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**THE HISTORY OF THE ARMENIAN COMMUNITY IN LEBANON:
FROM “REFUGEE CAMPS” TO “NEIGHBOURHOODS”**

Lübnan Ermeni Toplumunun Tarihi: Mülteci Kamplarından Mahallelere

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ABSTRACT

Lebanon is the first example coming to mind once multi-ethnic and religious societies are mentioned. Throughout the ages, it has welcomed various ethnic and religious groups in the Middle East. Migration of Armenians to Lebanon was important flows changing the distribution of population deeply. This paper is about the Armenian community in Lebanon. As a non-native population of the Lebanon, Armenians were able to establish their community and to appear a distinct community. This paper consists of two sections. Firstly, the roots of the Armenian presence will be explained in the historical point of view. Secondly, it is aimed to focus on the construction process of the Armenian community. Overall, it could be argued that Lebanon for Armenians be seen as religious, cultural and political centres. Experiences of Armenians caused them to root into Lebanese society. It is not exaggerated that no other place where Armenians national life is organised so well and as efficiently as Lebanon. For this reason, Lebanon can be called as a capital of the Armenian diaspora. Lebanese Armenians have distinctive features not only in the diaspora but also in Lebanon.

Keywords: Armenians, Lebanon, Diaspora and Migration

ÖZ

Çok etnikli ve dini toplumlardan bahsediliğinde Lübnan akla ilk gelen örnektir. Çağlar boyunca, farklı etnik ve dini gruplara ev sahipliği yapmıştır. Ermenilerin Lübnan’a göçü nüfus yapısını değiştiren önemli bir akım olmuştur. Bu makale, Lübnan’daki Ermeni toplumu hakkındadır. Lübnan’ın yerli nüfuslarından olmayan Ermeniler, sadece kendi topluluklarını kurmakla kalmamış aynı zamanda belirgin bir toplum olmayı başarmışlardır. Makale iki kısımdan oluşmaktadır. İlk olarak, Ermeni varlığının kökenleri tarihsel bir bakış açısı ile açıklanacaktır. Daha

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sonra ise, Ermeni toplumunun oluşum süreçleri üzerinde durulacaktır. Bu makalede, Lübnan’ın Ermeniler için dini, kültürel ve siyasi bir merkez olduğu ileri sürülmektedir. Ermenilerin deneyimleri Lübnan toplumuna entegre olmasına yol açmıştır. Lübnan dışında başka hiçbir yerde Ermenilerin etkin ve organize olmuş ulusal yaşamları yoktur. Bu nedenden dolayı Lübnan Ermeni diasporasının başkenti olarak adlandırılmaktadır. Lübnanlı Ermeniler sadece diasporada değil aynı zamanda Lübnan’da da ayırt edici özelliklere sahiptir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Ermeni, Lübnan, Diaspora, Göç

Introduction¹

Lebanon is the first example coming to mind once multi-ethnic and religious societies are mentioned. Throughout the ages, it has welcomed various ethnic and religious groups in the Middle East. Because of its geopolitical and geostrategic features, Lebanon has become a meeting point where different cultures encounter. As an important country in the Levant, Lebanon consists of 18 different sects (Kasabian, 2006:86).

It is possible to argue that historical experiences of Lebanon played the significant role to diversify the population. In the 7th century, Lebanon was exposed to Arab occupation. Because of the influences of the Umayyad Empire, Lebanon absorbed the Arab culture. Later on, the Ottoman Empire expanded its borders in the Middle East. Between the 16th century and 20th century, the region of Levant experienced the Ottoman rule. Two main families; namely, the Maans who were Druze and the Chehabs (later on, they converted to Christians) were gained autonomy from the Ottoman Empire. The authority of the Ottoman Empire lasted until the 20th century. After the First World War, the region was occupied by France. The French mandate governed Lebanon between 1918 and 1943.² As a result of the colonial mentality, the French mandate did some demographic and administrative changing. For instance, the region was subdivided into six states. They were the states of Damascus (1920), Aleppo (1920), Alawites (1920), Jabal Druze (1921), the autonomous Sanjak of Alexandretta (1921, modern-day Hatay), and the State of Greater Lebanon (1920). In this way, the borders of Lebanon were drawn. Implications of the French mandate emerged out various movement of population. Accordingly, Lebanon was affected migration waves in the region. These migration flows made Lebanon into a diverse place. Once Lebanon gained its independence, it had already had multi-ethnic and religious population.

