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Hospitality and the Lebanese Diaspora: A critical perspective

Diasporas are rarely analysed from a hospitality perspective. The paper reviews and expands on existent literature regarding the Lebanese Diaspora and focuses on the Lebanese Diaspora in London. The paper discusses the conditional and absolute notions of hospitality in relation to western and non-western cultural norms. Hospitality is thus examined from a cultural perspective in order to understand methods of consumption. The ways in which the 'early traditional Lebanese migrant' and the 'modern recent Lebanese migrant' interact in terms of hospitality is analysed. The conclusions identify future avenues of research.

Keywords: Lebanon; Diaspora; Migration; Hospitality; UK.

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Introduction

With an estimated figure of over fifteen million citizens living abroad compared with a population of four million, Lebanon is one of the only countries to have more citizens living outside its boundaries. Migration has long been a tradition for the Lebanese whose ascendants, the Phoenicians, travelled extensively around the Mediterranean (Tabar, 2010). Ouaiss (2010) describes how the modern Lebanese Diaspora began in the 19th century when Lebanese Christians fled from the Ottomans oppression. In the 20th century, the two World Wars and a civil war in Lebanon itself during the 1970s contributed to further emigration. The most recent wave of Lebanese emigration occurred from the 1990s onwards. From the first oil boom (1973) to the beginning of the second gulf war (1990), Lebanese migration reoriented from a regional framework towards a global framework (Labaki, 2006). Lebanon has thus known three important waves of out migration. Starting in the late 1800s the first wave of emigration was a disorganized one. In villages, the means of subsistence were limited, families were large, and land was scarce. The young had few prospects but to emigrate. Often clandestine (as the Ottomans initially prohibited emigration) the early migrants, usually poor and uneducated villagers, would board a boat and embark into a journey without knowing where they would end up. Karim (1992: 26) suggests that some Lebanese have left to never come back, making a life in their host country, but their children "whose roots were plucked from the hills of Lebanon" remain "deeply rooted".

Diasporas tend to make important connections back to their place of origin (despite, and often because of, their many displacements) in terms of tourism. In their book *Tourism, Diasporas and Space,* Coles and Timothy (2004: 19) note "three sets of themes which are beginning to emerge in tourism studies of diaspora: namely, diaspora experiences of tourism; the spaces occupied by diaspora tourists; and the production of tourism for and by diasporic

communities." They go on to discuss how diaspora identities are creolised or hybridised (Lowe, 1991) and can be related back to forms of so called 'ethnic tourism'. On the one hand, forms of diaspora tourism may be seen as voyages of self-discovery and identity affirmation 'in search of their roots'. This search for roots has also manifested itself in the rise of so-called 'genealogical' (Nash, 2002; Meethan, 2002; Basu, 2007), 'ancestral' or 'family history' (Timothy and Guelke, 2008) tourism. On the other hand, however, visits to diasporic homelands may result in troubling, disconcerting and ambiguous experiences as well as new-found ambivalences (Stephenson, 2002; Duval, 2003; Hannam, 2004). Perhaps, more interesting, however is how diasporic communities can lead to the production of new forms of tourism as they become visited themselves by residents of the original 'homeland'. As Coles and Timothy (2004: 43) argue: "Residents of the original 'homeland' may make a trip to diaspora spaces to discover how co-members of the diaspora, perhaps even their friends and relations, have adapted to life and conditions in another place." In so doing, they may make trips to view sites of heritage which may take the form of so called 'dark tourism' (as in sites associated with the death of ancestors), or, they may take the form of engaging with specific destinations, festivals and events targeted specifically at them.

Nevertheless little research has focused upon the relations between hospitality and diaspora which is surprising as some form of hospitality governs all human interaction (Westmoreland, 2008; Lynch et al., 2011). Hospitality has been conceptualised by the philosopher Jacques Derrida (2000) in terms of 'absolute' and 'conditional' hospitality. Derrida (2000) argues that most western conceptualisations of hospitality rest upon aspects of 'law' whereby hosts and guests meet under certain conditions, restrictions and limitations. Thus a host may invite a guest into their home as long as they behave in certain ways with language being one of the pre-conditions for a degree of hospitality. Such conditional

hospitality is always reciprocal in terms of an economy of exchange. A culture of absolute hospitality with no conditions is seen as practically impossible: "The law of absolute hospitality does not involve an invitation, nor does it involve an interrogation of the guest upon entering. Indeed, there is no need for speech, only silence" (Westmoreland, 2008: 5). However, Derrida's (2000) discussion of hospitality is profoundly Western and does little to take account of non-western conceptualisations of hospitality. The Lebanese Diaspora arguably transcend the Western and non-Western divide by being combing Western and Islamic notions of hospitality. Islamic hospitality has been conceptualised in terms of its congeniality and respect for guests: being a 'good host' (Din, 1989). Nevertheless, this conceptualisation of hospitality is still limited by conditions and behavioural codes (Stephenson et al., 2010).

