered there. Papers needed for birth, marriage or death registration can only be obtained from the local mayor. The same applies to people who no longer reside in the village or who have never lived there but whose patrilineage has always been registered there. Should migrants in Beirut or abroad need papers of any kind, they have to go to their village of registration or send a family relative. Thus, national registration and election practices encourage the establishment of translocal connections. Elections are a typical example of a time when translocal links are mobilized and people move from Beirut to their villages of registration or are even flown in from abroad, often at the expense of political representatives.

Therefore, the concept of a village presented in this paper is characterized by a network of translocal kinship relations. It contrasts the widespread image of the village as a remote, separate and enclosed area with a small population that is mainly involved in agricultural activities and holds on to traditional values and practices. This idea has little to do with the reality of contemporary Lebanese villages. In a small closely-knit country like Lebanon with its mere 4,000 square miles of densely populated urban and rural areas, the disjunctions between the rural and the urban, as well as the local and the global have become more tenuous. Whereas the cities have been ruralized by thousands of poor migrants from rural areas as well as wartime refugees, the villages have been urbanized: modern life-styles, urban apartment houses and shops have sprung up, offering the same variety of food and commodities as many of the urban centers. More importantly,

⁷ See Nabti, Patricia, *International Emigration from a Lebanese village. Bishimizzines on Six Continents*. Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Department of Anthropology, University of Berkeley, 1989, p. 85.

access to modern means of communication and media are available throughout the country. Satellite dishes, access to the internet, and cellular phones have become very common in Lebanese villages and allow the local to move into the global and vice versa. Today many Lebanese find it completely natural that their closest kin and friends live hundreds or thousands of kilometers away. It is even more significant that they are often able to maintain these spatially extended relationships as actively and effectively as the ties that link them with their next-door neighbours.

"Abidjan is like Zrarie. It seems that Abidjan is much closer to Zrarie than Beirut". This comment by a Zrarie woman expresses people's general impression that their relatives, friends and former neighbours, although thousands of kilometers away, often seem to be closer than the villagers who live in Beirut within a distance of 150 km from the village. In fact, Abidjan has become a daily topic of discussion for Zrarie villagers and it seems that Africa appears closer in range than many of the Lebanese regions.

Moving People

The Lebanese have been migrating to West Africa for more than a hundred years⁸. Thousands of young men left the country at the end of the last century because of the economic crisis and political repression under the Ottoman rulers. Their dream was to reach America but entry restrictions after the First World War as well as the enormous cost of the passage made it impossible for many, especially for many poor South Lebanese Shi'ite to carry out their plans.⁹ All west-bound Lebanese migrants travelled via Marseille, where many poor Lebanese found out that they had insufficient funds to cross the Atlantic but that fares to West Africa were cheap. There are stories about the fate of destitute Lebanese, cheated by shady Marseille shipping agents who promised to take them to America but actually dropped

⁸ On the general history of Lebanese migration see especially Hourani/Shehadi, *The Lebanese in the World. A Century of Emigration*, London, Centre for Lebanese Studies, 1992, and I.B. Tauris. On the Lebanese in Ivory Coast see: Bierwirth, Henry Christian, *Like Fish in the Sea: The Lebanese Diaspora in Côte d'Ivoire, ca. 1925-1990*. Ph.D. thesis, University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1994; Bierwirth, Chris, «The Lebanese Communities of Côte d'Ivoire», *African Affairs, The Journal of the Royal African Society*, vol 98, n° 390, 1999, pp. 79-99; Bigo Didier, «The Lebanese Community in Ivory Coast: A non-native Network at the Heart of Power?», 1992; Hourani, Albert/Nadim Shehadi (eds.) «The Lebanese in the World. A Century of Emigration», London, Centre for Lebanese Studies and I.B. Tauris, pp. 509-530; Taan, Dunia Fayad, *Les Libanais en Côte d'Ivoire de hier à aujourd'hui. Beirut*, Librairie de l'école, 1998, Dar al-kitab allubnani.

⁹ Hourani, Albert, «Introduction», in Hourani, Albert and Nadim Shehadi (eds.) *The Lebanese in the World. A Century of Emigration*, London, I.B. Tauris and the Centre for Lebanese Studies, 1992, p. 7.

them off at the West African coast.¹⁰ Further, it is argued that it was in the interest of France, which was the Mandate power in Lebanon and the colonial ruler in West Africa, to bring the Lebanese to Africa where they were needed as middlemen to boost the colonial economy.¹¹ In their role as middlemen, the Lebanese set about buying products such as cacao and coffee from African farmers inland and selling them to big colonial enterprises on the coast. They rapidly built up successful family businesses and paved the way for other family members to follow from Lebanon.

The first Lebanese migrants arrived in Dakar (Senegal) where the oldest Lebanese community in Africa was founded. From there they spread all over West Africa, especially Ivory Coast. Sons of first generation Lebanese in Senegal often moved to Ivory Coast in search of new economic opportunities and challenges, away from the direct control of their fathers.

Since the beginning of the Lebanese civil war in 1975 there has been a strong revival of the movement of people towards Africa. But whereas Senegal actually closed its borders to Lebanese newcomers, entry formalities were kept to a minimum in Ivory Coast. Today it constitutes the largest Lebanese community in Africa with between 54 000 and 66 500 Lebanese.¹² The majority are Muslims who come from predominantly Shi'ite villages and towns in South Lebanon such as Tyr and Qana, as well as from Zrarie, the village under study.