Migration of Armenians to Lebanon was important flows changing the distribution of population deeply. According to the census of 1932, Armenians were 4 per cent of the total population. There were 31,992 Armenians in Lebanon (Greenshields,

¹ This article is an improved version of the chapter of Ph.D. thesis which was completed in 2015 at the University of Exeter.

² The mandate document was ratified in 1923; however, Lebanon was held after the First World War. France began to do administrative changing in 1920.

1978: 83) Even though the presence of the Armenian population dated back to 14th century, they cannot be considered as "community". Putting it differently, they cannot be seen as an ethnic group. The religious point of view was an essential dynamic while defining them (Abramson, 2013:190). However, the modern Armenian community and its integration to Lebanon relate to socio-political events in the 20th century. The events of 1915, the withdrawal of the French troops from Cilicia in 1921 and the independence of Hatay state are crucial events which increased the population of Armenians in the Levant and Lebanon. Armenian migration not only increased the population of Armenians in Lebanon, but also it increased numbers of the Christians.

This paper is about the Armenian community in Lebanon. As a non-native population of the Lebanon, Armenians were able to establish their community and to appear a distinct community. This paper consists of two sections. Firstly, the roots of the Armenian presence will be explained in the historical point of view. The migration of Armenians occurred in different times and various motivations. This section helps us to understand how the Armenians had discovered Lebanon before the modern Armenian community was established. In the second section, it is aimed to focus on the construction process of the Armenian community. It should be underlined that Lebanon is one of the countries which do not have current statistics about the census in the Middle East. Due to the lack of infrastructure, heavy bureaucracy and political climate, there is not any official census since the mandate regime. Therefore, it will be given descriptive information about the community. This section can be useful to understand the power and possibilities of the Armenian community. Overall, it could be argued that Lebanon for Armenians, is considered as religious, cultural and political centres. Experiences of Armenians caused them to root into Lebanese society. It is not exaggerated that no other place where Armenians national life is organised so well and as efficiently as Lebanon (Nalbantian, 2011:298). For this reason, Lebanon can be called as a capital of the Armenian diaspora. Lebanese Armenians not only in the diaspora but also in Lebanon have distinctive features.

The Roots of the Armenians in Lebanon

As Kasabian (2006:86) states, the Armenians are among 18 other sects and peoples in Lebanon, and they are the 7th largest community having long historical roots. Even though the modern Armenian community emerged out socio-political events in the 20th century, it was possible to observe the presence of Armenians in the 14th century. As a result of the dissolution of the Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia, Armenians migrated to different places. Lebanon was one of the main destinations. Additionally, interactions between Armenians and the Crusaders were important events mobilising Armenians towards the Middle East.

Some of the Armenian population migrated to Mount Lebanon with the Crusaders. Once the crusaders came to Anatolia, Armenians had interactions with them. They cemented each other through intermarriages and helped Crusaders to pass the near east (Hodgson, 2011:83-107). Instead of establishing their communities, they were

absorbed by the Maronite population. Their migration can be seen as a seed of the Armenians' presences in Lebanon. However, it was difficult to see them as ethnic "community" or "congregation" because they tended to define themselves as "Christian" referring Catholic sect rather than Armenian or Apostolic (Schahgaldian, 1979:52). In other words, religious identity and affiliation with Catholic Church were important parameters while people were defining themselves and perceiving the world even if they were called as "Armenian" by next generations.

Following that, it is hard to see any significant migration until the last quarter of the 17th Century. At this time, Catholic Armenians who had been persecuted by the authorities of the Apostolic community in the Ottoman Empire began to migrate to Lebanon. As Sanjian and others argue, "... the Armenians' Christian faith as the crucial factor in their being welcomed by the Maronites and quickly embedded into the system, thereby strengthening (numerical) Christian dominance in Lebanon" (in Kasabian, 2006:84). Therefore, it could be argued that Armenians not have any difficulties in integration due to their Christian identity until the 19th century. According to Schahgaldian (1979:52), they preferred to speak French instead of their native language. In this period, relations between Armenians and Maronites were powerful. As Abramson (2013:189) cites, the Maronites further acted on the Armenians behalf in 1742 when they interceded with Vatican to win Papal recognition for the patriarch of the Armenian Catholics. Also Armenian was able to institute a convent in Bzoummar in Kisrawan. It is known as the oldest extant Armenian monastery in Lebanon. Furthermore, Armenians were financially supported by Maronites. They were settled down in the northern Lebanon. The Khazens (a clan of Maronite) and other Maronite notables contributed landholdings and money to help the Armenians establish themselves in Lebanon (Abramson, 2013:189). Apart from Catholic Armenian, Lebanon welcomed some Protestant Armenians at the end of 19th century (Schahgaldian, 1983:47). It should be stated that their population was not noticeable numbers.

