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A WASTA IN BELGIUM

DIASPORIC CAPITAL AND THE SHORTAGE OF MEDICATION IN LEBANON

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INTRODUCTION

The Arabic word *wasta* is directly translated into *the middle*. It is etymologically associated with the verb *yatawassat*, which means to mediate, compromise, or to provide a link between two different parties. In its common usage, the word refers to the person that acts as a mediator, but also to the act of soliciting said mediator (Alsarhan & Valax, 2020) In its most popular definition and application of the term, *wasta* refers to leveraging connections and associations to bypass bureaucratic procedures (Al-Twal, 2021). Berger et. al (2014) define it as "The intercession of a patron in support of another in an attempt to obtain privileges or resources from a third party" (p. 918) Under this definition, wasta can be associated with nepotism and corruption (Berger, Herstein, McCarthy, & Puffer, 2019). Wasta can therefore be used to obtain different resources such as employment, education enrolment, documentation from public authorities, loans and grants, court acquittal, amongst others (Barnett, Yandle, & Naufal, 2013). In exchange, the mediator may receive political, economic, or social gains. Other authors have proposed different definitions of wasta. These definitions provide less emphasis on corruption and more of a focus on kinship and networks. For example, Loewe et al. (2008) describe wasta as a form of favoritism received from family members, friends, or other close acquaintances that are in a position of power. Another definition given by Alsarhan & Valax (2020), in their state of the arts review of the subject, views wasta as "an unwritten social contract based on the cooperation and obligation between members of various social groups such as families and tribe" (p. 1). In the field of sociology, it is theorized as a form of social capital prevalent in Middle Eastern and North African countries that emphasizes on kinship, long-term trust, and reciprocity. This dissertation introduces the wasta concept into the diasporic field, and aims to theorize international wasta networks. This will be done by focusing on the Lebanese diaspora in Belgium and the international wasta network formed in response to drug shortages in the home country.

Context

From 1975 to 1989, Lebanon experienced a civil war, which caused hyperinflation and the devaluation of the local currency, the Lebanese Pound. In 1997, in an attempt to stop this devaluation, Banque du Liban (the Lebanese Central Bank) changed monetary policy. The country switched from a floating monetary system to a fixed monetary system: the Lebanese Pound was pegged to the United States Dollar (USD) at 1,507.5 LBP per USD (Awdeh, 2019) . From late 2019 to early 2020, Banque du Liban's foreign currency reserves started depleting, and the government defaulted on 90 billion USD worth of sovereign debt obligations. As a consequence, the fixed exchange rate was found to be unstainable. A black market for foreign currency started developing. As of writing, the US Dollar sits at around 30,000 LBP on the black market (Siddique, 2022). The currency crisis has caused considerable delays in drug imports. More than 80% of the drugs circulating in Lebanon are imported (Das, 2021). As the value of the Lebanese Pound drops further, and as foreign currency reserves become more scarce, such imports have become increasingly expensive. This has caused pharmaceutical importers to be heavily indebted to foreign pharmaceutical groups, therefore severely decreasing the supply of medication circulating in the country. In 2020, as a temporary solution to the economic crisis, the Lebanese government introduced subsidies on essential goods, including essential medication. While this policy aimed to reduce the cost of essential drugs, it had an adverse effect. It has led to an increase in stockpiling: distribution groups held back stocks, waiting for the Lebanese Pound to plummet further to re-sell them at a higher mark-up. Additionally, there have been accounts of stockpilers re-selling subsidized medication to foreign countries via the black market, further straining the supply of essential drugs in Lebanon. Subsidies were lifted by the Mikati government in November 2021. Moreover, the destruction of the Port of Beirut, the main port of the country, after the Beirut Blast of August 4 2020, has taken a toll on the production chain of local generic drugs (Azhari, 2021) . The factors above have created a shortage and/or a dramatic increase in the cost of essential drugs in Lebanon, leaving those dependent on them in a vulnerable position. Khattar et al. (2022) note that the shortage in cardiovascular drugs has caused an increase in "decompensated heart failure, myocardial infarction secondary to stent thrombosis, and unstable arrhythmias" (Khattar et al., 2022; p.1). There have also been reports of shortages in cancer medication as well as other vital drugs.

The Lebanese diaspora is notable for its sheer size. Upper estimates range between 12 to 15 million people, in contrast to the 6 million residing in Lebanon. The largest Lebanese diaspora groups reside in North America (United States and Canada), Latin and South America (Mexico, Brazil, Venezuela…), The European Union (France), Oceania (Australia), and Sub-Saharan Africa (Ivory Coast, Benin, Congo…). The most recent wave of Lebanese migrants is a direct consequence of the crisis described above. Mendelek (2022) describes these new migrants as members of the middle-class who were waiting for the right opportunity to leave the country. The crisis has created a sense of urgency, which pushed more than 200,000 citizens to migrate between the years 2018 and 2021 (Mendelek, 2022). The diaspora has maintained ties with the homeland via the establishment of formal and informal networks. This dissertation focuses on informal networks that provide medication for people in Lebanon

CHAPTER 1 – LITERATURE REVIEW

I – THEORIZING WASTA

I A - THEORETICAL BACKGROUND: SOCIAL CAPITAL AND FIELD THEORY

Bourdieu defines social capital as the “collection of actual or potential resources that are associated with belonging to a durable network, that has been more or less institutionalized by mutual acquaintance and recognition” (Bourdieu, The Forms of Capital, 1986) Social capital, in addition to cultural and economic capital determine the structural positioning of individuals. The different forms of capitals are intertwined and convertible. Leveraging on social capital allows actors to form bonds, which can be converted to economic resources. Group relations are institutionalized (through acquaintance and recognition) in order for members to gain access to resources.

The concept of social capital is situated in the context of Bourdieusian field theory. Fields constitute: “arenas of production, circulation, and appropriation and exchange of goods, services, knowledge, or status, and the competitive positions held by actors in their struggle to accumulate, exchange, and monopolize different kinds of power resources (capitals).” (Swartz, 2020). Fields are arenas of unequal distribution of “valued capitals”, such as social capital. In this context of unequal distribution, actors compete to acquire “power resources” (Swartz, 2020). Therefore, it is inevitably an arena of social reproduction: dominant groups monopolize power resources, for which they are able to cyclically acquire and reproduce other actual and potential power resources.

Capital determines one’s position in the field. Habitus, on the other hand, is the link between said field and social action. Habitus is a “subjective but not individual system of internalised structures, schemes of perception, conception, and action common to all members of the same group or class” (Bourdieu, 1977). The notion transcends the structure-agency dichotomy, in that it highlights an interplay between social context and internalization: history and structures shape habitus, which shapes current institutions and social actions, and our perceptions of these institutions and social actions (Morrison, 2005). Therefore, Bourdieu describes a dynamic process shared by people of common context, background, and culture internalize the institutions they are inhabited in, and externalize through actions.

Therefore, a context-specific analysis and conceptualization of social capital theory would provide meaningful insight into how the interplay between external structures and internalization perpetuate fields of social reproduction. The notion of *wasta* allows to theorize such dynamics in the Arab context.

I B - THEORIZING WASTA AS SOCIAL CAPITAL: DIVERGENT APPROACHES

In the sociological field, wasta is identified as a form of social capital that is prominent in Middle Eastern and North African countries. Ali & Weir (2020) identify two research clusters on the matter: the social networks perspective and the institutional perspective.

Wasta researchers who follow the social networks perspective focus on interactions between parties, and how these interactions are based on a form of culturally-specific social capital (Ali & Weir, 2020). To summarize the recent literature on the matter, wasta can be conceptualized as a form of social capital that is prominent in Arab nations and culture(s) and that has the following elements

> *Kinship* – The wasta concept highlights the importance of the notion of family in Arab culture(s). The word *family* does not just encompass close family members. It also includes distant relatives, as well as close friends and acquaintances (Egan & Tabar, 2016; Berger, Herstein, McCarthy, & Puffer, 2019; Ali & Weir, 2020)
>
> *Long-term trust* – In order for *wasta* to work, there needs to be a sense of trust between the parties. This is built over long periods of time. This can be done directly between the parties involved: one builds trust with their own direct family members over time, for example. If the parties are not in each others' circles of proximity, it can also be established indirectly, via, for instance, referrals from someone one has already established long-term trust with. Historical relationships between the families the individuals are a part of may also play a role in establishing trust. When kinship and trust are established, a social contract is formed between the different parties (Berger, Herstein, McCarthy, & Puffer, 2019; Ali & Weir, 2020).
>
> Reciprocity – This unwritten social contract stipulates that its' parties morally obligated to provide favoritism and benevolence towards one another. It is not a one-way relationship: if person A solicits person B for a wasta, person B may solicit person A for a wasta as well. This feature reduces uncertainty and helps sustain the relationship between the parties (Ali & Weir, 2020).

The notion of wasta, therefore, bridges the affective with the instrumental. A wasta relies on some sort of kinship between the parties. This kinship allows exchange. Therefore, wasta's nature "does not exist outside of a human context" (Ali & Weir, 2020; p. 664): in this framework, players are not just mere rational economic actors, but individuals with "complex motivations and diverse social identities" (Ali & Weir, 2020; p. 664).

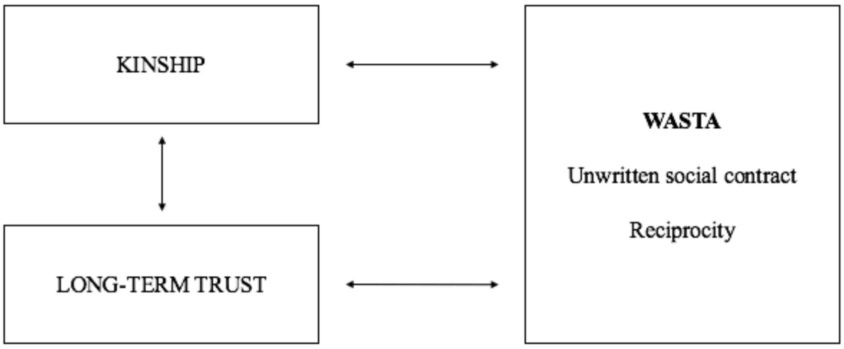

Figure 1 – Proposed visual representation of the wasta components

The wasta concept encompasses different forms of social capital. Most specifically, it is both relevant to bonding and bridging social capital. Bonding social capital is based on ties between members of a homogenous group, while bridging social capital acts as a bridge between different homogenous groups (Claridge, 2018). Wasta can be used in either form of social capital. It can be used within a homogenous group – people of the same family or geographic area (village, neighborhood, etc…). This helps reinforce ties within this homogeneous group. It can also be used between different individuals who adhere to different groups – people of different families, geographic areas, or close circles (Ali & Weir, 2020).

While wasta researchers who use the social network perspective focus on interactions between different parties, those who use an institutional approach focus on a macro-level analysis: They emphasize the historical, cultural, and institutional context that explains the prevalence of wasta in Arab countries (Ali & Weir, 2020).

On one hand, this cluster of wasta researchers argue that the notion derives from a shared national culture. It is "developed and normalized by the national culture which influences institutional arrangements" (Ali & Weir, p. 668) Under this research cluster, authors have focused on the institutionalization of wasta. In their analysis of the notion in The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, EL-Said & Harrigan (2009) link wasta back to tribalism. The authors argue that tribalism has been a key feature of Jordan's social fabric throughout its history. Under the Greek, Roman, and Ottoman empires, these tribes were kept independent from central authorities. They carried a value-based system centered around the notions of family and social solidarity (*takaful al Ijtima'i,).* Disputes were resolved and resources were managed through informal social networks. Therefore, historically, they have been the primary mode of organization in the region, which is now referred to as wasta (El-Said & Harrigan, 2009).

On the other hand, there is also an emphasis on *wasta*'s intercessory function. It acts as a substitute for malfunctioning formal organizations and institutions. If formal institutions are weak, informal alternatives (wasta) take over public life. In times of economic or political crisis, as the efficiency of formal institutions is weakened, such alternatives become more prominent (Kropf & Newbury-Smith, 2016) .

In this context, Kropf & Newbury-Smith (2016) argue that past research on wasta has often adopted a definition of the term that is associated with nepotism and corrupt practices. In other words, they communicate a euro-centric normative framework of economic development. The authors argue that past research has framed wasta as a sort of *bad* social capital, without taking into consideration the historical and institutional development of the phenomenon. Therefore, the institutional perspective brings cultural insight into the study of wasta.