When the first people left South Lebanon at the end of the 19th century and moved to remote and unknown lands, the vast majority of these early migrants were young single men. They stayed abroad for many years and often never returned. Until recently, a vast majority of literature available on the subject has taken migration to be this one first movement of direct migrants to their destination economies. In this approach migration is mainly portrayed in terms of mechanistic models that view it as a unique and one-directional movement caused by the imbalance of push-and-pull factors acting upon the individual from the place of origin and the place of destination.¹³ Poverty and oppression pushed the emigrants out of their villages and countries, and wage labour or different income opportunities pulled them to industrial zones. The migrant appeared to be the near-perfect 'homo economicus'. And migrants have often been portrayed as people who

¹⁰ Winder, Bayly R., «The Lebanese in West-Africa», *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 4, 1961, p. 297.

¹¹ Boumedouha, Said, «Change and Continuity in the Relationship of the Lebanese in West Africa», Hourani, in Albert and Nadim Shehadi (eds.) *The Lebanese in the World. A Century of Emigration*, Centre for Lebanese Studies and I.B. Tauris, London, 1992, p.550.

¹² Bierwirth, Chris, «The Lebanese communities of Côte d'Ivoire», *African Affairs, The Journal of the Royal African Society*, Vol. 98, 1999, n° 390, p. 516.

¹³ Todaro, Michael, «A Model of Labor, Migration and Urban Unemployment in Less Developed Countries», *American Economic Review*, 1969, 59, pp. 138-148.

become uprooted, leave home and country behind, and face the painful process of incorporation and integration into a different society and culture. Lately, social scientists have increasingly questioned these long-held assumptions. New concepts such as Glick Schiller's 'transnational migration'¹⁴, Pries' 'transnational social spaces'¹⁵ or Appadurai's ideas on 'translocality'¹⁶ have been introduced, all of which try to come to grips with the social phenomenon that people's lives often span borders and are closely woven together beyond local, regional and national boundaries.

In comparison with the old views that migration was a bi-polar move from one ordered social arrangement to the other, the present Lebanese migration to West Africa is a complex and multi-layered process where different actors simultaneously make decisions to migrate, re-migrate and to move back and forth between the worlds.

Contrary to the beginning of the century, nowadays not only young men, but also many women, children and elderly people move between South Lebanon and Ivory Coast. Many of the Lebanese who travelled to West Africa as young men at the beginning of the century were too poor to return to Lebanon and look for a wife. As a consequence many of them decided to marry African women. With the arrival of modern means of transport and communication technologies, marriages to Lebanese women became more common. Thus, Lebanese women found the opportunity to migrate and remain abroad through marriage. Now, many young men return to their village of origin after a few years work in Abidjan to 'look' for a girl to marry. Likewise, parents might be involved in 'looking for' a probable marriage partner in the absence of their sons. Engagement and marriage often take place in the village before the couple set out for Africa. In some

¹⁴ Glick Schiller, Nina, Basch, Linda and Blanc-Szanton, Christina, *Towards a Transnational Perspective on Migration: Race, Class, Ethnicity and Nationalism Reconsidered*, New York, New York Academy of Science, 1992; Glick Schiller, Nina, Basch, Linda and Blanc-Szanton, Christina, «From Immigrant to Transmigrant: Theorizing Transnational Migration», *Anthropological Quarterly*, 1995, 68: 48-63.

¹⁵ Pries, Ludger, «Transnationale soziale Räume. Theoretisch-empirische Skizze am Beispiel der Arbeitswanderungen Mexico-USA», *Zeitschrift für Soziologie* 25 (6), 1996; pp. 456-472; *Die Neuschneidung des Verhältnisses von Sozialraum und Flächenraum: Das Beispiel transnationaler Migrationsräume*, 1999, Honegger, Claudia, Stefan Hradil and Franz Taxler (Hg.) *Grenzenlose Gesellschaft? Verhandlungen des 29. Kongresses der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Soziologie, des 16. Kongresses der Österreichischen Gesellschaft für Soziologie, des 11. Kongresses der Schweizerischen Gesellschaft für Soziologie in Freiburg i.Br.* 1998, Opladen: Leske+Budrich, p.437-452.

¹⁶ Appadurai, Arjun (1995) «The Production of Locality», Fardon, Richard (ed.) *Counterworks. Managing the Diversity of Knowledge*, London: Routledge, 1995, pp. 204-225; «Sovereignty Without Territoriality: Notes for a Postnational Geography», Yaeger, Patricia (ed.) *The Geography of Identity*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1996 : 40-58.

rare cases, single women have moved to Abidjan on their own, and there are cases of women seeking better jobs through migration. There are examples of young single women who had worked as school teachers in South Lebanon and then migrated to Abidjan to work in Lebanese schools where income is generally higher. Since they would be staying with family members, their fathers agreed to their migration. There are other cases of women who commute between Lebanon and Ivory Coast several times a year. Their trips are private in nature but their luggage contains masses of new clothes which they then sell to Lebanese women.