In addition to these two migration trends, Apostolic Armenians started coming to Lebanon in the last quarter of the 19th century. Trade and education were important motivations behind their interests. Lebanon provided opportunities for both Armenian entrepreneurs and students (Abramson, 2013:190). On the one hand, entrepreneurs sought to expand their business networks over Lebanon and involve Lebanese market into their targets. On the other hand, students began to come to Lebanon for modern European style education. Sanjian states that schools were modified by efforts of missionaries and turned Lebanon into an educational centre (in Abramson, 2013: 190). The American University of Beirut and St. Joseph's University can be given examples which were established in the 19th century. Both efforts of entrepreneurs and numbers of Armenian students increased the visibility of Armenians in public. Another event triggered Armenians to migrate to Lebanon was mutual conflicts between Muslim and Armenian subjects in the Ottoman Empire. Armenian political parties and revolutionists organised serious of uprisings against the Ottoman Empire. The revolt of Sasun, the revolt of Zeytun and following the events of Hamidiye led the government to take more serious precautions

(Schahgaldian, 1979: 53). As a result of this, both Muslim and Armenians had to leave their hometowns. From the Armenian point of view, Lebanon was considered as the main destination. There is no doubt that connections of Armenians with the previous community (even if it was so small) in Lebanon encouraged Armenians to migrate to Lebanon. They were welcomed by Catholic Armenians and Maronites (Abramson, 2013: 190). It should be noted that motivations behind the migration of Armenians throughout the 19th century differed from each other.

The last quarter of the 19th century saw the migration of Apostolic Armenians. As can be argued their experiences shaped the Armenian community in different ways. Differently from the Catholic point of view, it is possible to observe more ethnic and national elements among Apostolic Armenians. Catholics did not tend to establish their communities. Rather, they were assimilated among the Maronite population. However, Apostolic Armenians established their schools and clubs. Throughout the 19th century, the population of Armenians remained in a few thousand (Abramson, 2013:190).

The Lebanese-Armenian Community

It can be argued that the Armenian community become more visible and enlarged in the earlier of the 20th century. Lebanon received Armenian migrants those who were affected by the Law of relocation in 1915. Once the First World War broke out, the Ottoman Empire had to fight various fronts. Undoubtedly, the Eastern front that was established against the Russian expansion was one of the important fronts for the future of the Ottoman Empire (Maan, 2004). The Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) declared mobilisation to prevent Russian occupation. Even though Armenian political actors stated that they would be natural, a few thousand Armenian joined the Russian Army (Ozdogan et al., 2009: 154). Their decision was interpreted as disloyalty by the government. Also, their actions would jeopardise position of the Ottoman Army. Furthermore, Turkish villages were attacked by Armenian gangs. To prevent a further chaos, it was decided that Armenians should be relocated. It was aimed to relocate Armenians living nearby strategic locations and Russian fronts such as Erzurum, Van and Bitlis to different districts of the Empire where consisted of the less Armenian population. On 27th May 1915 the parliament drafted the Law. Accordingly, the relocation of Armenians began (Halaçoğlu, 2002:74). Until the Law was abolished on 15th March 1916, they were sent to Syria. On contrast to some Armenians who returned to Anatolia after the war, the majority of Armenians tended to stay in Syria and Lebanon where were transferred to the French Mandate.

Thousands of Armenians were deported from their hometowns in Anatolia and became refugees in the province of Aleppo. Migliorino (2008) describes Armenians as aliens in that time, as they found themselves in different Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire without knowing a single Arabic word. As cited in Jebejian’s work, the numbers of Armenian speakers in the first generation were limited, and they did not have any education in Armenian. For this reason, they got used to speaking Turkish in their everyday life. Undoubtedly, this was a tough experience for first generation Armenians. Even though the CUP issued various instructions to reduce

casualties in the deportation of Armenians, they tried to survive from famine, poverty and disasters psychically. Once they were able to alive, they had to reconstruct an Armenian community to shoulder the responsibility in reconstructing the wider Armenian community but this time in a diasporic space.