I.C. - WASTA AND HABITUS

In the previous sub-section, two conceptual approaches to *wasta* analysis were described. On one hand, the social network perspective focuses on interactions between individuals and groups, and how these interactions foster a wasta network. On the other hand, the institutional perspective focuses on the macro level, in which there is an emphasis on the institutionalization of wasta in Arab societies. To surpass the micro-macro divide, Ali & Weir (2020) provide a holistic framework of wasta that borrows from these two approaches.

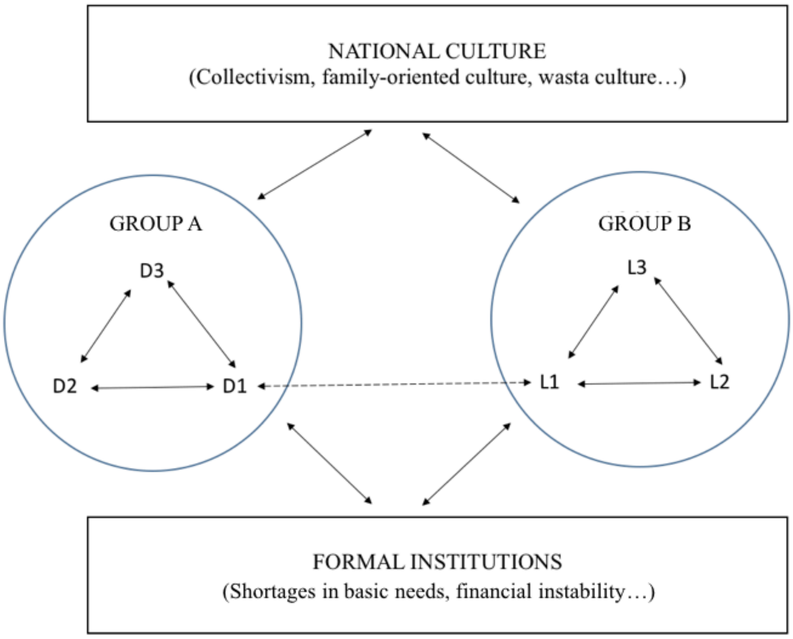
NATIONAL CULTURE
(Collectivism, family-oriented culture, wasta culture…)
GROUP A
D3
D2
D1
GROUP B
L3
L1
L2
FORMAL INSTITUTIONS
(Shortages in basic needs, financial instability…)

Figure 2 – Holistic wasta framework, adapted from Ali & Weir (2020)

In this framework, Ali & Weir (2020) argue that the interactions which foster a wasta network are embedded in a structural and cultural context. On one hand, the wasta network takes on a intercessory function: it acts as a substitute to malfunctioning formal organizations who cannot provide the needs of individuals who are embedded in it. On the other hand, wasta is embedded in a collectivist national/regional culture which influences modes of organizations. Both structural and cultural factors have a reciprocal relationship with the wasta network. Structures create a need for a wasta network, and existence and perpetuity of such network perpetuates the mode of existence of these structures. Similarly, the national culture fosters a wasta network, and the interactions created within the network reinforces it.

This framework highlights a theoretical gap in the social capital literature on wasta. Ali & Weir (2020) present formal institutions and culture as two distinct variables. They are presented as social facts and the processes of internalization are not discussed. In other words, the current literature on wasta fails to include the notion of habitus in its analyses. Understanding the interplay between the social context in which wasta is fostered and the internalization processes experienced by its participants could provide a more nuanced theoretical framework. This dissertation is interested in understanding such dynamics in the context of the diasporic field.

II, THE DIASPORIC FIELD AND WASTA

I - A. DEFINING *DIASPORA*

Not every migrant is a part of a diaspora group. This brief review of the subject matter is inspired by Grossman's (2019) state-of-the-art research on diaspora studies, in which he lays out the different attributes of the diaspora concept. These attributes are critically analyzed in light of previous literature. Four attributes are identified: (1) dispersal and living outside of the homeland, (2) transnationalism, (3) community, (4) homeland orientation.

1. Dispersal and living outside of the homeland

One of the core attributes of the diaspora concepts is *dispersal*. Movement across borders, voluntary or involuntary, disperses people who share similar geographic origins. Therefore, a migrant is considered a member of a diaspora if they live outside of a *homeland*. This excludes internal migrants from the diaspora concept (Grossman, 2019)

2. Transnationalism

This attribute of the diaspora concept refers to an adherence to both home and host country. Diaspora members sustain a relationship with their homeland, but they are also active members of the host country, in the sense that they are interested and invested in its economy, social life, and culture. They become a part of the host country's social fabric (Grossman, 2019). For example, a Lebanese person living in Paris maintains ties with both Lebanon and France. They work in France, pay taxes to the French government, and have developed a social and cultural life in Paris. However, they also sustain ties with their Lebanese heritage by participating in Lebanese elections, traveling to Lebanon, etc… This attribute excludes migrants that may reject identifying with the host country, or that actively try to remove themselves from forming ties with it.

The essence of the transnational attribute is much disputed in the academic literature on diasporas. Tabar (2020), for instance, argues that the diasporic field is different from the transnational field. He argues that transnational relations are not confined to one particular nation, whereas diasporic relations are centered around the home country (Tabar, 2020). However, transnationalism differs from globalization. The notion of globalization "transcends the context of specific nation-states" (Grossman, 2019; p.7). Transnationalism, in the context of diaspora studies, is not limited to the home country. It is specific to *two* nation-states: the host and home countries. The linkages between these two entities are transnational. As diaspora members are both engaged in the home and host countries, and they provide a sort of linkage between the two, diasporic relations are transnational.

3. An (imagined) community?

Members of the same diaspora group share a sense of community (Grossman, 2019). In this context, the term community does not necessarily refer to individuals who are in proximate contact with one another, or that even know of each other personally. It is also not defined by geographic borders. A community is an act of creativity, in which national identities are imagined by those who adhere to it. This idea can be associated with what Anderson (1998) calls the *imagined* *community*. The nation is not synonymous with the state or formal organizations (Anderson, 1998). The nation is constructed by those who adhere to it, creating a form of comradery between them (Calhoun, 2016). Therefore, diaspora members both feel and act upon their belonging to a community that transcends borders. For example, in this framework, a Lebanese person living in Paris feels a connection to everyone who shares this national identity. Grossman (2019) cites the formation of transnational diaspora organizations as an expression of said imagined community.

Hage (2005) warns that this notion's ubiquity in diaspora studies is due to its facility of use. The author argues that the idea of a community being *imagined* can be empirically problematic (Hage, A not so multi-sited ethnography of a not so imagined community, 2005). The notion implies a communal sense of belonging to a global village centered around a common identity. Hage (2005) argues that most of the empirical works citing Anderson's concept fail to empirically prove this. The label is therefore projected by the researcher, and not specifically communicated by the diaspora members themselves. Moreover, the empirical example given by Grossman (2019) is exclusionary, in the sense that it omits anyone who does not actively express a sense of *global* comradery and consciousness with other patriots. Must one be a part of a transnational diaspora organization to be called a diaspora member? Localized dynamics of diaspora groups provide more insight into the construction of a diasporic identity: in other words, the interactions between people who share the same origins within a specific geographic area provides insight into how a diasporic consciousness is formed. This research project focuses on such interactions (as developed in future sections).

4. Homeland orientation

Diaspora members "maintain material and symbolic ties with" (Grossman, 2019; p. 10) the homeland. This can take several forms

- Tourism: visiting the homeland for vacation, business trips, to visit family and friends…
- Commercial exchanges and financial contributions: sending remittances, providing essential goods in times of crisis, purchasing estate in the home country, developing entrepreneurial initiatives in the home country…
- Cultural exchanges: engaging and providing a platform for local artists
- Religious exchanges: importing local religious practices and symbols
- Political exchanges: participation in local elections, raising funds for campaign elections, participating in protests in favor of/against policies in the home country

These exchanges can also be immaterial, as diaspora members can engage with the homeland via the internet: joining online groups of expatriates, online advocacy and activism, etc… (Boichak & Kumar, 2022)

I - B. NOTES ON LONG-DISTANCE NATIONALISM

Diasporic conditions can be thought of as the product of a sort of emotional bond with the motherland. First coined by Bennedict Anderson (1998), the term *long-distance nationalism* refers to a form of nationalism that brings together "immigrants, their descendants, and those who have remained in their homeland into a single trans-border citizenry" (Sobral, 2018; p.50) Long-distance nationalism fosters an *imagined community* that is formed based on a common nationality, a sense of *peoplehood,* and “a continued commitment to the nation-state” (Sobral, 2018; p.50). Members of the diaspora are therefore framed as members of this imagined community. This entails they have some sort of adherence and emotional connection to the nation-state, as well as a commitment to engage with the homeland.

In this perspective, transborder citizenry has an impact on diasporic relations and engagement with the homeland. In *The Diasporic Condition (2021),* Ghassan el Hage describes a *diasporic injury* experienced by Lebanese diaspora members, a feeling of abandonment and disappointment experienced by the diaspora member towards their homeland. There is a tension between the disappointment experienced by the diasporic individual and their desire to valorize and better their homeland. The diaspora member struggles to navigate between a love for the homeland and the shame they feel concerning how the *motherland* treats its citizens (Hage, Diasporic Anisogamy, 2021). In the book, Hage (2021) argues that Lebanese diaspora members deal with this ambivalence by dissociating the *Good Mother(land)* and the *Bad Mother(land)*; Lebanon has a good side (its nature, people, culture, etc…) that needs to triumph over its bad side (corruption, politicians…). Therefore, the diaspora member feels a sort of duty to protect, foster, and promote the *good side* of their homeland, which would explain their motivation to sustain a relationship with the homeland. This includes providing for *the good people* of the country.

This approach can be criticized as a sort of methodological nationalism: the tendency in social science literature to present the nation-state as “the natural and necessary representation of modern society” (Chernilo, 2011; p. 99) In his critique of the notion, Chernilo (2011) describes a position he defines as a container argument: the idea that the nation-state can and has encompassed all forms and aspects of social life. In the field of diaspora and migrant studies, this would entail that the diaspora member/migrant is solely analyzed through the prism of their home country and their adherence to long-distance nationalism. In the case studied in this research project, it would mean that one can assume that a Lebanese migrant necessarily and exclusively engage with the homeland out of a sort of patriotism. This reductionist approach ignores the complexities of diaspora engagement.

Another critique that can be made of these theories is that it makes the assumptions that emotions towards the homeland necessarily lead to mobilization and action. In her qualitative study of Palestinian and Greek diaspora groups, Mavroudi (2018) argues against this assumption. She claims that diaspora members do not necessarily assist locals in times of economic crisis (Mavroudi). This inactivity can coexist with strong emotional connections to the homeland. In times of crisis, “these feelings are heightened” (p. 1309), as it leads to sympathy, compassion, and concern for those who live in the homeland. However, this feeling can be accompanied by a sense of diaspora fatigue. First theorized by Shain & Barth (2003), diaspora fatigue is a feeling of dejectedness expressed by diaspora members in light of critical conditions in the home country. Mavroudi (2018) specifies that her research subjects found that the economic and political crises in their respective homelands were so severe that they felt they could not act on it. Moreover, some participants cited the failure of organized, institutionalized diaspora mobilization initiatives in providing a systemic change in the homeland. These participants have previously donated money, food, or medication to non-governmental organizations, and failed to see the fruits of their contribution.

I.C - DIASPORIC CAPITAL AND WASTA

In the diasporic field, a reliance on bridging social capital can be seen as a reliance on the economic capital of diaspora members. Tabar (2016) applies a Bourdieusian approach to this phenomenon. Members of a diaspora group possess economic, social, and cultural capital. They have access to a field that locals (such as their family) do not have. Based on Bourdieu's theory, they are convertible to one another. Within the framework of diasporic relations, an increase in economic or social capital, for example, may increase *diasporic capital* (Tabar, 2016): diaspora members gain more power in relation to locals.

Both notions of wasta and diasporic capital can be compared to the Mauss' (1967) classic account of the gift. He argued that there is no such thing as a free gift, in that receiving a gift entails some sort of social obligation to provide a counter-gift. This counter-gift is not necessarily of the same value. However, as noted by Eckstein (2010): "Unequal exchanges contribute to and reinforce honour, prestige, and authority, and reciprocal exchanges across borders unify the parties involved" (Eckstein, 2010)

In the context of wasta literature, Ali & Weir (2020) make the assumption that boding wasta is more prevalent during harsh economic ties, as it is a more immediate source of resources that allows users to *get by*. However, this line of thinking has its shortcomings: what if the circle/local wasta network doesn't have the necessary resources to *get by*? In this literature review, little to no research was found on wasta in the context of diasporic relations. In the case studied that will be researched in this project, Lebanese locals often have to make use of connections that are outside of their immediate environment to secure medication. In this case, one can argue that both bonding *and* bridging wasta gain more prominence during harsh economic conditions.