Generally speaking, the motivation for migration and travelling between South Lebanon and Ivory Coast has diversified and can no longer be explained exclusively by economic factors. Above all, most of the Lebanese in present-day Africa are not detached from their home village and society but keep close contact with their family members residing in Africa, Lebanon or other migrant places throughout the world. This is clearly illustrated in the life of Leyla, a 45 year-old Lebanese woman residing in Abidjan as well as in Beirut and Zrarie. Several times a year she takes the eight-hour direct flight from Abidjan to Beirut where she looks after her 19 year-old son and 21 year-old daughter who have been studying there for the last two years. At the weekends she drives to Zrarie to visit her parents and parents-in-law. She keeps her mobile phone in her pocket so that she can talk regularly to her husband who is working in Abidjan. They discuss the latest family events in Lebanon, Africa or elsewhere in the world. Leyla asks him for advice on the education of her children in Lebanon and enquires how the other two children are doing at school in Abidjan. She gets quite a number of phonecalls from her sister living in the Lebanese community of Dearborn/USA, while her brother commutes regularly between France, Ivory Coast and Lebanon. Leyla's case is similar to that many South Lebanese families who are strongly linked by a worldwide translocal family network.

Living as Leyla does, moving regularly from here to there and keeping in touch by phone, fax and e-mail, requires considerable financial resources. This life-style is actually limited to a small group of high-income migrants. A direct flight between Abidjan and Beirut is expensive and many small-scale traders or shopowners think twice whether they can afford a visit to the village or not. Nevertheless, communication is not interrupted, even if people do not have the financial opportunities to travel. There is always someone travelling home who will take presents, letters and tapes with them. Even during the difficult wartime years, migrants always tried to come home for a visit. Since the end of the armed conflict in 1990, the number of people and entire families spending summer holidays in 'their village' has increased enormously. Today, not only migrants come on a visit to the

village, but also many relatives who live in Zrarie travel to Abidjan to visit their relatives, as in the case of Im Ali. Im Ali is the mother of ten grown-up children. Eight of them live in Abidjan. When times were prosperous and the economy was flourishing, her children visited her regularly in the village. Now, however, economic circumstances have become more difficult. As a result, Im Ali, who is a widow, decided to visit her offspring in West Africa instead. Sometimes she stays in Abidjan for up to six months, spending *ramadan* and other important feast-days with her loved ones.

The arrival and the departure of people moving between Lebanon and Ivory Coast have become very significant ritualized events where relatives, neighbours and friends come together to welcome the newcomer or say goodbye to the person who is leaving. Coffee and tea are served, and letters and presents to be taken abroad are handed over to the traveller. In the case of an arrival, villagers come to see if they have received a letter, tape or present from their relatives. At the same time, this event serves as an important means of receiving news about other migrants abroad. The information brought by the new arrival is examined for its reliability in comparison with other channels. Arrivals and departures are important social events where the latest news and gossip is spread and shared.

Summarizing, it can be stated that current South Lebanese migration to West Africa is marked by a continuous movement of people in both directions. These movements are constitutive for the development of a plurilocal village whose social space no longer coincides with geographic space. In this context, the ongoing movement of people strengthens family relations even if individual family members often live in different places. Further, repeated visits help people on both sides to obtain and keep a realistic view of their relatives' lives at home and abroad, and do away with unrealistic visions and ideas which can be redefined in a face-to-face encounter.

Not only people move between Lebanon and West Africa. Accompanying but independent of them, goods, messages, social and religious events, as well as organizations and institutions are also constantly in motion.

Moving Goods

The first Lebanese migrants in Ivory Coast usually made their living as petty merchants, traders and small shopkeepers. However, business activities have diversified and socio-economic rifts within the community have widened. Retailing still remains an important activity for the Lebanese of present-day Ivory Coast. One is likely to find a Lebanese shopkeeper in almost every town and sizeable village. Whereas shops in smaller places offer a wide range of goods, many of the small and medium-sized Lebanese

retailers in the towns specialize in particular trades such as textile, plastics, household articles and spare parts for cars. Some retailers have moved exclusively into wholesale. Over the last twenty years, Lebanese entrepreneurs have begun to use their capital accumulated from commercial enterprises and have moved into new fields of investment such as manufacturing. Wealthy Lebanese invested in industries such as building materials, textiles, soap, perfumery, beauty-care products and plastics. Most of these products are produced in Lebanese factories. They bear the label 'Made in Ivory Coast' and are consumer goods for the domestic market. Some are also exported to other West African countries. Other Lebanese investment went into services such as bakeries, fast-food (*falafel* and *shwarma*) shops, supermarkets, restaurants, pharmacies, hotels, video shops, petrol stations, property and insurance.

It is striking that one specific business branch is often dominated by people who originate from the same village. Whereas people from Qana dominate the textile business, it is the people from Zrarie who organise the plastics business in Abidjan. They produce all types and colours of plastic commodities from polyethylene bags to plastic plates and cups and, as a rule, specialize in injection-molded plastic shoes, slippers and sandals.¹⁷ While some Zrarie people produce shoes and own anything from one or more machines to big, modern industries with 50 machines, others from the same village sell the shoes in small shops mainly located in market areas all over the city. Small scale businesses are usually family enterprises, where the husband runs the factory and the wife or a son takes care of the shop. There is a street in the market district of Abidjan where one shoe shop next to the other displays the entire variety of plastic shoe models with such imaginative brandnames as 'Fairuz', 'Madonna', 'Maradonna', 'Etoile', 'World Cup 96', 'Jaguar' or 'Romario'. As most of the shop owners originate from Zrarie, people called this street 'Rue Zrarie'.

On a higher level, rich entrepreneurial families often manage several factories and employ large numbers of African workers.