A short history of Armenians in Lebanon is highly undulate. They started their journey in refugee camps with considerable difficulties. Gradually, they reconstructed their Armenian community and integrated themselves successfully into Lebanese society socially, economically and politically. According to Payaslian, Armenians tried to balance between integration and preservation of ethnic culture and identity (in Kasabian, 2006:88). Armenians are deemed the least assimilated group in Lebanon due to their linguistic differences and fresh social memories remaining from the events of 1915 (Hourani, 1947). The Armenians’ short history in Lebanon can be a good example of solidarity and division in the post-traumatic community as it is possible to observe how the first generation of settlers reconstructed Armenianness and how the community was divided by following generations.

Under political developments in Lebanon, experiences of Armenians can be split into four periods; namely, the French Mandate, the Lebanese independence, the civil war, and the post-civil war. Socio-political developments in these periods not only shaped the Armenian community in Lebanon but also initiated to enlarge Armenian diaspora in different countries. It can be argued that the duration of the French mandate provide a suitable environment for Armenians before reconstructing their communities. After the First World War, the territories of the Ottoman Empire in the Middle East were occupied by French and British armies by referring the agreement of Sykes-Picot (Sander, 2003: 282). As a secret agreement, it seemed to be “a guideline” how territories of the Ottoman Empire should be shared by win-win principle. It not only drew maps of the Middle East, but also it sought to compromise interests of the Great Powers. For this agreement, the Middle East was divided into two main areas. The south of the Anatolia and the western Mesopotamia (Syria and Lebanon) were taken by France whereas Britain planned to occupied Iraq and southern Mesopotamia. Armenians those who were living in the region of Cilicia and the Eastern parts of Anatolia were considered under the dominances of French and Russian powers respectively. Even though the agreement was decoded by Bolsheviks, it was used to legitimate their occupations after 1918. Accordingly, Armenians found themselves within the French mandate.

The mandate period can be seen as a peak in the French-Armenian relations. Not only Armenians living in Cilicia, but also Armenians in Syria who were relocated by the Ottoman government developed relations with France. Although territories of Syria belonged to the Ottoman Empire officially, they were not included in the National Pact. In the 1920s, the authority of the French mandate began. Until national governments were established, the League of Nation accepted that French had a right to exercise its power. Accordingly, the region experienced social, cultural, economic and political engineering. Establishment of the Alawi state in

Lebanon and administrative changing can be given as examples how the French mandate altered dynamics of the region.

However, the French mandate did not find a suitable environment in the south of Turkey because of resistances of local people and conflicts between the national forces (Kuvay-i Milliye) and the French Army. They had to sign the agreement with the Ankara government in 1921. Later on, they withdrew their soldiers from Antep, Marash, Urfa and Adana. Needless to say, the Ankara agreement was an important success and provided advantages for the Ankara government; it did not solve border issues between France (Oran, 2001:151). Some territories (the Sanjak of Alexandretta) which were considered within the national pact had to remain in the French mandate. While the French troops were withdrawing from Cilicia, Armenians were also brought into the Sanjak, Syria and Lebanon (Ada, 2013). As Güclü (2001:23) states, the population of Armenians who were brought from Cilicia was 172.000. They were mainly resettled down in Syria and Lebanon (around 80.000). According to Greenshield (1978:132), 27.500 Armenians left the region. Consequently, it increased the population of Armenians in the Middle East. The French mandate took responsibility to mobilise Armenians and to settle down. Shemmassian (2012: 4-5) points out that Armenians were supported and carried by the French mandate. As he describes, goods of the Armenians were shipped to Ras al Basit. Between Kesab and Latakia, the women, children and the elderly were carried by trucks and buses. Men and animals had to walk. Until they settled down permanently, the French mandate supported them financially and bought lands in Lebanon. It could be argued that using French vessels to transport Armenians and buying lands for Armenians can be interpreted as significant indicators how the French mandate involved in the resettlement of Armenians in the Middle East. In the earlier years, Armenian refugees thought that they were "nation in temporary exile" (Schahgaldian, 1979:1). They used to rely on aids of Catholics and Lebanese authorities. Nevertheless, political climate and events transformed Armenian refugees as “fully integrated minority” in Lebanon (Nalbantian, 2011: 303). Later on, next generations began to consider Lebanon as “fatherland” (Schahgaldian, 1979:227).