RESEARCH QUESTION AND AIMS

This dissertation seeks to answer the following research question: How do Lebanese diaspora members' perception of formal institutions inform the formation of an international wasta network in the context of medicine shortages?

This research answers two existing gaps in the social capital literature on wasta. Firstly, it seeks to introduce the notion of habitus into the conceptual understand of wasta network formation. Focusing on participants' perceptions of formal institutions provides insight into internalization and externalization processes through the lens of wasta. Secondly, it aims to introduce the wasta concept into the diasporic field, and to understand how diasporic capital and participants' perceptions of the host country institutions interplay in a wasta framework.

CHAPTER 2 – METHODOLOGY

As this research project explores attitudes, as well as notions that were previously empirically unexplored, the choice of a qualitative research design is relevant.

1. SAMPLE

The total sample is composed of ten individuals. The basic sampling criteria are the following: (1) The participant is Lebanese and has sent or brought medication with them to Lebanon, and (2) The participant has been living continuously in Belgium for at least six months. As this research uses theoretical sampling, the sample criteria change in function to the developing theory. Partial conclusions were made in the first phase of the data collection process: the first five interviews were conducted with participants who meet the basic sampling criteria. These observations informed changes in sampling criteria for the second phase of the research process. The second basic sampling criteria was changed. The second phase contrasts two sampling groups: Lebanese people who moved to Belgium before the start of the economic crisis, and Lebanese people who moved to Belgium after the start of the economic crisis. This decision was informed by the data collected in the first phase of the research, in which participants noted differences in attitudes amongst the diaspora based on their experience in the economic crisis. More details on the matter are provided in the findings and analysis sections.

A snowballing sampling strategy was used. Initials contacts from the researcher's personal network were first interviewed, and were then asked for recommendations of other individuals in their network who fit the sample criteria. Additionally, social media was used to recruit research participants: a *story* was posted on the researcher's personal Instagram page with the initial sample criteria and brief context on the research project. Members of the researcher's personal social media network also shared the post on their own pages.

Demographics

The median age is 27. The oldest participant is 44, and the youngest one is 20. Seven out of ten of the participants are women, and three out of ten are men. They have been in Belgium for an average of 2.25 years, and eight of them live in the Brussels region (the other two participants live in Ghent and Hasselt). All of the participants are Lebanese and lived most of their lives in Lebanon. Four participants are Belgian-Lebanese and one of them is Franco-Lebanese. The others only possess a Lebanese nationality. All of the participants have a university-level education: eight possess a Master's degree and two a Bachelors' degree. Two of the participants are completing their students, and eight are employed in various sectors. None of the participants reported being members of a Lebanese political party or political organization, and eight out of ten participants identified as atheist. In terms of religious sect, three participants are registered as Muslims (Two Shiia Muslims and one Sunni Muslim), and seven are registered as Christians (Three Roman Catholic, two Evangelical Christians, one Greek Orthodox, and one Maronite Christian).

2. ACCESS AND POSITIONALITY

In order to discuss access to the field, clarifications on my positionality vis-à-vis the field and studied sample must be discussed. I moved to Belgium from Lebanon two years, and my decision to emigrate was greatly influenced by the country's socioeconomic context. As many of my friends emigrated at the same time as me, I possess a sizeable network of Lebanese people living in Belgium. In the initial phases of the sampling strategy, I already knew several potential interviewees, who were also able to provide me with other contacts. Moreover, my fluency in the Lebanese Arabic dialect, as well as my knowledge of the context and my understanding of the sensitive nature of the topics at hand, facilitated the interview process. In the feedback section of the interview, many of them noted that they felt comfortable throughout the interview. However, my positionality in regards to the subject at hand has also caused difficulties throughout the research process.

Firstly, in the first two interviews, interviewees made assumptions about my knowledge of the field. For example, instead of elaborating on certain elements or events of the economic crisis, they would mention it quickly. When I asked them to elaborate, the answer I often got was "Oh, you probably already know this." After noticing this problem, I rewrote the opening questions. Instead of asking "Can you tell me about the economic crisis in Lebanon?", I asked "Can you tell me about yourself and why you decided to leave Lebanon?" or "Can you tell me more about your personal experiences in regards to the economic crisis?" Focusing on personal experiences allowed interviewees to communicate more openly.

Secondly, since I have my personal thoughts, emotions, and experiences in regards to the field, I was worried of projecting myself onto the participants. During the first interview, I caught myself asking several closed questions, which may have influenced the interviewees' answers. I became more attentive of this issue in later interviews, and actively tried to turn these closed questions into open questions.

Thirdly, I took my positionality for granted throughout the sampling process. Due to my reliance on a personal network and snowballing, the majority of the participants were individuals around my age, who left Lebanon around the same time as me. I struggled to find individuals to interview that have been in Belgium for a longer period of time. This resulted in me only being able to interview two people who moved to Belgium prior to the economic crisis. The demographic composition of the sample, as well as my positionality, will therefore be taken into account in the data analysis.

3. DATA COLLECTION TECHNIQUE

Data was collected through interviews, timed at an average of 64 minutes. Seven of the ten interviews were conducted face-to-face, while three were conducted online using Microsoft Teams. The interviews were conducted in the interviewee's language of choice. Seven of the interviews were conducted in Arabic. Two of the interviews were conducted in English, and one in French. The interviews were manually transcribed in their languages. Quotes in Arabic and French that were used in this dissertation were translated to English by the researcher.

The research was conducted using semi-structured interviews. The head researcher wrote an interview guide that favored open-ended questions in order to foster a conversation: the questions were designed to allow the researcher to extract and explore new themes. Some of the questions asked were unplanned: they were the result of new topics and themes that were brought up by the interviewee. The interview guide was adapted and changed progressively throughout the research process. The structure of the interview guide can be summarized as followed:

> Ethics – The interview begins with the interviewer summarizing the participants' rights as written in the informed consent sheet. More details on the content of said sheet can be found in subchapter 5. After both parties sign the consent sheet, the interviewer starts the audio recording.
>
> Opening questions – These questions are *icebreakers* meant to understand the interviewees' background and experiences pre-emigration and post-emigration. The first question of the questionnaire is "Tell me about yourself and why you moved to Belgium." The question is broad enough to generate a wide variety of data. Interviewees discuss their experience in regards to the financial crisis, which constitutes the context in which the medication shortages appeared. Questions were also asked about their close circles' experiences in the crisis. Attitudes towards the country are discussed. Other opening questions were asked based on the topics and experiences described in the interviewees' initial answers.
>
> Introduction – Introduction questions link the notion of wasta to the interviewees' experiences. Interviewees' reliance on wasta in times of economic crisis are discussed.
>
> Transition questions – Interviewees are asked about their experience sending medication to Lebanon. In order to keep answers as broad as possible, the first transition question is "Can you tell me about your experiences sending medication to Lebanon?" The questions that follow were asked based on the interviewees' initial answers. For instance, questions were asked about the methods they used to acquire these medications.
>
> Key questions – These questions focus on the diasporas' members perceived roles towards their family and country, and how the emigration process and economic crisis informs these roles.
>
> Concluding questions – The interviewer summarizes key points from the interview, and asks the interviewee if they would like to add any comments or to provide insight on a topic previously discussed. Feedback is asked and taken into consideration in following interviews. I finish the interview by asking demographic questions.

4. ANALYSIS METHOD

Thematic Analysis and Constructivist Grounded Theory were used in this research project. Firstly, theoretical sampling was used. As described in the sampling sub-chapter, the sample criteria were changed in function to the development of theoretical insights provided by the first data collection phase. In the second phase, the sample criteria changed based on inductively developed observations on the participants' personal experiences in the Lebanese economic crisis. Secondly, the analysis was conducted inductively (constant comparative method), as reflected in the coding strategy. In the first phase, open coding was conducted: coding was conducted line by line, regardless of existing assumption of its theoretical relevance to the research project. Coding was conducted as close to the data as possible in order to explore different interpretations (in vivo coding). In the second phase (Focused coding), the most insightful and frequent codes. Codes are *cleaned* (duplicates are removed). In the third and final phase, codes are reorganized to provide a thorough understanding of the research topic. In this phase, coding is more abstract and inspired (but not determined) by the previous literature on the wasta concept, as well as diaspora studies. Thirdly, this research project does not just test existing theories, but build on the previous literature by providing new theoretical insights. This project builds on the wasta literature by introducing an international dimension to the concept. This will be further discussed in the analysis and conclusion. Fourthly, as described in the literature review, the research question aims to thoroughly explore the topic at hand, as opposed to merely describing it. A final version of the code structure can be found in the annex section.

5. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

All of the participants signed an informed consent sheet (See Annex section). It includes the title of the research project, the name and e-mail of the head researcher and supervisor, and the participants' rights, which included the following six points:

- The participant has read and understood the information about the research: The head researcher gave sufficient knowledge about the research project, and the context in which it is conducted. The participant was given the opportunity to ask questions prior to signing the consent sheet.
- Participation in this research project is voluntary, and the participant has the right to discontinue their participation *during* the interview without explanations. They are also allowed to not answer specific questions.
- The interview will be recorded. The participant was given the option to opt out of video recording if they wished so.
- The participant understands that they will receive no financial compensation for their participation.
- The data is anonymized and the participants' identities will not be traceable
- The participant agrees to the terms above and agrees to participate in the research project.

If the interview was done in person, three copies were signed manually. One copy was given to the participant, and two copies to the researcher. If the interview was conducted online, the informed consent sheet was signed electronically. A final copy was sent by e-mail to the participants prior to the start of the interview. Before the start of the interview and the recording, the interviewer summarized the participants' rights (as written in the consent sheet) and asked the participant if they had any questions on the project. Data is anonymized and any traceable information, such as names, specific addresses, specific professional titles, amongst others, were changed in the transcript by the head researcher. The names present in this dissertation are not those of the research participants. The transcripts and recordings are only accessible to the researcher and are located in a password-protected folder. All video and audio recordings, as well as transcripts and other relevant documents (i.e. NVIVO files) will be deleted by the researcher after successful completion of the course.

CHAPTER 3 – FINDINGS

PART 1 - LEBANON AS LIVED

This section summarizes the participants' perceptions of the Lebanese economic crisis. Firstly, it groups accounts given by the participants of their experiences pre-emigration, in which they frame Lebanon as unstable. Secondly, participants' interpretation of their emigration is examined. Thirdly, accounts of their interpretation of the economic crisis in Lebanon post-emigration are presented, in which they apply a comparative framework.

1.1 LEBANON AS UNSTABLE: PRE-EMIGRATION EXPERIENCES

Based on personal accounts of their experiences in the country pre-emigration, all ten participants framed Lebanon as unstable and unsafe.

Three of the participants personally experienced financial instability in Lebanon.

> "The minimum wage, was €400 for interns. And then when you graduate, if you're, like, a legal person, they either pay you or not, and it's lower even than the minimum wage as a law graduate." - Fairuz, 3 years in Belgium

By saying "they pay you or not", Fairuz insinuates that, in her experience, receiving a wage is not guaranteed. Employers exploit young graduates, who have little professional opportunities in Lebanon. Therefore, they allow themselves to skip or slash monthly wages. Elissa's employers, for example, cut her monthly wage by 50% without previously informing her. Ali expressed his frustration in working in a gig economy. In his interview, Ali argues that one can only get by in Lebanon by "doing odd jobs". He notes that this comes with a high level of precariousness, and little reward compared to the efforts put in: "*Basically you have to do a lot of work to barely get by"*

Additionally, the banking crisis caused Elissa distress:

> "I saved up a lot of money and like… Seeing this money, just as a number on the application when I opened the bank app, that it's virtual, it's not real… Slowly sucking life out of you." *Elissa, 2 years in Belgium*

Due to the rapid devaluation of the Lebanese Pound, as well as banking restrictions imposed after the crisis, Elissa could not access the savings she made in US Dollars, and her savings in Lebanese Pounds lost its value. In the interview, Elissa describes this experience as psychologically distressing. Fairuz and Charles' family finances, however, did not get negatively impacted by the banking crisis, as they previously invested their savings in real estate properties. These differences in experiences highlights a socio-economic contrast between Lebanese individuals who live paycheck to paycheck, and those who have the financial capacity to invest in assets. For instance, Mariam describes her family's incapability to recover from the devaluation of her father's salary:

> "When everything was collapsing, my dad's salary was like peanuts. The hospital, his salary, collapsed. It was worth nothing. (My parents) were trying to open a business, but it was… I mean they opened something in August 2019, but everything fell out. It's still open, but it still doesn't give you anything technically." - *Mariam, 2 years in Belgium*

While other participants associated financial instability with the ongoing economic crisis, Sarah argues that such dynamics were previously present in Lebanon.