Generally speaking, Lebanese trading and business activities are strongly fashioned along translocal Lebanese networks and social relations, as the actors rely on family members and other social ties all over the world. A small second-hand cloth retailer receives his merchandise via his brother-in-law who lives in Canada; a Lebanese who sells spare parts for cars is linked to his family in France or Germany. In this way, global goods are moving

¹⁷ Generally, there are two types of shoes. Those which are made exclusively of primary materials, and those that are made to some extent or fully from recycled material, e.g. old shoes.

along local Lebanese social networks around the world. This overlap of social and economic networks is not a totally new phenomenon but could also be observed during the colonial era when, for example, the Lebanese dominated the Kola trade between Ivory Coast and Senegal. This was done on the basis of family relations. The Kola was received at each intermediate station and sent on by different members of the family.¹⁸

On a smaller and more private level, goods move along with those travelling between Lebanon and West Africa. When someone plans a visit back to Lebanon or travels to Africa, it is expected that he or she inform relatives and friends of the trip. The traveller is not only expected to carry letters, tape-recorded messages and photographs to the family abroad but also gifts of all shapes and sizes. On the return trip, the traveller will be laden with goods coming from the other direction. Food specialities and ingredients for Lebanese cuisine in particular are favourite gifts that move along with the people: olives and olive oil, *burghul* (mashed wheat) and *za'atar* (thyme) are often sent to Africa. Migrants bring colourful patchwork trousers and African dresses, tropical fruit and cheap Atlantic fish to Lebanon. While visiting a variety of homes all over Lebanon, one can often guess in what part of the world the majority of migrants dwell. In villages where migration is directed to South America, almost every home has a mate teapot from Argentina. The houses in Zrarie are decorated with African wood-cuts of elephants and antelopes, small pillow-cases with African motifs, and various types of African arts and crafts, all of which are sold in African markets.

Money has moved more than goods from Ivory Coast to Lebanon and has given people of poor origins the opportunity to accumulate wealth and status. By the late sixties, the impact of this new Shi'ite wealth was strongly felt in the South, where migrants invested in large agricultural estates that once belonged to the old dominant families of that region. During the civil war migrants took over the task of socio-economic development of the state. They built mosques and had roads and the village square paved with asphalt; they took control of the water supply and brought generators to sell electricity to individual households.

In fact, migrants, re-migrants and family members who profited economically from migration have developed into the new village elite, bringing new cleavages into the social make-up of the village drawn between economically successful (re-)migrant families and those who were less successful.

The most visible impact of remittance income on the village is the large amount of new construction. Whereas before, small flat-roof houses built of

¹⁸I am thankful to Salma Kojok, CERMOC (Beirut) for this information .

The Lebanese in Ivory Coast

clay and yellow stone dominated the whole village, today, huge, individually styled villas, some of them still under construction, rise above the village. The imagination of the architects and migrants knows no bounds in South Lebanon since there are no building regulations to hinder frantic construction plans that originated during the war. Many of these striking buildings are fully furnished, and, with ten or more rooms, have enough space for several families. Yet many are uninhabited or merely used for a couple of weeks during the year by the owner and his family whose permanent residence is in West Africa. Owning a house in the village visibly demonstrates that migrants still belong to the community and that they always have the choice to come back, even if they never do.

Moving Messages

When the first migrants travelled from South Lebanon to West Africa it took them several exhausting weeks to arrive. They went on foot or rode horses or donkeys to Beirut harbour and often had to spend quite some time in Marseille before boarding the ship that would take them to Africa. Letters took ages and sometimes never arrived. Still, people kept in touch with their relatives back home as the biographical account of Farid Antony's life in West Africa and that of his father shows. Anthony describes that as early as 1908 the first migrants to Sierra Leone awaited the newcomers at the harbour in Freetown. They wanted to hear the latest news and perhaps receive an occasional letter or parcel of Lebanese fruits and foodstuffs.¹⁹ These early links to the families back home paved the way for the close relationships that exist today. The tendency of people to move between communities of origin and specific places of migration, there by establishing important links, is not in itself particularly novel. Processes ascribed to modern globalisation, such as a growing worldwide interconnectedness, have their origins in a much older history. Nevertheless, current globalization processes do seem to differ from earlier forms in certain respects. Growing access to telephones, fax machines and computers has brought a significant shift, making it possible for the first time to operate almost simultaneously without face-to-face encounter. The people of Zrarie, living in South Lebanon or Abidjan, make intensive use of the broad range of media opportunities to send messages and information, and receive and transfer news and ideas. In fact, the daily flow back-and-forth of spoken and written words and images by social actors living in different parts of the world but linked by lines of kinship, friendship and common village background, constitute the very basis of the emergent translocal community.

¹⁹Antony, Farid Raymond, *Sawpit Boy*, Londres, F.R. Antony, 1980.

In this way, people are involved in ongoing processes of constructing and producing this permeable social unit that transcends social arrangements formerly taken for granted. Everyday experiences that were once necessarily derived from a close face-to-face relationship, are currently stretched out and formed into new 'trans-real' experiences. One may argue with Hannerz that those people whose life-worlds are closely linked share "habitats of meaning"²⁰ and form a "community of sentiment"²¹, a group that begins to imagine and feel things together, despite the fact that they live hundreds or thousands of kilometers away from each other.

The telephone is one of the most important means of communication. When the state-controlled communication system broke down during the civil war, private telephone shops emerged all over the country, even in the tiniest villages. More recently the very fashionable and ubiquitous mobile phone has also made its way into the villages and spread rapidly. Whether it is the telephone shop at home or a cellular phone, access to the telephone not only allows people to keep in touch periodically but to contribute to family decision-making as well as participate in family events from a considerable distance. News or gossip, be it important or unimportant, circulates immediately in Zrarie and Abidjan at the same time. In the word of a migrant: "What you cook in Zrarie today, your relatives in Abidjan will know the same day!"