In addition to intensive relations between Armenian community and the French mandate, two important events increased the loyalty of Armenians to Lebanon. The headquarters of the Armenian Catholic Church and the Catholicosate of Cilicia (which had been in Sis) moved to Lebanon in 1928 and 1930 respectively (Abramson, 2013:193). Differently from refugees, Armenians had their spiritual centre and began to establish the community around these centres. It could be argued that religious centre not only emphasised Armenians’ religious identity, also allowed them to have political representation. According to Migliorino (2008:52), relocation of the religious centre in Lebanon had a positive contribution in developing of the Armenian community. They integrated socially, economically and politically.

The mandate era not only for Armenians but also other ethnic groups, provided a suitable environment to develop their communities and the boundaries of modern

Lebanese society. For Sanjian (2001:161), the unity of the Lebanese society between Armenians and ‘others’ was based on common past experiences. Both communities saw themselves as having “... endured the tyranny of the Ottoman government in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.” As Migliorino (2008) points out, the political and constitutional formula provided some advantages in the sense of maintaining their cultures and identities. The mandate regime created a protective environment for Armenians who suffered from the deportation and conflicts. In this environment, they established their churches, schools, political parties and other cultural associations gradually.

Armenians did not participate in politics intensively at the beginning of the mandate regime since they were dealing with the trauma and were getting used to living as refugees in an odd place. However, they always paid attention to being affiliated with the mandatory regime. In 1924, Armenians were granted citizenship, and so they transferred their status from "alien to citizen" (Migliorino, 2008: 52). This decision of the mandatory regime was criticised by the Muslim population in Lebanon because it changed the balance of the population (Der-Karbetian, A and Proudian-Der-Karabetian, A, 1984:5). The Armenians started to take active roles in politics after the 1920s and became more pragmatic. They decided that Lebanon would be a new home for the Armenians, and so they became more concerned with political life. As Payaslian argues, the Armenian elites and political leaders tried to involve themselves in the decision-making process as much as they could and maintained the principle of being loyal citizens because they were repeatedly let down by the Western powers (in Kasabian, 2006:86). Armenians participated in the election of Lebanon’s Representative Council in 1925. They had their first representative in Lebanon’s Chamber of Deputies in 1929. Although he was not Apostolic and his representation was limited, there is no doubt that importance of his existence in the parliament could not be ignored. He served as a representative of minorities officially, so the requests of the Armenian community were mentioned in the parliament (Schahgaldian, 1979: 178).

The Armenian community was represented by Apostolic members of parliament in 1934. Accordingly, political parties tried to involve Lebanese politics shortly. Differently from other ethnoreligious groups, the Armenian community brought their political parties which had active political life and agenda in the Ottoman Empire. They had somehow sympathisers. Subsequently, the Armenian parties; namely, Dashnak, Hunchak and Ramgavar began to involve Lebanese politics. Before moving on to explain experiences of Armenians in the Lebanese independence period, it should be noted that there is a consensus about the political parties are the real representative of the community (Abramson, 2013:194). This consensus allows political parties to be active at ground level. Throughout the years, they were able to establish their schools, neighbourhoods and clubs. In this ways, the political doctrine can pass next generation easily and prevent assimilation while they are integrating into the Lebanese society.

Interactions between Armenians and Arab nationalists also played significant roles in developing the community. Although the Armenian political elites supported the mandatory regime since they arrived in Lebanon, their support decreased, and they began to approach the nationalists in Lebanon because the French's policy toward Turkey changed. For instance, the mandatory regime recognised the province of Alexandra (which had an intensive Armenian population) as an autonomous/independent Republic in 1938. Afterwards, the assembly of Hatay (Alexandretta) made a decision to join Turkey. For this reason, relations between the Armenian community and France started breaking down (Abramson, 2013:194). Changing attitudes of the Armenian political elites are also a good example of how Armenians conducted their checks and balances policy. According to Schangaldian (1979:178), Armenians actively participated in Lebanese nationalist movements. Once the nationalists took power, they won four seats in parliament. By the time of the 1930s, Armenian political elites and parties began to legitimise their presence in Lebanon and maximised the interests of the Armenians in the new Lebanese system. It should be pointed out that Armenian political elites and Arab nationalists had political cooperation in the past. In the election of 1936 in Sanjak, Armenians and Watani Party sought to establish independence Syria by including territories of the autonomous Sanjak worked together. Armenians were nominated in provinces that were ethnically Turks (Birsal and Ozkaya Duman, 2012: 351). It could be seen that Armenian political elites passed the destiny of the Armenian community along to other ethnoreligious groups to not live in under the Turkish autonomy. Arab nationalism became popular in Lebanon after the 1930s, Armenian political elites paid attention to developing relations with them. Even though they did not declare against the French mandate officially, they were close to Arab nationalists. It could be argued that Armenian community benefits from relations with Arab nationalists once the French mandate was terminated. In this period, their social influence and visibility in everyday life became clearer. Armenians started to transform refugee camps and shelters into neighbourhoods and modern houses.