> "I used to work full-time and I was still poor. I was working as a teacher before I left for Belgium. My salary was 300 USD. I couldn't afford insurance" - *Sarah, 12 years in Belgium*

In this quote, Sarah highlights the difficulties of acquiring basic needs in Lebanon. Lebanese public healthcare is limited, meaning that citizens often have to recur to private insurance companies for healthcare coverage. According to Sarah, her wage could not allow her to make ends meet, and restricted her from getting basic healthcare.

In addition to financial instability, two of the participants characterized Lebanon as unsafe. Elissa associates this characterization with her experience in the Beirut blast of August 4, 2020:

> I wasn't feeling safe anymore in my country. Like then definition of safety changed because already like there are times where you don't feel safe in general, but this time it was like: I can die. There were explosions happening before. But when (they) happened in 2005, 2006, we were younger. We weren't that aware. - *Elissa, 2 years in Belgium*

In this quote, Elissa mentions the mid-2000s, during which Lebanon saw a series of political assassinations, in addition to the 2006 Israel-Hezbollah war. According to her, she was too young to be "aware" of the implications of living in such a context. The August 2020 blast was Elissa's first time experiencing such an event as an adult. This experience, in addition to her memories of previous conflicts and explosions throughout her childhood, fostered a sense of danger. According to her, what happened in August 2020 could happen again, which partly informed her decision to emigrate. This lack of security could be traced back to the Lebanese Civil War (1975 – 1990) Sarah associates daily life in Lebanon to her war trauma:

> "I have a lot of trauma in Lebanon, and I don't want (my children) to live what I lived. And security… There's this anxiety that comes with day to day life, trauma of our past lives, the sound of bullets…" Sarah, 12 years in Belgium

It is in this context that the participant witnessed a shortage of medication in Lebanon. This included both over-the-counter (OTC) medication (such as painkillers) as well as prescription drugs (cancer medication, mental health medication, heart medications, etc.):

> "I think it was mostly 2021, beginning of 2022. That was the peak where you could find empty pharmacies. Nothing was available." Mariam, 2 years in Belgium

Participants cited different factors that led to this shortage. Fairuz and Charles argued that the economic conjuncture pushed pharmaceutical distribution groups to close in the country in order to avoid loss. Nancy mentioned the impact of the August 4 Beirut blast on pharmaceutical distribution:

> "One of the warehouses where they keep all the medication exploded. So physically, yeah… Concretely, the medicine was not available anymore" - *Nancy, 8 years in Belgium*

As the Lebanese economy becomes progressively dollarized, drugs have become increasingly available in pharmacies across the country. However, medication has become less *financially* accessible

> "At this point, companies are not losing money anymore, so they're just bringing it and making people pay in dollars. It's more expensive. It's less accessible in terms of financially access." - Charles, 2 years in Belgium

This means medication is less accessible to Lebanese people of low socio-economic status, especially those whose income is in the local currency. Additionally, four participants noted the presence of new medication brands that emerged as a response to the shortage. However, they note that these new products are not as effective as the medication that were available before the crisis. For instance, because of the shortages, George's mother often has to recur to an alternative to the anti-depressants she was initially prescribed:

> "There's no shortage anymore, per se. But there are alternatives that are made in Lebanon or Turkey. They're just not as good. They don't have the same effect." - Georges, 2 years in Belgium

1.2. EMIGRAITON AND (LACK OF) AGENCY

Half of the participants framed **their emigration from Lebanon as forced**. Fairuz, for instance, articulates her views on the topic by positioning herself outside of a *diaspora* framework:

> "I think because the terminology around migrant and refugee is kind of pejorative, so (Lebanese people) tend to stay away from that connotation and go for diaspora or expat, as if we have the choice to go back. But we don't. (…) "If I wanted to go back, I can go back and I'm fine there. But I'm here because of the vibe." OK, you're not here because of the vibe. We all know why we're here." - Fairuz, 3 years in Belgium

In the interview, Fairuz identifies herself as a *migrant* as opposed to a member of a *diaspora.* As illustrated in the quote cited above, she presents a dichotomy between those who identify with one term, and those who identify with the other. On one hand, according to Fairuz, Lebanese people who identify as *diaspora* members are delusional. The usage of the term diaspora, here, is associated with a false assumption of agency and a distorted perception of the home country. According to Fairuz, the "diaspora" perpetuates a false image of Lebanon as a country in which one could live without trouble, and that their decision to leave the country was voluntary and based on their wanderlust. On the other hand, identifying as a *migrant* acknowledges the context that informed the decision to emigrate:

> “I feel like the term diaspora is just, like, sugar coating the term. I'm an immigrant.” - Fairuz, 3 years in Belgium

Throughout the interview, Fairuz cites corruption and instability as the main reasons that informed her decision to leave the country. Her negative personal experiences in the country are associated with deficiencies that are inherent to the socio-political context in Lebanon. Therefore, recognizing one’s status as a *migrant* as opposed to a *diaspora member* is a form acknowledgement that Lebanese people are *pushed out* of the country.

This sentiment is shared by Sarah, who did not *want* to leave Lebanon:

> “I came to Belgium even though I never thought I would leave Lebanon. I feel like an immigrant. I didn’t make a decision to leave. I never wanted to leave. I was forced to.” - Sarah, 12 years in Belgium

Sarah left Lebanon following an unplanned pregnancy. Her past experiences growing up in a low-income household in the suburbs of Beirut, as well as her exposure to the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1989) and the July 2006 war, made her worried for her child’s future (“I don’t want my child to go through the same shit I did”). In the interview, Sarah argues that she “didn’t make a decision” to leave. By saying so, Sarah argues that she was stripped of any agentic capability to decide where to live.

Joumana expressed similar feelings, implying that she was forced out of the country:

> “It got triggered after the crisis and the explosion and these events in 2020-2021, the explosion just felt like it was fast tracking and it was like: “I knew I had to leave”. Lebanon somehow managed to kick me out. It was: oh, I really have to go, rather than that was the plan anyway.” - Joumana, 3 years in Belgium

According to Joumana, the events of 2020 and 2021 (the COVID-19 pandemic, the Beirut Blast of August 4, 2020 and the economic crisis) created a sense of urgency to emigrate. Previous to these events, she wanted to start her career and to settle in Lebanon. Emigration, in this context, is experienced as a *removal* from her *home.* While both of her parents are Lebanese, Joumana was born and partly raised in Oman. She moved to Lebanon with her family at the age of eight. Throughout the years, she has developed an emotional attachment to the country. Emigrating from Lebanon was emotionally taxing to Joumana, as she expressed grief in losing “another home”:

> “As you know, I had already been removed from my home in Oman. And now I'm being removed from my home in Lebanon. Not by choice. It just felt like just another home that I was losing, which was obviously retriggered after I moved out.” - Joumana, 3 years in Belgium

This desire for stability contrasted with the economic and political context of 2020-2021, which pushed her to emigrate. Before the crisis, Joumana's family tried to convince her to consider leaving the country. She was able to acquire the Belgian citizenship through her father, which would simplify emigration for her. She was initially reticent to do so:

> "There was a lot of, like, conversation around why do I actually need this (passport). And then I understood it because… It is what it is. I have the passport. I should go get it. Emotionally, it felt a bit like a betrayal to my home." - *Joumana, 3 years in Belgium*

Another interviewee, Elissa, expressed frustration that the socio-economic context has pushed her to emigrate:

> "We had to leave. Somehow it was imposed on us. One of the things that were really heavy on me, I used to say "I want to move to Europe", but not like that. I escaped." - Elissa, 2 years in Belgium

Despite her initial considerations to emigrate to a European country, the crisis created a sense of urgency to do it immediately. However, in contrast to Fairuz, Sarah, and Joumana, she also acknowledges that emigration remained a ***choice*** for her.

> *"At least I came here easier than a refugee. It's different, but yeah. It's a choice at the end of the day. We left, but we made the decision to leave." - Elissa, 2 years in Belgium*

In his interview, Georges tried to provide some nuance to what he considers a false dichotomy between a *choice* to emigrate and *being forced* to emigrate

> *"It's a decision we made, but it's a decision that was forced (...) I use the term voluntary exile to describe my situation" - Georges, 2 years in Belgium*

According to Georges, emigration is a decision made by the emigrant. In that sense, one has the agentic capability to decide whether to emigrate or not. However, this decision is restricted and "forced" by the economic conjuncture. A decision to stay in Lebanon would entail negative consequences on the person's economic standing, which may orient them to consider emigrating. Therefore, emigration, in this context, is not directly *forced,* but it is informed by the socio-economic context of the home country.

1.3. A COMPARATIVE MODE OF EXISTENCE

Participants framed this instability and lack of security in Lebanon as normalized. In this context, normalization takes the form of routinization: Lebanese people accept deficiencies in basic needs (i.e. water, electricity, gas), and adapt their daily habits and routines accordingly. This can be illustrated by the two following quotes:

> " I think that's the biggest quality Lebanese people have amidst everything: it's adaptability. We adapt to everything that's going on like from one day having like 24/7

> electricity we can go the next day having like 7 hours of electricity and we can still adapt around that" - *Charles, 2 years in Belgium*

> "There's a reflex that my mom wakes up in the morning, she turns on the hot water. She makes her coffee. She checks on the battery that is being recharged by the solar panel, the one that we could afford. We have to make sure the the electricity is not gonna die so that the the fridge doesn't. So if the battery is empty, we have to switch it to the (private electricity) generator. So like all of these tiny logistics that have become reflexes to me, just feel like extra steps." - Joumana, 3 years in Belgium

The emigration experience allowed participants to identify the *abnormality* of this *normal* routine. Seven participants noted that their consciousness of Lebanon's economic instability and lack of security heightened post-emigration. As they adapt to their new environment in Belgium, they experience a shift in references. They enter a comparative framework, in which they constantly reflect on the differences between Belgium (or the West) and Lebanon. Participants note a contrast between Belgian's welfare state and Lebanon's economic instability:

> "There's also the safety issues and and not just safety as war. I mean safety as in things like Social Security, things like basic needs that are either not available or very difficult to find and. And here that's just so much easier." - *Joumana, 3 years in Belgium*

In this quote, Joumana emphasizes on an *ease of life* in Belgium that cannot be met in Lebanon. According to her, basic needs in Belgium are met: she is able to have have access to electricity and water continuously without having to recur to a *wasta*. She also notes that Belgium possesses a functioning Social Security system which is able to provide aid, care, and benefits to its citizens. In contrast, she characterizes Lebanon as lacking in "safety", for the state cannot provide a social safety net. According to Fairuz, this contrast parallels the difference between Lebanese and Belgian family culture.

> "(…) because everything is so well taken care when it comes to pensions, it kind of creates this: OK then the government taking care of me. I don't need to rely on my children to help me. And so, it also creates this butterfly effect that their children don't care about them, their sons don't care about their moms…" - *Fairuz, 3 years in Belgium*

Fairuz notes that she started noticing these differences after meeting her Belgian boyfriend's family. According to her, family solidarity and kinship are replaced by the welfare state. She argues that this dependence on the government fosters individualism, in which the role of the family is irrelevant. In this context, Fairuz sees family kinship in Belgium as voluntary. In contrast, in Lebanon, family kinship is necessary, as it provides services and care that is not guaranteed by the state.

Charles experienced this contrast in the medical field:

> "I think Lebanon is still very like, uh, regressive on that part. We still pay for everything. We still pay a lot of money for everything (…) Whereas here, the healthcare system

> basically provides 80-70% of all the procedures that you need (…) I think that's obviously what we should strive as a community, this kind of socialistic system" - *Charles, 2 years in Belgium*

This observation was made throughout his experience as an intern in his medicine studies in Brussels Charles expresses frustration in the Lebanese healthcare system, which is dependent on private insurance companies and hospitals. He positions it as "capitalistic", which he contrasts to the "socialistic" aspect of the Belgian system. Charles argues that Belgians "fail to see what the system is giving them and what is and what it's providing them". His positive perception of the Belgian healthcare system is informed by his experiences in healthcare in Lebanon, and his negative perception of the Lebanese healthcare system is informed by his experiences in Belgium.