However, the telephone is an expensive means of communication and many people cannot afford hours of chatting, but mainly use it for special events such as a sudden illness, death, the birth of a baby or congratulations for religious celebrations.

People from a wide spectrum exchange audiotapes and letters: Both literate and illiterate relatives resort to the use of audiotapes to converse with their relatives. Taping cassettes has become a popular means of talking personally and on one's own 'colloquial' terms about the small and the big events in everyday life. It is often chosen as the most open way to talk to sons and daughters and confront them with their problems, wishes, expectations, criticism and social advice. Sometimes parents criticize their children for not sending enough money, telling them how much money their neighbours received recently. In fact, many people adopt their role as parents to give advice and try to exercise social control even though their

²⁰ Hannerz, Ulf, *Transnational Connections. Culture, People, Places*, London, Routledge, 1996, p. 22.

²¹ Appadurai, Arjun, «Sovereignty Without Territoriality: Notes for a Postnational Geography», Yaeger, Patricia (ed.) *The Geography of Identity*. Ann Arbor, The University of Michigan Press, 1996, p. 8.

children are far beyond their surveillance. Hearing the voice of one's parents even in faraway Africa can suddenly bring them and their authority very close again.

The exchange of videotapes serves as another important means of keeping the information flow up-to-date. The amateur and professional filming of wedding celebrations has become one of the most important elements of a 'modern' marriage ceremony. Later the cassettes are sent to relatives abroad, to all those who could not attend the ceremonies. Family members can thus virtually join everyday discussions of the event, addressing questions about who was there, who wore what kind of dress, and what kind of food was served. Especially women get together to watch these documentary wedding videos. Getting together to watch wedding ceremonies also provides an occasion to talk about the latest news from abroad, to ask about an absent son or the newly-married daughter living in West Africa. In the same way videos about other family events, such as the first steps of a grandchild, the first birthday party or New Year's Eve in Abidjan are filmed and videotapes exchanged. Not only family events, but also amateur videos about South Lebanese war events rapidly find their way to Abidjan. Over there, family and friends gather and re-live shocking moments of the harsh reality in South Lebanon. These films can contribute greatly to the West African Lebanese people's willingness to react to these events and turn a sense of helplessness into action. Money, medicine and gifts in kind were often collected for the victims in Lebanon. Thus, spaces and opportunities for translocal social action have been created.

Apart from the exchange of personal information via letters, audio and videotapes, information transmitted through television has become increasingly significant. Satellite television allows both South Lebanese villagers and migrants in Africa to witness Middle Eastern and global events.

One of the largest and most influential firms is MBC (Middle East Broadcasting Corporation), a London-based company financed by Saudi Arabia, that broadcasts on a global scale and aspires to become an Arab version of the major American networks. MBC's potential audience includes an estimated 5 000 000 Arabic-speaking viewers across Europe and over 100 million viewers in Arab and African countries.²²

Moreover, Dubai TV and a few Lebanese stations, such as LBC (Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation) and Future TV, are on satellite and can be received by the Lebanese in many parts of the world including Abidjan. Arabic music video clips, Mexican, Syrian and Egyptian soap operas, as

²² Amin, Hussein/ Boyd, Douglas, «The Development of Direct Broadcast Television to and within the Middle East», *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies*, 18 (2), 1994, p. 37.

well as news and religious and political programs are watched by a large audience. Thus, people in Zrarie in South Lebanon or in Abidjan are able to watch the same TV programmes and appropriate the same information which can then be interpreted locally. These appropriated forms of news can be used as elements of new information « bricks », which, in turn, are spread throughout the translocal village via different channels. For instance, the latest peace talks in the Middle East or the Israeli air raids in South Lebanon as documented in TV news could be addressed when a migrant talks on tape. He or she can enquire about the personal experience of his or her relatives in South Lebanon. By exchanging and commenting the news, relatives, friends and neighbours are jointly involved in a shared production of what something means, thereby constructing a shared 'habitat of meaning'.

Discussions within the translocal village often circulate around people who can be traced back to a member or in-law of one of the main patrilineal families of the homeland village. The life-story of someone living in Lebanon, West Africa or elsewhere in the world takes on a 'real' significance that reaches far beyond the territorialized bounded space of where they actually live.

Whereas in colonial times men were the main carriers of information between Lebanon and West Africa, nowadays women take a specific role in the process of passing and receiving information. When they meet as neighbours, relatives or friends in Abidjan or in Zrarie, the latest news is exchanged and discussed. These 'female spaces'²³ act as nodal points of information circulating between the different migrant communities and South Lebanon. Coming together in face-to-face situations, in a specific 'real' place, women absorb the latest news, transform it and negotiate it according to their conceptions, norms and views of the world. When a woman has just received a phone call or listened to a tape from a son or daughter abroad, she might talk to her female neighbour or a relative living next door immediately afterwards. Neighbours and friends are constantly updated on the course of family events in the translocal village. Who married whom? What happened to the sick grandmother in the village? Have you heard about the death of Abu Ali? Did Leila give birth? Indeed, life seems all-eventful, as every little change in the fortunes of individuals is discussed in great detail. And news about major events such as an accident, a death, or a sensational scandal spreads like wildfire within the Lebanese women's world in the translocal community.