This paper thus critically examines the contemporary Lebanese Diaspora by engaging with recent theoretical conceptualisations of hospitality. Firstly we review the literature on the Lebanese Diaspora. We then focus on the hospitality in the Lebanese context before examining this in terms of the Lebanese Diaspora in the UK. We conclude by suggesting some further avenues for research.

The Lebanese Diaspora

Hourani (2007) describes how the Lebanese government considers Lebanon as a phoenix with two wings -- the resident and the migrant-- and that it cannot survive without its other wing, i.e. the migrant. Furthermore, the Lebanese diaspora,

> is more a diaspora of dispersal in which the recovery of identity reflects the experience of cross-generational attrition in assimilating societies, the impact of globalisation of the terms of participation under post-modernity, as well as the

destructive and meaninglessness of war that killed and dispersed without a redeeming peace. The recovery of the imaginary homeland for many Lebanese resembles the broader predicament at present time, social impermanence, fluid identities and individual uncertainty (Humphrey, 2004: 17).

The contemporary use of the term Lebanese diaspora embraces all of these different senses of exile. Humphrey (2004) explains that the Lebanese Diaspora and its present self-consciousness was brought into existence by the displacement of people by the enduring Lebanese civil war that lasted more than fifteen years. Humphrey (2004) then argues that the Lebanese Diasporic experience is the product of national disintegration and the destruction of social worlds and their experience of resettlement in migration. Khater (2001) argues that pre-World War I Lebanese emigration also had a significant impact on the political and economic development of Lebanon. He states that in addition to the money coming in from remittances, and its significance on the local economy, it is estimated that a third of the migrants returned to Lebanon. Humphrey (2004) further explains that alongside the more recent refugee communities are the older Lebanese communities who experience the diaspora as a nostalgic sense of exile experienced primarily in terms of a loss of culture and a loss of social connections with the past.

Ouaiss (2010) describes "Lebaneseness" as meaning Lebanese people as full of pride, even when they migrate and seek refuge in foreign countries. Abdelhady (2007) describes how Lebanese immigrants are mostly highly educated and professional who pursue goals of educational and economic improvements in their new settings. It has been argued that Lebanese immigrants want to separate themselves from other immigrant groups and desire participation within a host community in order to be seen as part of that community

(Abdelhady, 2007). Nevertheless, this does not mean that Lebanese immigrants forget their identity as they take their traditions with them when they immigrate (Convey, 2008),.

Abdelhady (2007) further clarifies that universal notions of solidarity, democracy and rights are central to many members of the Lebanese diaspora and thus, their emphasis on notions of universalistic solidarity and cosmopolitan citizenship informs their participation in public activities. Naff (1992) discusses how the first waves of Arab immigrants were Syrian-Lebanese Christians, farmers or artisans, relatively poor, and poorly educated. These immigrants were referred to as Syrians or Syrian-Lebanese and more rarely Arab. These immigrants were emphatically sojourners, who left voluntarily as they wanted to improve their economic condition and to return home in a short time wealthier and prouder than when they left (Naff, 1992).

Moreover, Suleiman (1999) discusses how Lebanese immigrants were found to contest their stigmatization as members of an oppressed minority. Instead, they sought ways to affirm their identities in ethnic as well as cosmopolitan ways and in the process become more active participants in processes of social change. Suleiman (1999) argues that the Lebanese diaspora want to be remembered as individuals that helped their homeland community and worked to better the image of Arabs as a whole and Lebanese specifically.