Moreover, Charles further gained consciousness of the lack of security in Lebanon after meeting Belgian locals:

> "We've been carrying these traumas, we've lived our entire life (inaudible), and we tend to forget that it wasn't necessary. Once you move to a place like here and you make friends from Belgium, you notice: Ohh, they actually had a good childhood." - *Charles, 2 years in Belgium*

When meeting locals in Belgium, Charles notices a gap in experiences. Before emigrating, he lived through "traumatic" events (the Beirut blast, the economic crisis…). During his childhood, he was exposed to war, conflict, and other hardships. His surroundings in Belgium do not share this past with him. This realization heightens the image of Lebanon as an unstable, unsafe country. Interactions with people outside of Lebanon, and who have not experienced similar childhoods, allows Charles to recognize this context as *abnormal.*

Three of the participants expressed feeling "emotionally stuck" in Lebanon. Joumana, for instance, recalls not being able to think about anything else despite her efforts to dissociate herself from the country:

> "I felt like I needed to move on and do other things and try not to get stuck emotionally in Lebanon. At the same time, I wasn't really able to talk about anything else. And so I had muted all the news things on Instagram, for example, but I was still Googling stuff. I'm having a phone call with friend, they're telling me what's going on in their life. You know, with family, all these things…" - *Joumana, 3 years in Belgium*

For Joumana, following Lebanese news is emotionally taxing. However, she expressed difficulties in not doing so. She is reminded of day-to-day life in Lebanon through conversations with friends and family. Additionally, she actively seeks out information herself, despite her efforts not to. These tendencies highlight difficulties in distancing herself from the socioeconomic context in Lebanon despite her not being physically in the country anymore. Interpersonal relationships, as well as a psychological urge to understand the evolving context, prevents Joumana from distancing herself. This echoes Sarah's statement on her emotional attachment to Lebanon:

> “My body is here and my mind is there. I don’t love Lebanon as a country, I don’t have these romantic thoughts. But my roots are there, my memories are there” - *Sarah, 12 years in Belgium*

Elissa also shares similar thoughts, which she associates with trauma:

> “It’s a bit worrying, the inflation here. It’s my PTSD, really.” - *Elissa, 2 years in Belgium*

This quote highlights how Elissa caries her experience in the economic crisis in Lebanon after moving to Belgium. The inflation in Belgium reminds her of her experience with the hyperinflation in Lebanon, which she associates with “PTSD”. Therefore, she expresses the difficulty of drawing a psychological separation between her current life in Belgium and her past life in Lebanon.

This comparative mode of existence is also applicable in the context of yearly visits to Lebanon, in which economic instability and deficiencies are no longer experienced as *normal.*

> “There is this frustration that happens where it's, like, I'm getting annoyed because the wi-fi not working, that there’s no electricity… We sometimes forget that in Lebanon this was a part of our daily life.” - Joumana, 3 years in Belgium

> “Before I moved here, I was living in Byblos and I was commuting to Beirut every day in a van. I did the same commute the last time I visited. I realized how much danger I used to put myself in. And how cheap your life is in Lebanon”- Georges, 2 years in Belgium

These two examples showcase how emigration breaks the normalization and routinization present amongst Lebanese locals. As emigrants are removed from their local context, they are given the space to reflect on their environment. When visiting the home country post-emigration, the emigrant reinterprets elements that they used to take for granted.

PART 2 - WASTA AS ESSENTIAL

Participants framed wasta as an inherent feature of Lebanon’s socio-political fabric. According to the participants, wasta is an essential resource to daily life in Lebanon.

2.1. WASTA AS SALIENT

In his interview, Ali acknowledged that, in Lebanon, he relied on his family’s connections to acquire professional experience:

> “Lebanon is not… it’s not very like formalized in any way. Everything’s kind of just…. Bootstrapping (…) I don’t know if I can say about every single job I’ve had, but like the vast majority is because of a personal network (…) Sometimes it was friends, one of that was my family who knew someone who was like, ohh. Ali’s doing this, you know they can help you.” – Ali, 1 year in Belgium

Ali cites a lack of formal institutional channels one can use to "get by" in Lebanon. In the context of employment, this would entail, for example, that it is difficult (if not impossible) to find a paid position through formal recruitment channels. By using the term "bootstrapping", he insinuates that one has to make use of their personal resources, including personal networks or a *wasta.* In his case, Ali was able to get a job by utilizing his family's personal network. In other words, his family had a *wasta* that Ali was able to capitalize on in order to achieve employment. He later mentions that this work opportunity allowed him to expand his network, which facilitated recruitment later on in his life.

Mariam was also given access to an extensive wasta network by family association:

> "I think the name, because you come from that family, you benefit from the name. You're automatically associated with the whole family and this gives you connections. It starts in exposure. It's an exposure to things. It's a lot of privilege, passively (…) Some people knew me before they even met me" - Mariam, 2 years in Belgium

Throughout the interview, Mariam admitted that she was "privileged" because of the family she was born into. Her family name, according to her, is recognized by a good majority of the inhabitants of her community in the south of Lebanon. Her family's wasta allowed them to facilitate bureaucratic public procedures, but also to benefit from financial and investment opportunities. These connections allowed her family to live financially comfortably, to an extent that she deems it as "not normal". It allowed her to live a "luxurious lifestyle" that, according to her, most of the people in her community could not afford.

In Joumana's case, her wasta network was acquired through her family's historical participation in sectarian politics. In the interview, she notes that her family were prominent members of the Phallangist party, which they left by the time she was born. Despite not being active members of the party anymore, the family's history and name allowed them to still benefit from its network. This network is sustained through religious participation

> "I understood that we don't actually have a choice. I understood that very early on as well, because when we moved back to Lebanon, we moved without my dad. My mom's constant narrative was that we need to go to church, we need to go to this thing. We need to because you guys don't have a dad. The church provides communal ties that can provide connections, that can provide the right resources for you to get by in the country. You have to be something. You can't just be a person, right? You need to be in the context of a community or a household name. So you can get things that the state cannot provide for you." Joumana, 3 years in Belgium

This quote emphasizes on the sectarian nature of Lebanese politics and wasta-building. Political networks are sustained in the context of a sectarian community. In Joumana's case, carrying her father's last name gave her access to a wasta network, as his family is historically tied to the Phallangist party. However, since her father left the household, Joumana and the rest of the family had to make active efforts to maintain this network. Participating in church activities and masses is a public display of adherence to a sectarian community and, therefore, a way to sustain a historical wasta network.

Fairuz recounts her experience on the matter in her description of her work as a legal assistant at a law firm in Lebanon. Throughout her studies and professional career, she has noticed the rampant corruption in the judiciary system in Lebanon:

> "In the court system, if you go to a court Lebanon, it's disgusting. It's horrible. You have to know the judge to win the case." - *Fairuz, 3 years in Belgium*

She noticed that in order to succeed in the legal field in Lebanon, one must develop interpersonal relationships with members of the government and the judiciary. Judges favor lawyers with whom they have a political or personal relationship with, which defines the conclusions of court proceedings. Therefore, the work of a lawyer is diminished to their level of *wasta*. In contrast to Ali and Mariam, Fairuz noted that she did not have the right connections to navigate the legal discipline

> "Originally, like family-wise, we're not politically active. We don't have a lot of connections in the government, like we don't know any judge, we don't have any soldiers in the family." - *Fairuz, 3 years in Belgium*

This quote makes a direct association between family history and the political, judiciary, and military class. According to Fairuz, wasta is acquired through the family, or a family name, which are historically associated with political parties or militias. These associations provide an extensive *wasta* network, which can be used to facilitate access to services, but also to "get by" in the legal field. Since her family was never "politically active", Fairuz is deprived of said wasta network. She notes that "being pretty" can be a substitute for wasta. In her interview, she recounts an experience she had during her studies. She wanted to watch a court proceeding, but was worried that the security guards would not let her in, as she was a student at the time. In order to avoid getting her ID checked, she decided to wear a skirt and to "look pretty". By doing so, she found that the only way to compensate for her lack of wasta is to objectify her body. Fairuz associates misogyny with the wasta system as, according to her, it is designed to protect men in power. Not having a wasta, in that sense, allows for powerful men to exploit and objectify women.

2.2 WASTA AND THE CRISIS

Georges utilized his family wasta to get his passport renewed before moving to Belgium

"My cousin's husband knows someone who works at the General Security Directorate. I was able to get my passport in three days. Others, it might take them 2 months. If not more. I'm not proud. I felt like shit. It's super fucked up"

Georges, 2 years in Belgium

Georges recalls skipping through massive queues of people who have been waiting in front of the Directorate for hours. He was then escorted by a security guard to a private room, where he was given his passport. While this experience made him feel an extreme sense of guilt, Georges argues that such practices are “normalized” and “a part of the culture”. The usage of wasta, in this context, is a tactic to achieve ones’ goals in an unstable environment. At the time, passport renewal appointments were being arbitrarily canceled by the Directorate, which often cited a lack of human and physical resources to meet the increased demand. In this context, a wasta allows to be given priority:

“Of course, all of this was intensified by the crisis. Before that, I never really needed (a wasta). I don’t remember doing anything like that before (…) Wasta has become a tool for survival. And it’s understandable” - Georges, 2 years in Belgium

The economic context heightens a need for a wasta in order to go through bureaucratic procedures, but also to get basic services and needs:

“It was difficult and depressing and things were kind of falling apart. Just everyday things, electricity, water et cetera. That was getting less and less available and it was annoying to deal with. You have to go to water guy, you have to get a electricity guy, and so forth.” - Ali, 1 year in Belgium

Shortages in basic needs, such as electricity, water, or gas, have manifested as a consequence of the ongoing economic crisis in Lebanon. Such shortages facilitate a wasta network that provides these needs. Private sources of electricity are controlled by sectarian-political wasta networks. Since the start of the crisis, public sources of electricity have been lacking, with some households only receiving one hour of electricity per day. Therefore, an access to said network has become essential to satisfy the basic need of electricity. This is what Ali refers to as “the electricity guy”: he is the wasseet that provides electricity for the household. Such services are necessary in day-to-day life:

“So the economic crisis, also like as a lawyer, let's assume that the courts were still open. You need gas to drive between those different courts, because as a lawyer you're expected to go to different courts per day and visit these different courts to finish paperwork, and you need the lot of gas for that. The gas prices were going up due to the inflation. And the major courts, because of centralization of the government, they're all in Beirut. And I live in Jounieh, So what do I do?” - Fairuz, 3 years in Belgium

This is also applicable to liquid cash

“I mean, you have to find strategies. For example, instead of exchanging money at the currency exchange office, she has a guy that comes to the house and exchanges every Tuesday. So you're kind of dependent networks in this type of context. (This guy), he’s a friend of my mom's friend that also, you know, like just an extra service that's been provided.” - Joumana, 3 years in Belgium

Formal channels, such as money transfer companies, provide a lower currency rate than the black market. Moreover, the volatile nature of the hyperinflation and devaluation of the Lebanese Pound has pushed locals to exchange money on a daily basis. Currency exchange offices struggle to satisfy this demand, either due to a large amount of traffic or a lack of bills available. In this context, a wasta network has emerged. Private individuals, who have acquired US Dollars through various sources, are able to provide services that cannot be met by formal channels. In order to gain access to this source of US dollars, you need to “know the guy” (wasseet). Such examples illustrate the centrality of wasta in locals’ everyday lives in times of crisis.

PART 3 – DIASPORA AS A ROLE

This subsection summarizes participants’ perceptions of their positionality vis-à-vis the economic crisis in Lebanon, and how the roles they take on inform their decision to send medication to Lebanon.

3.1 ATTITUDES TOWARDS STRUCTURAL CHANGE

Nine out of ten participants argued that structural change is impossible. Mariam expresses hate, anger, and frustration towards Lebanon:

> “Lebanon has only given misery to its people. I could have had… Everyone could have had a better future if they weren’t born in that shithole, to be honest. I have a lot of hate, and I have a lot of anger.” - Mariam, 2 years in Belgium

Throughout the interview, Mariam expressed her frustration with the lack of meritocracy and the rampant corruption in Lebanon. She presents Lebanon as an entity that deprives its citizens of actualizing their potential. By characterizing Lebanon as a “shithole”, Mariam distances herself from any sort of patriotism, nationalism, or hope in the country. For Ali, the economic crisis has caused him to be more cynical in his everyday life:

> **“**I think it caused the kind of psychological reaction in me. It made me a little bit more cynical” - Ali, 1 year in Belgium

In his interview, Ali elaborates that the instability that he witnessed throughout the crisis has negatively impacted his views towards the country, which has also translated into overarching cynicism in his day-to-day life and his social relationships.