Concluding, it can be stated that the development of modern communication technology have dramatically changed people's possibilities

²³ See Lachenmann, Gudrun, «Frauen als gesellschaftliche Kraft im sozialen Wandel in Afrika», *Peripherie*, 12, 47/48, 1992 : 74-94.

of keeping in contact with their distant and absent family members. What is more important, people are now able to share 'habitats of meaning', and life-worlds with family members, neighbours and friends who are virtually present but in fact many thousands of kilometers away.

Moving social and religious events

Important social and religious events are celebrated and commemorated both in South Lebanon and in the migrant communities. If someone dies, funeral ceremonies are held in the *husainiye*²⁴ of Zrarie and of Abidjan. Despite the vast expense involved, migrants in Abidjan generally do not hesitate to send the bodies of their deceased relatives home to Lebanon. The relatives of the deceased can thus see their loved one for one last time. Perhaps the place of burial constitutes the most potent symbolic statement of the migrant attitude to residence in Africa. Despite the fact that they may have lived all their lives in Africa, they cherish their 'dream return', and the wish to die in their 'homeland'.

Paying condolence visits to relatives of the deceased is a social obligation for friends, neighbours and relatives in Abidjan as well as in Zrarie. When relatives, neighbours and friends sit together in Abidjan mourning, the beloved person, other relatives, neighbours and friends sit together simultaneously in Zrarie. Although thousands of kilometers away from each other, these people are strongly linked in their mourning. In moments of silence, time and space seem to vanish, while suffering is the dominant element linking their social worlds. Nevertheless, the physical distance is felt more strongly at different times, when an elderly mother, for example, has become seriously ill and the decision has to be made whether to travel to Zrarie or not. The journey is probably too long to bid a last farewell, and the feeling of not having arrived in time can be depressing .

The death of a village member is announced by the speaker of the mosque in Zrarie. He once announced the death of a woman and called for the funeral ceremonies to be held in the *husainiye*. The villagers asked each other: "Who is this woman? What was her name? Who was her father?" Zainab Z. was not well known in Zrarie. Like her parents, she was born and brought up in Abidjan but unlike many others, she had never visited the village of her ancestors. However, despite the fact that she never lived in the village and never even came to Lebanon, her family ties justified her membership of the village community. Her death was announced for that reason and she was commemorated in the village *husainiye*.

²⁴ The *husainiye* is a Shi'ite assembly hall where mourning rituals for the deceased take place. During *Ashura*, mourning in the memory of Imam Husain is celebrated there.

As mentioned earlier, the video documentation of social events has become an important means of communicating within the translocal village. Linda Walbridge, who carried out research on the Lebanese Shi'ite community in Dearborn/USA, watched a home video of a funeral held in a Shi'ite village in Lebanon in 1990 : "It was the funeral of a man who had been killed by Israelis. The emotional level was very high, with men obviously competing with one another as they pounded their chests and heads, weaving through the streets, chanting slogans as they went."²⁵

Here, the tragic death of a young man who has become a Shi'ite martyr (*shahid*) is mourned not only in his village of origin but also in the migrant community in Dearborn where some of his relatives live. At the same time, the funeral was politicized and used for political manifestations, and brought to the notice of the migrants through the video.

Studying Muslim burial in the Turkish diaspora in Berlin, Gerdien Jonker has also described the rising importance of taking photographs and filming during a funeral : "The moment the washed and wrapped body is carried into the hall and the face freed to permit a last look, camcorders, cameras and polaroids are set into action. The body, the mourners, the prayer, the procession, the depth of the grave, the shovelling, are all fixed on still or moving film"²⁶

Although filming and photographing these events falls under the general ban on pictures in Islam, living in the diaspora makes many Turkish migrants feel it to be an absolute necessity. Jonker gives two reasons for this. The first lies in the fact that a Muslim is buried in a Christian country and the family 'back home' cannot participate in the burial. In this case, the photographs and films are proof that the body was not burned or treated according to some 'strange' Christian habits. The second reason is to demonstrate to the people back home that the body was wrapped and washed in the right way.²⁷ Thus, as depicted clearly by Jonker, these photographs are not meant for the family album but are seen as a crucial necessity to keep communication flowing. "Films and photographs are used as a bridge, keeping the different parts of the family together."²⁸

Whereas funerals are sad events within the translocal village, marriages are the most welcome and joyful social happenings. The decision on where a wedding is to take place often depends on several factors. Although the bride and groom may have grown up in Abidjan and most of their relatives

²⁵ Walbridge, Linda (1997) *Without Forgetting the Imam. Lebanese Shi'ism in an American Community*, Detroit, Wayne State University, 1997, p. 95.

²⁶ Jonker, Gerdien, «The Kinfe's Edge: Muslim Burial in the Diaspora», *Mortality* 1 (1), 1996, p. 39.

²⁷ *Idem.*

²⁸ *Idem.*

The Lebanese in Ivory Coast

actually live in Abidjan, the marriage sometimes takes place back in their parents' home village. There it can become a powerful symbol of the parents' success in migration. In many cases, the male migrant returns and marries a village girl 'at home' in Zrarie, and the couple travels back together to Abidjan. Sometimes the groom only comes to Zrarie for the official engagement. The bride travels later on her own to Abidjan where the marriage takes place. This way the migrant saves the expense of a second trip. No matter where the marriage takes place, there will always be some members of the family, friends or relatives who are not able to attend this crucial social event. Therefore, either amateur or professional filming of the wedding celebrations has become an essential element of a Lebanese marriage. Vital elements of the celebration such as cutting the cake or the wedding dance often seem stage-managed. They are, in fact, sometimes performed several times until the 'stage director', usually a local photographer and specialist in the production of wedding videos, is satisfied. Later, the tape not only serves as an immortal document of the most joyful day in a couple's life, but also as information and documentation for all those people who were absent.