Kemp (1992: 685) further argues that many Lebanese immigrants consider western countries such as Canada, America and Britain to be the ultimate land of settlement, a place where their children can have a decent future. Abu Laban (1992) proposes that with their emphasis on multiculturalism and ethnic pluralism, countries such as Canada, America and Britain are seen as providing Lebanese immigrants with the opportunity to form communities that reinforce social attachments and political commitments to the homeland and maintain

their ethnic cultural identity. Similarly, Abdelhady (2007) argues that integration in the host country has not always been an easy task, especially for the new Lebanese migrants. He suggests that in countries such as Argentina or Australia Lebanese immigrants found themselves on the margins of the host society. In Argentina, where they were referred to as "Turcos" (as they were immigrant of an Ottoman Turkish Province), they found themselves as "a stigmatized immigrant group within a strongly assimilation national culture" (Humphrey, 2004: 15-17). Abdelhady (2007: 39) also describes how Lebanese immigrants in Australia, "assumed a position on the economic margins as petty traders, were referred to as 'Syrian,' and were often resented for their success." Nevertheless, Convey (2008) argues that the Lebanese diaspora have contributed to local affairs and community projects wherever they settled and states that from the earliest days of settlement until the present day, the Lebanese have actively formed their own social institutions. He further suggests that even though many Lebanese attempted to hide their "foreignness" from the general community, in the private sphere of the home many of the traditions of the old village society remained intact. As we shall see, this was particularly the case for food and cooking.

Hospitality and the Lebanese Diaspora

In terms of hospitality, Lebanese culture has placed a great emphasis upon food. Food facilitates social interaction and enables individuals to actively maintain social networks (Warde and Martens, 2000). Saad (2011) argues that Lebanon's cuisine is deeply rooted in its history and enjoys a great reputation worldwide, and particularly by European and American consumers. Abdelrahman 2007) links the growth of Lebanese cuisine to Lebanese migration and explains that the expansion of Lebanese cuisine worldwide prompted most Lebanese

establishments to expand from modest beginnings as small falafel shops to high-end restaurants with evening entertainment and sophisticated food.

Monsour (2009) states that in Lebanon food and its presentation are an art enjoyed with conviviality among family members, friends and, moreover, strangers. Monsour (2009) suggests that for the Lebanese, food is the accompaniment to all of life's occasions, whether they are happy or sad ones. He then argues that although one finds similarity between Lebanese cuisine and other Middle Eastern cuisines, a noticeable difference puts Lebanese cuisine in a category of its own, because Lebanese food "combines the sophistication and subtleties of European cuisines with the exotic ingredients of the Middle and Far East. The cuisine of Lebanon is the epitome of the Mediterranean diet" (Monsour, 2009: 235). Monsour (2009) further explains how in Lebanon, food is not only to feed the body; it is considered food for the soul. It also embodies the diverse history and civilization of the country, "therefore, its food is largely influenced by its historical heritage, by the diversity of its relief and its climate" (Monsour, 2009: 235). A similar but more comprehensive argument towards the Lebanese cuisine was made by Rizik. Rizik (2009) argues that Lebanon's Baklava is one of the best in the world and is in fact, the best in terms of quality and presentation. Rizik (2009: 73) also discusses Lebanese sweets in general stating that Lebanese sweets are "high-quality sweet products that combine highly skilled workmanship and innovation for the people who understands quality, demand refine taste, and desire nothing but the best."

At a time when almost all aspects of social life are being commodified, the Lebanese cuisine remains a collective memory and a cultural identity. Khechen (2007) for example argues that the Lebanese kitchen provides a model of the Lebanese village of memory and of the collective Lebanese imagination. Consequently he suggests that the Lebanese cuisine

provides an experience of the traditional Lebanon without individuals having to visit the country itself. Khechen (2007) further argues that Lebanese cuisine is simultaneously a means of unification and a symbol of separation. He refers to "unification" to describe how members of the Lebanese diaspora and Lebanese migrants in general get together and are united through this cuisine, and refers to "separation" to describe years of migration from Lebanon and the separation of Lebanese migrants form their home country.

Adbulrahim (2009) explores how Lebanese immigrants come to be incorporated into small business enterprises, analysing the factors that encourage Lebanese migrants to establish small businesses. This could perhaps provide an indication of why the Lebanese cuisine has been widely distributed around the world. Adbulrahim (2009) suggests that Lebanese migrants, regardless of their class origin, become incorporated upon arrival to their host-countries in low-wage labour. They hold jobs in the mainstream secondary economy or in ethnic businesses owned by other Lebanese immigrants. Adbulrahim (2009) proposes that this incorporation is temporary as Lebanese immigrants are able to move out of low-wage labour through mobilizing social capital resources and transforming them into physical or human capital. He then describes social capital manifested among Lebanese immigrants in the form of having access to resource-rich social relationships, and not in the form of widespread trust and reciprocity. Adbulrahim (2009) argues that the desire and ability of Lebanese migrants to move out of low-wage labour coupled with an inability to enter the primary mainstream economy led immigrants to small business enterprises. This is further illustrated by Moallem (2000) who in turn argues that Lebanese hospitality is evident through small and medium enterprises in the shape of cafes, restaurants and snack bars.