Fairuz expresses her negative feeling towards by verbalizing her frustration with the Lebanese diaspora in Belgium:

> “I see Lebanese people still so attached to the roots and tell you: “Oh, in Lebanon we have this we have that.” We don’t! It's a shitty country! (….) It’s shitty and it’s corrupt.” - Fairuz, 3 years in Belgium

In this quote, Fairuz expresses her frustration with members of the Lebanese diaspora that are still attached to their homeland. According to her, Lebanon has nothing to provide for its citizens, and romanticizing it is an act of delusion. This sentiment is also shared by Charles:

> “People now go to Lebanon for vacation. You're just going, you're going to the beach. You're having fun. You're enjoying your time, and then you're back here and be like, oh, fuck this. I hate my life here. Try to work (in Lebanon) for 10 months and let me know if you would say the same thing.” - Charles, 2 years in Belgium

In this quote, Charles is referring to members of the diaspora who make regular visits to Lebanon. In the interview, he makes a description of visiting Lebanon post-emigration: during their visit, diaspora members are exposed to the “nice things”, which enable them to romanticize the country. In the interview, Charles argues that this experience differs categorically from the day-to-day life of Lebanese people. The hyperinflation is a heavier burden on locals (who get paid in Lebanese Pounds) than it is on those who live abroad, and the difficulties that are synonymous with daily life in Lebanon, such as power cuts for example, are only temporarily experienced by tourists. This comparison allows Charles to highlight a contrast between the difficulties of being a local in Lebanon, which he frames as onerous and humiliating.

Joumana argues that her relationship with Lebanon is akin to a “toxic (romantic) relationship”:

> “It's a bit like a toxic relationship where you're angry at Lebanon from being so uncomfortable, but also it feels like a dirty hug, you know. It's still a hug, but like, kind of poisonous.” Joumana, 3 years in Belgium

This simile is used to express the tension between her emotional attachment to Lebanon and the difficulties of living in it. By referring to this relationship as “poisonous”, Joumana insinuates that Lebanon harms its citizens because of its instability and corruption. It contrasts with the word “hug”, which entails comfort and, in context, belonging. This simile is also used by Charles, who compares Lebanon to a “toxic ex”:

> “At the beginning, you're gonna be like, I hate this person. I never want to be around him again. Then you're like, we actually had good moments (…) but I also see that that person was really toxic for me, and I'm happy I'm not with that person anymore.” - Charles, 2 years in Belgium

In this comparison, Charles highlights the changes in attitudes towards Lebanon. Post-emigration, he expressed negative views towards the country. As he spends more time outside of Lebanon, he begins romanticizing the country, reminiscing good memories. He concludes by reminding himself that, despite these memories, not being in Lebanon is better for him.

According to Mariam, Lebanon’s instability is cyclical: “Every 10-15 years, there’s something. A crisis, a war. Constant instability.” Elissa and Charles associates this constant instability to the Lebanese political class.

> “A long as it's the same people ruling, we're gonna fall in the same loop again and again.” - Elissa, 2 years in Belgium

> “It was just history repeating itself at some point because I feel like as long as politics are the way they are in Lebanon, (…) there will always be major historical events that will bring everything downhill.” - Charles, 2 years in Belgium

These two quotes denounce the reproduction of the Lebanese political class. The political landscape has been dominated by leaders of civil war era sectarian militias. According to Elissa and Charles, this facilitated rampant corruption, for which citizens pay the price. The instability experienced by the country is, therefore, a direct result of a self-reproducing political system.

Sarah, who describes herself as an activist, notes that there is a “wall between us and those in power.” She notes that this “power” is situated on two levels. Power in Lebanon is monopolized by the political elite, that is composed of historical actors of the civil war. Sarah stresses on the tentacular reach of this elite into all institutions in the country:

> “You can’t expect to win against these people. They’ve been where they are for the past thirty years, even more. They have all of the power, all of the media….” – Sarah, 12 years in Belgium

She also argues that the local context is embedded in a global neoliberal economy, which favors profit over people:

> “This is global. These forces, they’re extremely strong, and they’re all about profit. How do you expect to win in front of such psychopaths?” – Sarah, 12 years in Belgium

In these two statements, Sarah argues that systemic change is impossible.

One of the participants made ambiguous statements about her attitudes towards the country. Nancy left Lebanon in 2015 (Eight years prior to the date of interview). While both of her parents are Lebanese, she only moved to the country at the age of fifteen. Her choice to emigrate was motivated by her desire to follow a master’s program for which there were no alternatives in Lebanese universities. If it was not for her education, she “would have been happy to stay” in Lebanon. Nancy describes herself as an “optimist”: she positions herself outside of the pessimism she argues is overwhelmingly present in the country:

> “I was actually always a little bit annoyed when we would go out and people would always complain about the country, so I was actually one of the very few who saw that: Actually, it's nice to to live there.” - Nancy, 8 years in Belgium

This quote refers to the notion of framing. In the interview, Nancy argues that Lebanese people often focus on the negative aspects of daily life in the country, and fail to recognize its more pleasant qualities. By doing so, she normalizes the difficulties associated with daily life in Lebanon. In the context of the ongoing economic crisis, however, she acknowledges the following:

> “I mean now, of course, the situation is worse (…). If we're talking now, things are 10 times worse.” - Nancy, 8 years in Belgium

The crisis, according to Nancy, heightened the “negative” aspects of daily life in Lebanon (such as shortages, financial instability…). Therefore, in this context, “pessimism” is more justified. Nancy herself expressed a lack of hope in systemic change, which contrasts the “optimism” she described earlier in the interview:

> “You have to move on, right? Otherwise you will always just be frustrated.” - Nancy, 8 years in Belgium

This statement was made in response to diaspora members who actively claim their Lebanese identity, and who express their cultural attachment to Lebanon. According to Nancy, Lebanon is a source of frustration, and efforts to “make it better” only result in disappointment.

3.2. PROVIDING FOR THE FAMILY

When asked his opinion on how the Lebanese diaspora can provide assistance or help in times of economic crisis, Georges argued that it is not in the position to help the country as a whole:

> “Country, no. Personal level, your family, maybe.” – Georges, 2 years in Belgium

Eight of the participants exclusively sent medication to their family members in Lebanon, and nine argued that the best impact one can make in the context of an economic crisis is to provide help, assistance, and care to family and other members of their close circles.

> “I'm attached to Lebanon, but more Lebanon as in my family, but not Lebanon as the country. There (are) things you can control and things you cannot control, so you put your energy on things you can control.” - Nancy, 8 years in Belgium

The dichotomy presented by Nancy in this quote highlights an incapability to enact structural change. In this context and line of thought, diaspora members are only able to exercise a certain level of agency on the family-level, in which they are able to provide resources (such as medication) to their family members. Post-emigration, they take on the role of provider in the family context. They provide resources that are available to them because of their presence in Belgium, which includes medication. This “privilege” informs their ability and desire to provide care for their family members in Lebanon:

> “I think we have a role that was that was kind of presented to us with our privilege of being abroad and helping circles back home.” - Joumana, 3 years in Belgium

> “We have more opportunities and resources; we live more comfortably. So, that allows us to help when we can” – Clara, 3 years in Belgium

For Elissa, Mariam, and Clara providing such resources to her family, and taking on the role of provider, gives her with a sense of purpose and allows her to deal with feelings of guilt:

> “I remember (arriving at) the airport, looking around and seeing people smiling and happy and I was like: oh, my fucking God. I started crying (…) I felt a lot of guilt. But at the same

> time, by being here, I can be more of a help to my family by being here than by being there." – Elissa, 2 years in Belgium
>
> Everything is more accessible to you… You feel like you want to compensate for this unfairness - *Mariam, 2 years in Belgium*
>
> In Lebanon, I was a kid. I was very dependent on my parents. Now that I'm here, I can bring them the thing they need. – Clara, 3 years in Belgium

Throughout the interview, they expressed feelings of guilt after moving to Belgium. These feelings come from differences in perceived privilege: while they are in Belgium, their family is "stuck" in Lebanon. Being able to provide medication for her family is an opportunity for them to alleviate their guilt.

Elissa and Mariam also add that they would like to support them financially, but that she was not capable of doing so yet:

> I mean, *inshallah,* when things are better financially, I can help with money. But for now, things like medication, I can take medication with me. – Elissa, 2 years in Belgium
>
> I have little money to contribute, and it bothers me. - *Mariam, 2 years in Belgium*

Only two of the interviewees have sent financial remittances to their family in Lebanon. The remaining eight interviewees cited not being financially capable of doing so, as they are either students or young professionals. While most participants said that their family were understanding of their financial situation, Fairuz argued that financial remittances are expected after they "settle down":

> (They) let you can kind of settle down here, but at some point you're gonna be there for them. They expect you to be there. – Fairuz, 3 years in Belgium.

By "being there", Fairuz is referring to financial support. She argued, in the interview, that Lebanon's lackluster social security system deprives individuals of a satisfactory retirement salary or pension plan. This means, according to her, that children have to take the role of financial providers. Living outside of Lebanon heightens this role, as the Lebanese emigrant is perceived as more financially stable than locals are.

For Nancy and Fairuz, providing remittances and medication are part of her role as the "older sister":

> "My parents divorced. Very, very messy divorce. I was always kind of helping a bit my mom with my sister and my brother. And now I can help a bit more financially, which is good. But before I helped, you know… Yeah, taking my brother here, doing this, dropping this, helping sister with homework." - *Nancy, 8 years in Belgium*

In this quote, Nancy argued that her presence in Belgium only extends a role she previously had as an older sister, which entails providing care to her siblings and assistance to her mother.

Joumana describes a “different (family) hierarchy”. She describes this hierarchy as such:

> People who are able to give and people who are not not, and people who receive, and people who don't receive. If I was in Lebanon, my mom would have the contacts, my family would have the contacts for…. I don't know. Fixing the car or or the electricity guy or the whatever. The basic amenities are provided by the eldest because they have the network. Yeah, umm… Here, it’s not like that. – Joumana, 3 years in Belgium

This quote makes an association between social hierarchy in the family unit and *wasta*. The “shift in hierarchy” that Joumana is, according to her, associated with her capacity to provide resources (in this case, medication). Her presence in Belgium has allowed her to provide a *wasta.* Previously, the family’s wasta network was monopolized by her mother, who “had the connections.” According to Joumana, this role is informed by gender socialization:

> “I think maybe as a woman, I relate to this a bit more. A lot of women are raised to think this way, which is that: “if you don't do it, who's gonna?” I mean when you're in a house, you do the dishes, you do whatever without being asked. Because if you don't do it, who's gonna?” – Joumana, 3 years in Belgium

In this quote, Joumana describes women’s role in Arab families: women are expected to “get things done” in the household unit, whether it is domestic chores or other types of tasks. This sense of responsibility is acquired with age. Joumana interprets her desire to act upon her wasta network in Belgium as an extension of her role as a woman in her family.

In the interviews, interviewees linked these roles and expectations to the lack of social welfare in Lebanon. This entails a necessity for children to become a provider for their family, regardless of their personal feelings towards them.

> “(The) youth is not that interested in family, because this type of family life is sick. It’s toxic.” *Fairuz, 3 years in Belgium*

In her interview, Fairuz described Lebanese family culture as “toxic”. She describes a family environment that is characterized as restrictive and oppressive. Fairuz notes, for the example, the prevalence of “toxic masculinity” in Lebanese family, in which the men in the family are “hard to connect with emotionally” and neglect the emotional and psychological well-being of their children. Similarly, Mariam notes that she had troubles navigating family life as a young woman:

> “Your parents always have expectations from you, especially if you’re a girl” *Mariam, 2 years in Belgium*

Mariam notes that, as a woman, she felt strangled by her family’s expectations in terms of academic and professional performance, her dating choices, her lifestyle, etc… According to

Fairuz, such an environment pushes the youth away from family life. However, they sustain ties with their family out of a sense of obligation, which is fueled by the country's instability:

> "You still stand there for each other 'cause you know there's no government to help. You know that if I don't help them, they will die." Fairuz, 3 years in Belgium

In this context, family-level solidarity is perceived as a matter of survival. This sentiment is shared by Nancy and Joumana (as well as four other participants):

> "Because in Lebanon we don't have a government that takes care of us. We only have each other, right?" Nancy, 8 years in Belgium

> "You're kind of forced because you don't have things like Social Security and all these things. You're kind of forced to be a Social Security for your family." Joumana, 3 years in Belgium

For Mariam and Charles, family obligations are associated with perceived reciprocity:

> "I'm also very grateful for my parents. Even if there are generational gaps, they did a lot to support me in their own ways (….) For them, I (would) do anything. I want to do anything, and I want to provide (…)" - Mariam, 2 years in Belgium

> "I know that even if my parents have conservative ideas (…) they would sacrifice so much of their own self to give me the things I want" - Charles, 2 years in Belgium

Both of them make references to "sacrifices" that their parents made to be able to raise them and to provide them with the resources necessary to live in Lebanon, but also to be able to leave the country. Therefore, providing care for family is experienced here as a necessity but an obligation, but also a way to "give back".