Ramadan in the translocal village

The Muslim lunar month of fasting (*ramadan*) is of great importance for people in the translocal community. During this month, Muslims all over the world are required to abstain from food and drink in daylight hours, and from engaging in sexual activity. Muslims fast so that, through a greater awareness of their bodily needs, they can reach a deeper consciousness of the presence of God and feel kinship with the deprived.

Although sometimes a tiring and exhausting experience, people generally look forward to fasting, and enjoy the opportunity to purify themselves and share the pleasure of coming together. A Zrarie migrant in Abidjan expressed his attitude towards *ramadan* in the following words : "Ramadan is so good, it is such a joy because in this month we are all the same, the rich and the poor."

Notably, *ramadan* shows no sign whatsoever of losing its presence in the Lebanese migrant community. On the contrary, fasting has become a crucial social and religious event, a public statement of religious convictions as well as of identity. In this context it becomes understandable that those who had never fasted in Lebanon began to do so in migration. People in Abidjan explained that their Communist convictions had kept them from fasting in Lebanon and that they had only recently begun to fast. One man explained : "I enjoy fasting here in Abidjan. It gives me a feeling of closeness. This feeling emerges when you know that the others are fasting like you. Then

you come together with the family, with friends, and with other Lebanese to share the food in the evening. This is a real enjoyment. If you do not fast, you cannot feel this joy"

In the evening, the breaking of the fast in Mecca is directly broadcast on television. Many Lebanese in Africa use this as a marker for their own fast-breaking and prayer instead of local African practices.

The fast is initially broken with a simple meal. This is followed by a more elaborate meal which often contains dishes served only during *ramadan*. The breaking of the fast or *iftar* generally takes place with visitors, relatives, friends, neighbours or colleagues. Later in the evening, people visit each other again, when tea, coffee and sweets are served. This ritualized mutual visiting reinforces the social relations between Lebanese friends, relatives, neighbours and colleagues at home as well as abroad. In migration, work figures predominantly in migrants' lives. However, *ramadan* puts the focus on the socializing aspect of their lives.

The end of the fast month is celebrated joyfully and people use this holiday (*Aid al-fitr*) to call their relatives at home or elsewhere in the world to share their happiness.

Commemorating 'Ashura translocally

Shi'ites in Muslim countries all over the world come together each year, from the first day of the Islamic lunar month *muharram* until the tenth, to commemorate and ritually re-enact the murder of Imam Husain by Caliph Yazid's troops at the battle of Karbala in 680.

Everyday life comes to a standstill in South Lebanon for ten days, during which the focus is on mourning, ritual weeping and processions. In separate groups, men and women listen to religious experts reading *ta'ziya*, which literally means expressions of sympathy, mourning and consolation²⁹. They relate the story of Husain's death over and over again in narrative recitations, making women and men weep. It seems that what happened thirteen hundred years ago is looked on as if it were taking place now. In fact, Husain's battle has transcended history, time and space and become a vital expression of opposition, martyrdom and revolt. The annual occasion of mourning Imam Husain, hitherto a reminder to the Shi'ites of their solitude and defeat, was to become a celebration of the defiance of the Shi'ites who had refused to submit to injustice. In Iran as well as in Lebanon, the mixing of *'Ashura* mourning slogans with political ones was characteristic for a

²⁹ Chelkowski, Peter, «Ta'ziyeh: Indigenous Avant-Garde Theatre of Iran», Chelkowski, Peter (ed.) *Ta'ziyeh. Ritual and Drama in Iran*, New York, New York University Press, 1979, p. 2.

long time, as in the case of the Iranian Revolution.³⁰ Musa al-Sadr, a charismatic cleric who formed the *Amal*-movement³¹ in Lebanon, introduced a new reading of the old tale of Karbala, transforming it into radical politics of practice. He stripped it of its sorrow and lament and turned it into an episode of political choice and courage on the part of Imam Husain.

On the tenth day of *muharram*, ritual mourning reaches its climax. In many Shi'ite villages in South Lebanon, in Iran as well as other Shi'ite areas throughout the world, Imam Husain's martyrdom is not only as a narrative recited as a narrative but staged as a performance. Actors in colourful costumes, marching or mounted on horses and camels, depict the events leading to the final scene at Karbala. Boys and young men walk in procession through the villages and cities following the voice of the cantor. The followers repeat the slogans, screaming and rhythmically beating their chests with a great deal of emotional involvement. Some men deliberately cut their scalps with a knife so that blood can stream down their faces.

The story of Husain's tragedy in Karbala is deeply ingrained in the life of every Shi'ite. When they move throughout the world, Husain's drama moves with them. In Abidjan the Shi'ite migrants come together in their *husainiye* where *ta'zieh* is read, and where people weep and mourn for Husain. Moreover, there are private meetings where women, in particular, meet and recite the story of Husain's murder. Here and there people dress in black, women wear no make-up and men are unshaven. However, the *muharram* rituals are not practiced in the same manner as in Lebanon. Dissociated from the local, they are rediscovered in a new environment. In Abidjan as well as in other Lebanese migrant communities, the rituals take place exclusively inside mosques and *husainiyes*. Working on the Lebanese Shi'ite in Dearborn/USA, Walbridge states that people refuse to act out their feelings in public processions. She supposes that if they did so, they would certainly risk an unpleasant encounter with the local police and possibly arouse fear and anxiety among both Sunnite Muslims and non-Muslims.³² This stems from the fact that they are a migrant minority in the United States. Similarly, the Lebanese in West Africa have often experienced hostility, and in many cases have become the scapegoat for economic and political crises. They therefore avoid staging a ritual presence in public during 'Ashura .