Rowe (2008) through field research in various Lebanese villages describes how the memories of subtle differences abound, and survive through recipes passed down in family

lines. He suggests that Lebanese people do not seem to be competitive nor comment about the differences in food as especially significant in any way today as they did before. Rowe (2008) argues that the diversity in village food ways has given way to acknowledging a more generic and flexible "Lebanese cuisine" in the diaspora. Rowe's (2008) argument suggests that the "flexible Lebanese cuisine" could reproduce culture amongst the Lebanese diaspora. Shryock (2000) also stresses the importance of Lebanese food being cooked at home and raises concern of non-home-made Lebanese food. He argues that as Lebanese food is used in restaurants for profit reasons, as the "real" ingredients are not being used for dishes in order to cut costs. Moreover, Shryock (2000) suggests that foods prepared in Lebanese restaurants are prepared differently by the same individuals when at home. Furthermore, Samhan (1999) distinguishes between Lebanese male and female cooks and argues that the Lebanese cuisine is more "Lebanese" when prepared by females. Samhan (1999) claims that Lebanese males only prepare dishes when they have to, perhaps as a means of an income, as this is not part of the Lebanese culture. Samhan (1999) states that women are considered the ones who traditionally create Lebanese food, and suggests that, for Lebanese women, food practice is categorically tied to the home and the concepts of hospitality discussed above.

Abdelrahman (2007) discussed the popularity of the Lebanese cuisine around the world and explains the increase of Lebanese restaurants internationally to two major factors. The first factor argued is that Lebanese restaurants offer their customers a wide selection of Lebanese foods. Abdelrahman (2007) then explains the second factor as being the attraction of customers by the fact that Lebanese cooking is generally low in fat and seen as healthy. Abdelrahman (2007) concludes that alongside the entertainment and healthy food options provided, Western cultures like Lebanese restaurants because they offer varied menus at cheaper prices than other restaurants.

The Lebanese Diaspora and Hospitality in London

Lebanese citizens, migrants and entrepreneurs have arguably learned to be flexible and resilient. Their flexibility meant adapting rapidly to new cultures such as the British culture, and resilience in starting a new life, progressing and striving in their doings (The Economist, 2013). Edgware road in west London is centre of London's Lebanese diaspora. The Lebanese in London have a reputation for hard work and hard headed business sense and many of them have become wealthy working for major multinational companies or for themselves (Sydney, 2012). In an interview conducted by the British Satellite News (BSN) (2007) George Asay, the chief executive of the Arab – British Chamber of Commerce stated that the:

> Lebanese have traditionally been merchants and entrepreneurs over the years and it is not surprising today to see that there is a large number of Lebanese entrepreneurs in London. If you look at all the large British, American and European companies, you will find that there are some lots of young Lebanese working there and contributing to the success of these institutions. Some of them have done extremely well, became branch managers or have moved on to open their own companies here in the UK and in Europe. So, the Lebanese in general are extremely hard working and contribute to the economy wherever they are.

The latter demonstrates the importance of pursuing successful careers at executive levels for Lebanese individuals. In turn, this led Lebanese migrants living in London in exploiting various options including cultural commodification in the form of hospitality to ensure career success (Khechen, 2007).

The pursuit of career success has led to two types of Lebanese migrants, each of which perceives career success form different perspectives. These two types have been labelled as the "Early Traditional Migrant" and the "Modern Recent Migrant".

-       The Early Traditional Migrants are the immigrants that left Lebanon in search of a new experience. They are the older Lebanese communities who experience the diaspora as a "nostalgic sense of exile experienced as loss of culture and loss of social connections with the past" (Humphrey, 2004: 15). They struggled to survive and discovered language and cultural barriers (Naff, 1988). They wanted to be part of a community and did not want to be seen as outsiders (Abdelhady, 2007). They brought their traditions with them, but blended in with others as they desired to be seen as unique foreigners and wanted to be part of local communities and therefore took part in everyday life.