3.3 PROVIDING FOR "THE COMMUNITY"

While the other participants argued that family-level care is the biggest impact one can make as a member of the diaspora, self-described activist Sarah argued that being a member in the diaspora allows to provide help and assistance on the community-level. In the interview, Sarah admits that she "doesn't have any hope in the world". However, she argues that she has "energy" to provide community-level care as a form of activism:

> "As a fuck you to the system, even if it wants to break me, I won't (….) Let the evolution be all about solidarity and care and kindness. that's why I work on the community-level: all about love and kindness and solidarity, honesty, health, sobriety…" – Sarah, 12 years in Belgium

Sarah gathers and personally purchases OTC, mental health, and sexual health medication in order to distribute them to local Lebanese non-governmental organizations (NGOs), as well as

Palestinian refugee camps (in addition to her family). By doing so, she acts on a pre-existing network:

> “I always bring medication to a migrant community center in Beirut. I was an activist even before I left the country. I have a lot of connections in the sector. They don’t even tell me to bring medication, or which ones to bring. I just do it” – Sarah, 12 years in Belgium

These acts allow Sarah to gain a sense of purpose, and to provide care to a community she did not want to leave:

> “I have a lot of things to do there. I know the social codes, I have a dream. That’s why I didn’t want to leave. When my kids go to university, I’ll pack my bags and go back.” – Sarah, 12 years in Belgium” – Sarah, 12 years in Belgium

Sarah and Clara are the only participants who have sent medication to NGOs. While Sarah personally identifies with the values of these organizations and explicitly situates herself as an activist, Clara sent medication as a favor to her grandmother who operates a youth organization. However, both of them provided medication to a pre-existing personal network, wether it was fostered by activist work in Lebanon (Sarah) or family (Clara).

PART 4 - ACQUISITION STRATEGIES

The participants acquired both over the counter (OTC) and prescription medication. Six out of ten participants reported acquiring OTC medication to distribute to Lebanon. This includes paracetamol, Fucidin, Voltaren and Dafalgam. They were able to acquire them by simply purchasing them from a local pharmacy or a drugstore (i.e. Kruidvat). All ten participants acquired prescription medication, including the following: Anti-inflamatory creams, arthritis medication, asthma medication, cancer medication, heart medication, insulin, Nexium, mental health medication, and prostate medication. Participants used different strategies in order to acquire prescription drugs.

4.1. USING THEIR OWN PRESCRIPTION

Joumana was able to acquire Seroquel and Zoloft (both mental health medications) through her own prescription. She bought them to distribute to different family members. In order to buy larger quantities of the two drugs, she made the tactical decision of acquiring them through her local pharmacy, at which she it is “already in their system that she usually buys these drugs”. She told the pharmacist that these extra boxes were for her, and that she would need them as she was traveling for the summer. The pharmacist allowed her to buy extra boxes without a refill prescription, warning her that they would not be covered by insurance. When asked about the experience, Joumana noted that her family asked her to buy them because they knew she had a prescription for Seroquel and Zoloft (as opposed to asking her sister, who also resides in Belgium):

> “I don't think it's a coincidence. I think it's also because they knew that I had one and they asked me or someone: “do you know anyone who has a prescription for whatever, we need this, et cetera, et cetera or like” I would say like, OK, I have a prescription for one two

> three, which one of these do you need…. These kinds of things." – Joumana, 3 years in Belgium

Joumana noted that this was a common practice amongst the Lebanese diaspora. However, none of the other participants used this strategy.

4.2. PRESCRIPTION FROM A DOCTOR IN LEBANON AND APPEAL TO EMOTION

Two of the participants were able to acquire different types of medication by using a prescription from a doctor in Lebanon. Elissa was asked by her family to buy asthma medication for her cousin's five-year-old daughter. One of her family members sent a scan of a family doctor's prescription (based in Lebanon). Elissa went to her local pharmacy to purchase it. She noted that she had to provide context for the pharmacists to agree to sell it to her:

> "And also like you explain as well, like "I don't know if you know, but in Lebanon there is the crisis and we don't find medication a lot and it's a little girl" you know." – Elissa, 2 years in Belgium

In order to acquire the medication, Elissa had to appeal to the pharmacist's emotion by stressing on the dire socioeconomic context in Lebanon and the age of her niece. Nancy noted that while she often tries to use this strategy, it is not always successful

> "Once by chance, one of the pharmacies accepted a prescription from a Lebanese doctor in Lebanon, but not always. At least not the one next to my house." – Nancy, 8 years in Belgium

4.3. THROUGH THE LEBANESE DIASPORA

Four of the participants were able to acquire a prescription through a Lebanese doctor based in Belgium. Charles was able to receive a prescription under his name for a heart medication in order to give it to his grandfather, who still lives in Lebanon. He was able to find a "specific Lebanese doctor" through word of mouth:

> "I had to ask some of my friends that already took medication to Lebanon, like which doctors they went to and stuff. So, it wasn't relatively very hard, but obviously if I didn't know people who are already did, it would have probably been hard because as I told you, I don't think a lot of doctors could have done that." – Charles, 2 years in Belgium

The three other participants were able to acquire a prescription through their family's network. Clara and Mariam, for example, were able to acquire different sorts of prescription medication via family friends who is are Lebanese doctors residing in Belgium and France respectively:

> "They would buy as much as they could, and then they would send them with friends or me, and my parents would pay them back when they're in Lebanon" – Mariam, 2 years in Belgium

> “My dad’s best friend is a doctor based here in Brussels. He was able to prescribe several boxes to bring back to Lebanon. I had a contact point. I think that, if I didn’t, it would be 1000 times more complicated.” – Clara, 3 years in Belgium

Sarah was able to utilize her network in Brussels in order to acquire OTC and prescription drugs for an NGO in Lebanon. When she asked him about potential sources for medication, a Lebanese-Belgian friend of hers (a dentist based in Brussels) gave her the contact of a pharmacist who would be able to help her. The pharmacist was Moroccan, which, according to Sarah, explains why he agreed to help her.

> “Parallel economy, parallel solutions (…) He gave me cancer medication, insulin…. *Huwe mzabat lwada’* [1], he gave me a bag full of different medication, and I took everything: antiinflamtory creams, paracetamol, Dafalgam, Zanax…” – Sarah, 12 years in Belgium.

In this quote, Sarah makes parallels between the Lebanese and Moroccan economy in their instability and incapability to provide healthcare for its citizens. By “parallel solutions”, she insinuates that such strategies are also used by Moroccans in Belgium to provide medication to their family. She added that he “follows the news on Lebanon”, and is therefore aware of its socioeconomic situation, and how it resembles that of Morocco.

These four cases highlight the importance of a Lebanese network in order to acquire prescription medication. In two of the quotes cited above, the participants argue that having a Lebanese network in Belgium simplifies the acquisition process. Mariam had to recur to her parents’ family friend who lives in Paris:

> “I heard there are Lebanese pharmacies, but I don’t have the network. (…) I’m also not very well connected to the Lebanese community. Actually, I have no Lebanese friends here.” – Mariam, 2 years in Belgium

According to Charles, a non-Lebanese doctor would not run the risk of falsifying a prescription, while a Lebanese one is more likely to “understand”. In addition, he argues that a Belgian doctor might perceive the act as fraud:

> “They will also be like: the insurance shouldn’t pay for somebody that lives in another country, right? So they wouldn't be willing to to prescribe this medication that you will probably have for free or like for a reduced cost, just for you to help somebody that's not in their own system.” – Charles, 2 years in Belgium

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[1] *mzabat lwada’* is an expression used in Lebanese Arabic to signify that someone used informal means to solve a problem.

4.4. THROUGH CONNECTIONS IN THE HEALTHCARE SECTOR

Two of the participants were able to acquire prescription medication through non-Lebanese connections in the healthcare sector. Nancy was able to receive a prescription for Nexium though her Syrian friend's roommate, who is a Belgian doctor. Georges was able to get a prescription of anti-depressants through his own general practitioner, who is Flemish. He notes that she agrees to write these prescriptions out of goodwill and an understanding of the socioeconomic context:

> "She's nice and understands the situation. She knows it's for my mom." – Georges, 2 years in Belgium

Charles, who is a medicine student, stated that he could be able to use his network in the medical sector if needed. According to him, this would be contingent on his interpersonal relationship with his colleague and their understanding of the socioeconomic context in Lebanon:

> "They would do it if you would explain the situation and if you get along with them. You couldn't like obviously do it with someone you never talk to." – Charles, 2 years in Belgium

CHAPTER 4 - ANALYSIS

All of the participants lived most of their lives in Lebanon, in which they personally experienced instability. While they do note that this instability was heightened by the ongoing economic crisis, it was also noted that it is perpetual and historically consistent. For this reason, little differences were found between participants who moved to Belgium prior to the crisis, and those who moved after the crisis. Half of the participants framed their emigration as *forced* by this constant instability, for which they expressed frustration in their lack of agency. Participants described a post-emigration comparative mode of existence. Through their accounts of their experience settling in their new environment, Lebanon and Belgium are presented dichotomously. Lebanon is characterized as unstable, unsafe, and incapable to provide basic services, whereas Belgium is presented as safe, secure, and generous towards its citizens. This dichotomy presents a contrast between the environment they were socialized in and the environment in which they now live in. Despite living in Belgium, they are still inhabited by the Lebanese *field*. Their interpretation of their proximate environment is informed by their lived experiences in their home country. In their accounts of their visits to Lebanon post-emigration, participants relived their past routinized lifestyles in Lebanon. During their visits, they gain consciousness of how instability is normalized in Lebanon, and how this instability shapes a routine in daily life. In this context, it can be said that the participants are inhabited by their new context. This comparative mode of existence, whether in Belgium or Lebanon, can be interpreted as a double inhabitation, in which both fields clash. This analysis contrasts greatly with Anderson (1998)'s concept of imagined community, which focuses on international diaspora identity-building. As highlighted by Hage (2005), diaspora members are situated at the intersection of their local context and their homeland.

All participants argued that structural change in Lebanon is impossible. This opinion is informed by a feeling of dejectedness and their experiences in the country. They argued that the best impact one can make in the context of an economic crisis is to provide help, assistance, and care to family and other members of their close circles. Eight out of ten participants exclusively sent medication to their family. Participants noted the differences in "privilege" and "resources" between themselves and their family. These differences relate back to the notion of diasporic capital (Tabar, 2016): living outside of Lebanon provides diaspora members with resources that are not available to locals. Therefore, diaspora members gain power in relation to locals. In the context of the family, possessing diasporic capital is associated with the role of provider: post-emigration diaspora members are now able to provide resources to their family, including medication. According to the participants, this is an extension of pre-existing roles. They note the role of the child as the provider would still apply to them, regardless of their geographic location. Participants cited the lack of formal healthcare and social security in Lebanon, which entails a reliance on family wasta networks. Kinship is an inherent feature of the wasta concept: family is theorized as the central unit of organization in Arab cultures and a reliable source of trust (Egan & Tabar, 2016). While these roles would have still been exercised had the participants stayed in Lebanon, their presence in Belgium grants them to access to resources that are not available in Lebanon, which provides them leverage and power. While the other participants argued that family-level care is the biggest impact one can make as a member of the diaspora, self-described activist Sarah argued that being a member in the diaspora allows to provide help and assistance on the community-level. While she positions herself as an activist, and while she is the only participant who has acquired medication for NGOs, the recipients remained people in circles she formed while working as a social assistant in Lebanon. In this case, the definition of kinship is expanded to close acquaintances.