³⁰Kippenberg, Hans G., «Jeder Tag 'Ashura, jedes Grab Kerbala. Zur Ritualisierung der Straßenkämpfe im Iran», Berliner Institut für Vergleichende Sozialforschung (ed.) «Religion und Politik im Iran». Mardom Nameh. *Jahrbuch zur Geschichte und Gesellschaft des Mittleren Orients*. Frankfurt am Main: Syndikat, 1981 : 217-256.

³¹ Amal, in Arabic literally means 'hope'. Concurrently, it is an acronym for *afwaj al-muqawama al-lubnaniyya*, meaning 'Groups of the Lebanese Resistance'.

³²Walbridge, Linda, *Without forgetting the Imam. Lebanese Shi'ism in an American Community*, Detroit, Wayne State University Press, 1997, p. 92.

The rituals are filmed in Zrarie and videotapes often sent to relatives in Abidjan or elsewhere, bringing the South Lebanese practice of 'Ashura into the world. They can be taken as a point of reference when negotiating on the practice of this ritual in migration. Walbridge notes that there has actually been some disagreement over how 'Ashura should be commemorated in Dearborn/USA. Some people who saw the passion play in South Lebanon wanted it to be performed in the same way in the Dearborn *husainiye*. Others miss the processions on the streets where the men beat their chests and cut their scalps.³³ On the other hand, by watching a film of the 'Ashura rituals, villagers can participate from a distance in the ongoing negotiations of how the ritual should be carried out in future. They thus take up their active role as members of the translocal community.

Conflicts between various local groups have often sprung up during 'Ashura rituals. Traditionally, processions expressed rivalries between local quarters, groups and associations. In the present South Lebanese context, rivalries are similarly played out with a vengeance. However, nowadays it is often political affiliation which dominates the conflicts that occasionally arise during the *muharram* processions. In his study on the Lebanese in Sydney (Australia) Michael Humphrey shows that similar conflicts between various religious-political Shi'ite groups can break out during 'Ashura in migration as well.³⁴ Similar to my observations regarding the *Amal/Hizbollah* tensions during 'Ashura ceremonies in Zrarie³⁵, Humphrey reports of violent clashes between rival factions of the Lebanese Shi'ite community. The incident occurred in front of a predominantly Lebanese Shi'ite mosque in a suburb of Sydney during the celebrations to mark the beginning of *muharram*. The factional rivalry between pro-*Amal* and pro-*Hizbollah* groups for control of the mosque caused serious injury to six members of the congregation. This example points to existing conflicts in Lebanese migrant communities. Due to the fact that organizations and political parties make up a dense network of translocal and transnational interconnections, their organizational activities unfold in the home country as well as in migration. Political and religious loyalties and activities are not left behind. On the contrary, they move with the people around the world.

³³ Idem.

³⁴ See Humphrey, Michael, «Sectarianism and the Politics of Identity: The Lebanese in Sydney», Hourani, Albert and Nadim Shehadi (ed.), *The Lebanese in the World. A Century of Emigration*, London, Centre for Lebanese Studies and I.B. Tauris, 1992, p.444.

³⁵ See Peleikis, Anja, "Ich bin kein Symbol, eine Frau bin ich." *Weibliche Identifikationsmuster im 'Globalisierten Dorf. Südlibanon und Elfenbeinküste*, Klein-Hessling, Ruth, Nökel, Sigrid und Karin Werner (ed.) *Der neue Islam der Frauen. Weibliche Lebenspraxis in der globalisierten Moderne – Fallstudien aus Afrika, Asien und Europa*. Bielefeld: transcript, 1999, p. 208-228.

Concluding Remarks

In this paper I have sketched out how through migration a local village population crossed boundaries formerly taken for granted and has thus developed into an emergent 'translocal community-in-the-making.'. In demonstrating how this community is in fact 'produced' by local actors living in distant places, I take up Albrow's (et al.)³⁶ argument that the social category of community, hitherto taken for granted, has to be reconceptualized and redefined. The old view that a community naturally occupies a particular territory is open to question. Instead of following the idea that social relations are framed in and by a container which may be the nation-state or a locality, I argue that the translocal community-in-the-making should not be taken as a fixed, stable or bounded reality. It rather emerges from the practices of social actors. Religious events such as *ramadan* or 'Ashura as well as important occasions in the life-cycle (birth, marriage, death) or business activities which encourage the maintenance of social ties across space should be mentioned here. People who consider themselves to be members of the same village do not necessarily live their everyday life in the same place any longer but are still able to produce new deterritorialized forms of proximity and virtual face-to-face relations. Here they can make use of recent developments in communication technologies that help to transcend and reduce time and space constraints. Through the rapid feedback of these means of communication people can in fact achieve some of the efficiency of face-to-face interaction.

³⁶ See Albrow, Martin, John Eade, Jörg Dürrschmidt and Neil Washbourne, «The Impact of Globalization on Sociological Concepts. Community, culture and milieu», in Eade, John (ed.), *Living the Global City. Globalization as local process*, Londres et New York, Routledge, 1997, pp. 20-36.