-       Modern Recent Migrants are the current migrants forced out of Lebanon due to war and seek to be part of an already existing community. They might within time change or adapt to host's cultural beliefs but are still not sure whether they will go back to their homelands and may forget their original cultural values (Werbner, 1999; Anthias, 2010).

The "Early Traditional Migrant" and the "Modern Recent Migrant" both play a key role in the demographical structure of the Lebanese diaspora in London. The "Early Traditional Migrant" sought a permanent life in the UK and strived to succeed by adapting to culture and investing in a foreign land. This community then helped employ the "Modern Recent Migrant" who intended to gather as much money as they could in a short period of time and was determined to go back home after significant earnings. The "Modern Recent Migrant" did not intend to learn or adapt to a new culture and just relied heavily on the "Early

Traditional Migrant" who helped in securing them jobs and temporary residence, and in most cases sponsoring their stay and living in the UK. Consequently, the "Early Traditional Migrant" has been pushed out of their established territories in London by the "Modern Recent Migrant", perhaps leading to competition and tension between both categories in the same diaspora.

Although the concept of hospitality is usually employed to explain an ethical or political approach towards the "foreigner" or "stranger", it can also be used to describe orientations towards those in need (Nielson, 2008: 606) and in this case the "Modern Recent Migrant". Appiah (2006) extends a similar conditional imperative arguing that hospitality cannot be offered by just any of us to just any of them, rather, it is limited to those who would enter dialogue between cultures. Therefore, hospitality amalgamates individuals with similar cultural interests or individuals from the same cultures, such as that being offered by "Early Traditional Migrants" to the "Modern Recent Migrants" within the Lebanese Diaspora. Leung and Stone (2009) refer to the latter as conditional hospitality that because it is given only on expectation of a return or offered out of decorum and therefore without responsibility. Furthermore, Lynch et al., (2011) argue that hospitality is premised on the mobility of the visitor, the stranger, the exchange student, the tourist or the asylum seeker. At the same time, however, hospitality connotes slowing down, resting and stopping for a while, and in this sense, it also always entails immobility. Thus, hospitality within the Lebanese diaspora in London is premised on the "Modern Recent Migrant". However, in this case, the Lebanese "Modern Recent Migrants", consumes hospitality vacancies that are given to them by the Lebanese "Early Traditional Migrants". .

Conclusions

The Lebanese diaspora embodies the diaspora's homeland through hospitality and food. Lebanon, according to Young (2007), is one of the most liberal in the Middle East and has permitted the production of liberal national traditions. Dancing, music and smoking are traditions that perhaps some of Lebanon's neighbouring countries frown upon due to strict Islamic regimes, but such cultural traditions have helped to shape the Lebanese diaspora, as well as a tourist "boom" in Lebanon (Marouni, 2009).

The Lebanese diaspora in London have adopted Lebanese cultural heritage and unified it with a degree of western "exoticness" (Abdelrahman, 2007) in order to form a socially constructed cultural diaspora that would be welcomed and embraced in a western world. Hospitality remains the key factor in the success of the diaspora which has popularized the diaspora amongst British citizens and other Diaspora within the UK. Entrepreneurs of the Lebanese diaspora have achieved great success by developing Middle Eastern cuisine. But as Lebanese hospitality is a core cultural tradition, and as the Lebanese diaspora have used hospitality as largely the only means of striving in the West, cultural traditions have been commodified to suit Western consumer's needs and desires. Nevertheless, the use of cultural traditions have additionally led to a separation of the diaspora in London which currently comprises two categories of Lebanese diaspora members, the "early traditional migrant" who migrated seeking a better permanent life abroad, invested and established businesses on that basis, and the "modern recent migrant" who was forced to travel but aimed to migrate temporarily in order to gather funds and return. However, the "early traditional migrant" has provided the "modern recent migrants" with support in the form of hospitality. Therefore, although a separation in norms is visible within the Diaspora, hospitality acts as a bond that unites the migrants of a comparable culture.

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This paper has reviewed the Lebanese Diaspora and hospitality. Future research regarding this topic should focus on: (1) the (im)mobilities of first-generation Lebanese Migrants in the UK to examine the reasons why Lebanese migrants choose London as their first destination to permanently settle; (2) the Lebanese Diaspora and labour mobility, in order to discover how Lebanese migrants travel within the UK in search of specific occupations; (3) Hospitality consumption and trends within the Lebanese Diaspora in order to understand the reasons why Lebanese cuisine is consumed.

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