Participants’ embeddedness in the Lebanese and Belgian context (their disposition to the field), in addition to their diasporic capital (their position in the field), fosters a wasta network.
The “routines” described by participants can be conceptualized as a form of habitus: Lebanese people in Lebanon, who share a common context, internalize the institutions they are inhabited in. In other words, they normalize their environment. This is externalized through actions, including enacting a wasta network. Wasta is framed as a necessity in Lebanon. Participants highlighted its “intercessory function” (Kropf & Newbury-Smith, 2016): it acts as an alternative to formal institutions. This perceived necessity is heightened by the economic crisis and shortages, as wasta becomes a tool to acquire basic needs, such as water, electricity, or medication. The dual-embeddedness of the Lebanese diaspora results in a heightened perceived inefficacy of formal institutions. Their diasporic capital allows them to gain power within the context of this field, and, therefore, to provide resources such as medication. By enacting on a wasta network, diaspora members externalize internalized structures while leveraging on their monopoly over diasporic capital. This wasta network manifests itself through different strategies, including leveraging off a network of other Lebanese diaspora members (such as Lebanese doctors). As the latter are also embedded in the same context, they are perceived as more trustworthy and understanding.

CONCLUSION

This research answers two existing gaps in the social capital literature on wasta. Firstly, it sought to introduce the notion of habitus into the conceptual understand of wasta network formation. Focusing on participants' perceptions of formal institutions provides insight into internalization and externalization processes through the lens of wasta. Secondly, it aimed to introduce the wasta concept into the diasporic field, and to understand how diasporic capital and participants' perceptions of the host country institutions interplay in a wasta framework. Therefore, it aimed to answer the following research question: "How do Lebanese diaspora members' perception of formal institutions inform the formation of an international wasta network in the context of medicine shortages?"

Firstly, in terms of their disposition to the field, the Lebanese diaspora is embedded in both the Lebanese and Belgian context. Participants describe a "normalization" and "routinization" in regards to the strategies used by Lebanese people to get by in times of instability. Lebanese people in Lebanon, who share a common context, internalize the institutions they are inhabited in. In other words, they normalize their environment. This is externalized through actions, including enacting a wasta network, which is perceived as a necessity in the Lebanese context. Throughout the emigration process, diaspora members experience a comparative mode of existence, in which they experience sharp contrasts between their environments in Belgium and Lebanon. This dichotomy and dual-embeddedness heightens perceived inefficacy of formal institutions in Lebanon, which is also externalized by fostering a wasta network. Secondly, in terms of their position in the field, their diasporic capital provides them power and leverage in the family unit. The combination of these factors fosters a wasta network aiming to provide medication for family in Lebanon. This wasta network manifests itself through different strategies, including leveraging off a network of other Lebanese diaspora members (such as Lebanese doctors). As the latter are also embedded in the same context, they are perceived as more trustworthy and understanding.

The main limitation that can be identified in this research project is related to sampling. The sample had an amount that was unsatisfactory for comparative analysis. The researcher was not able to recruit enough participants who moved to Belgium prior to the economic crisis. Moreover, all of the participants are first-generation immigrants. Because of their differing experience in regards to the country, further research should investigate how second-generation members of the Lebanese diaspora perceive formal institutions in Lebanon, and how that fosters a wasta network.

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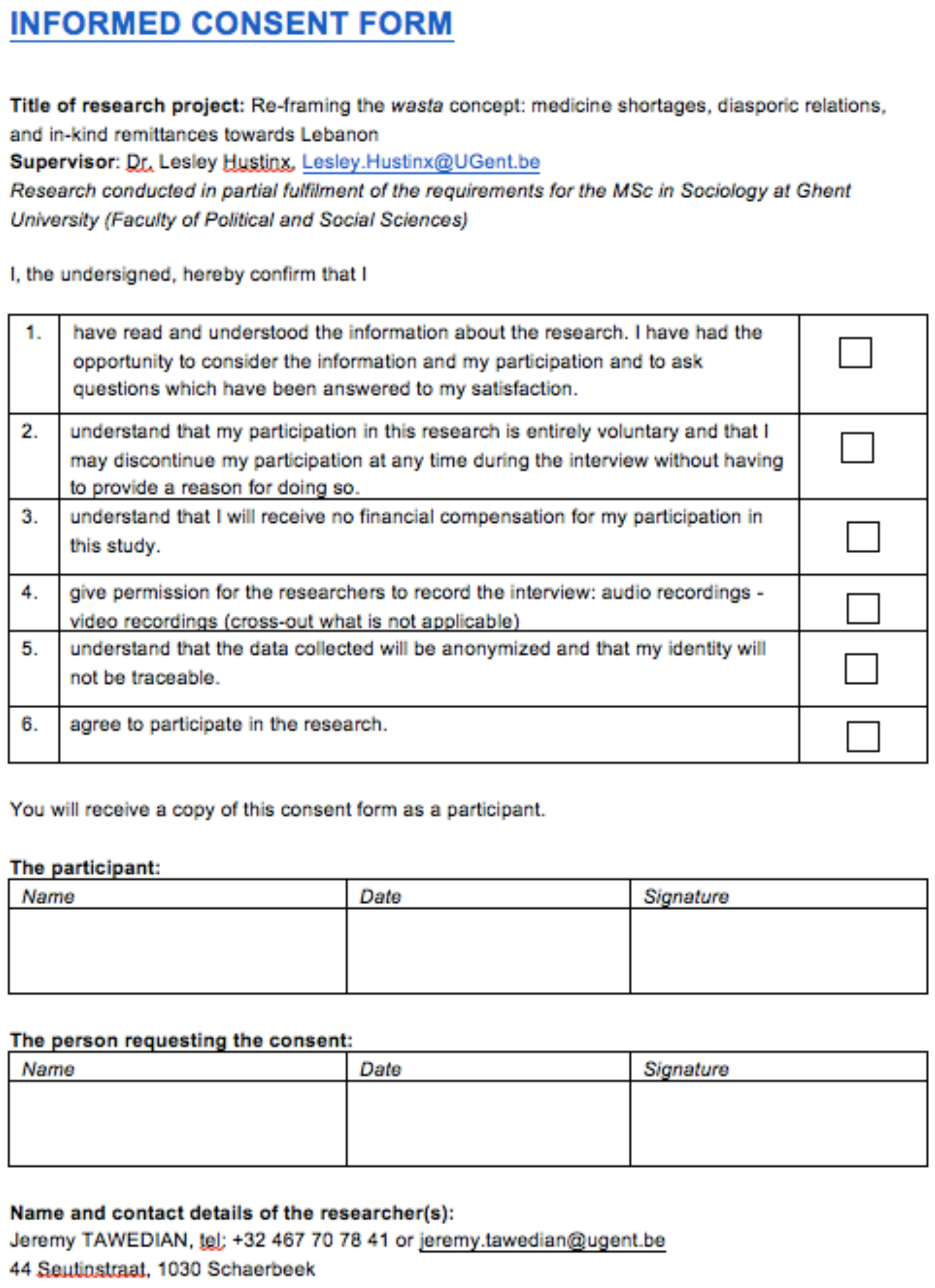
ANNEX – SAMPLE GRID

Name	Age	Gender	Years in BE	City	Occupation	Nationality	Born/raised?	Sect	Religious?	Education
Fairuz	24	Woman	3	Brussels	Legal consultant	Lebanese	Yes	Roman Catholic	Yes	Masters
Ali	25	Man	1	Hasselt	Student	Lebanese	Yes	Shiia	No	Masters
Joumana	27	Woman	3	Brussels	Graphic designer	Lebanese – Belgian	Moved at 8	Evangelical	No	Masters
Georges	30	Man	2	Brussels	Cultural worker	Lebanese	Yes	Roman Catholic	No	Masters
Sarah	44	Woman	12	Brussels	Social worker	Lebanese Belgian	Yes	Orthodox	No	Bachelors
Clara	20	Woman	2	Brussels	Student	Lebanese Belgian	Yes	Sunni Muslim	No	Bachelors
Elissa	29	Woman	2	Gent	Editor	Lebanese	Yes	Roman catholic	No	Masters
Mariam	29	Woman	2	Brussels	Project manager	Lebanese French	Yes	Shiia Muslim	No	Masters
Charles	24	Man	2	Brussels	Student	Lebanese	Yes	Maronite Christian	No	Masters
Nancy	32	Woman	8	Brussels	EU Commission worker	Lebanese Belgian	Moved at 15	Evangelical Christian	Yes	Masters

ANNEX – CONSENT SHEET



INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Title of research project: Re-framing the *wasta* concept: medicine shortages, diasporic relations, and in-kind remittances towards Lebanon
Supervisor: Dr. Lesley Hustinx, Lesley.Hustinx@UGent.be
Research conducted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the MSc in Sociology at Ghent University (Faculty of Political and Social Sciences)

I, the undersigned, hereby confirm that I

1.	have read and understood the information about the research. I have had the opportunity to consider the information and my participation and to ask questions which have been answered to my satisfaction.	☐
2.	understand that my participation in this research is entirely voluntary and that I may discontinue my participation at any time during the interview without having to provide a reason for doing so.	☐
3.	understand that I will receive no financial compensation for my participation in this study.	☐
4.	give permission for the researchers to record the interview: audio recordings - video recordings (cross-out what is not applicable)	☐
5.	understand that the data collected will be anonymized and that my identity will not be traceable.	☐
6.	agree to participate in the research.	☐

You will receive a copy of this consent form as a participant.

The participant:

Name	*Date*	*Signature*

The person requesting the consent:

Name	*Date*	*Signature*

Name and contact details of the researcher(s):
Jeremy TAWEDIAN, tel: +32 467 70 78 41 or jeremy.tawedian@ugent.be
44 Seutinstraat, 1030 Schaerbeek

ANNEX - LATEST VERSION QUESTIONAIRE

ETHICS
- Data storage
- Anonymity data
- Right to not answer questions
- Informed consent sheet

OPENING QUESTION

1. Tell me why you moved to Belgium / Tell me about yourself.
2. Tell me about this change in environment. How was the experience of moving to Belgium?
3. Can you tell me about your personal experiences in relation to economic crisis?

INTRODUCTION QUESTION

4. Tell me about the notion of *wasta*. How would you define it?
5. Tell me about a time you had to use *wasta* and why.

TRANSITION QUESTION

6. You said you've sent medication to Lebanon. Can you tell me about that?
    - Why did this person ask you to get them for you?
    - How did you acquire these medication? How did you send them?
    - Can you tell me about your reasoning behind it?

KEY QUESTIONS

7. Would you say that your relationship with the country has changed since you moved to Belgium? What about the crisis?
8. What about your relationship with your close ones, your family and friends?
9. What type of responsibilities do you think you have, as a member of the diaspora?

CONCLUDING QUESTIONS
- Summary
- Extra comments
- Ask for feedback

ANNEX – CODES USED

- Experience Lebanon
    - Pre-emigration
        - Unstable
            - Wage instability
            - Banking crisis
            - Crisis as a cycle
        - Unsafe
            - Beirut Blast
            - Civil war
        - Shortages
    - Emigration
        - Lack of agendcy
        - Mix feelings
    - Comparative mode
        - Cultural differences
            - Family culture
            - Trauma
        - Structural differences
            - Healthcare
            - Social security
        - Recognition abnormality
    - Wasta as essential
        - Context of crisis
        - Family-acquired wasta
        - Sectarian wasta
        - Political party wasta
    - Attitudes structural change
        - Negative
            - Hate towards the country
            - Reproduction political class
            - Toxic relationship
        - Mixed
            - Optimism
            - Post-crisis dejectedness
- Providing for family
    - Best action
    - Lebanon as family
    - Power in family
        - Possession of resources
        - Change hierarchy
    - Toxicity family culture
        - Lack of interest
        - Judgmental environment

    - Roles in family sustained
        - Older sibling
        - Family solidarity as necessary
        - Perceived reciprocity

- Providing for “community”
    - Activism
    - Sense of purpose

- Types of drugs
    - OTC
        - Paracetamol
        - Fucidin
        - Voltaren
        - Dafalgam
    - Prescription
        - Anti-inflamatory creams
        - Arthritis medication
        - Asthma medication
        - Cancer medication
        - Heart medication
        - Insulin
        - Nexium
        - Mental health medication
        - Prostate medication.

- Acquisition strategies
    - Own prescription
    - Prescription Dr Lebanon
        - Appeal to emotion
        - Unreliable
    - Lebanese doctor Belgium
        - Through friends
        - Through family
        - Importance Lebanese network
    - Connections healthcare
        - Interpersonal ties
        - Own GP
        - Professional network