On contrast to this transformation, it is hard to argue that the Armenian community is homogeneous. Lebanese Armenians also became divided into several fragments across political, ideological lines. The crisis of 1958, which produced the election of the Catholicos of Cilicia, was an important event that polarised the Armenians. When the head of the Catholicos of Cilicia passed away in 1952, Armenian parties were not able to agree on a candidate. All attempted elections failed. As Milgiorino (2008: 100-103) summarises, the root of the problem was Soviet interference, according to the Dashnak perspective. They argued that the Soviet authorities intend to use diasporic institutions to control Armenian communities in diasporic spaces. Therefore, the Dashnak insisted that the new spiritual leader of the Catholicos of Cilicia must be capable and courageous, independent-minded, and completely free of Soviet influence. The tension within the Armenian community was enhanced through Etchmiadzin Vazken I visiting the Catholicos. Besides, the Dashnak collaborated with President Camille Chamoun to receive the support of the central government. Despite claims that he suspended the elections, Chamoun sent

gendarmeries to Catholicos to ensure that voting would take place. In February 1956, it was declared that the Dashnak candidate, Bishop Zareh of Aleppo, had won the election. This broke up the religious unity of the Apostolic community and triggered further divisions among the Armenians. In the following days, anti-Dashnak groups, including Hunchak, Ramkavars, independents and other community representatives did not recognise the authority of the new Catholicos. They elected their candidate as locum tenens. However, it was not successful and recognised by the Lebanese government. The Lebanese government helped the new Catholicos to maintain its authority on the monastery of Bikfaya which was controlled by opposition groups.

Following years, tension and violence within the Armenian community were favoured by Arab political groups that had already had disagreements about national institutions of Lebanon. Armenian political groups had deep disagreements in May 1958 and began to attack each other (Milgiorino, 2008: 102). The Armenian quarters of Beirut were divided along political lines. While the Hunchak were based on Nor Hadjin, Khalil Badawi and Charchabouk, advocates of the Dashnak took the opposite side of the Nahr Beirut in Bourj Hammoud. Due to subsequent violence and radicalisation, some Hunchaks had to move out from Bourj Hammoud and diasporic institutions such as schools, churches, and social clubs were clearly marked in accordance with political affiliations.

In addition to intra-Armenian division and sectarianism in Lebanon, the Lebanese Civil War between 1975 and 1990 is another important event in the history of the Armenians. As a result of Palestinian refugee problems, aggressive enlargement of Israel and claim for reformation in the Lebanese National Pact, conflicts between the Lebanese National Movement (LNM) and the Lebanese Front (LP) spread across Lebanon and became a civil war. This war had multiple players who did not hesitate to use violence against civilians. Despite the multi-ethnic and religious mosaic of Lebanon, Beirut (and also other provinces) was divided into two fronts. While Christian forces controlled the east side of Beirut, Muslim powers controlled the west. The civil war continued until 1990 through the support of regional and super powers. The Armenian community was also affected by the civil war, even though Armenian parties decided not to get involved in conflicts on either side since the early days of the civil war. Rather, they even tried to be arbitrators to end the civil war. Meanwhile, both Dashnak and Hunchak continued to train their paramilitary forces to protect Armenians and their neighbourhoods from possible attacks by Christian and Muslim militants. It should be pointed out that the fact that the Armenians' took this decision was perceived as a betrayal of other Christians. They were threatened by Christian militants and became targets of some bombings in Borj Hammoud (Der-Karbetian, A and Proudian-Der-Karabetian, A, 1984; Milgiorino, 2008:152-154). As Milgiorino (2008:153) states, a large number of civilians were killed due to attacks of Chammounists and Lebanese Forces against residential and commercial areas. As a result of the civil war and insecurity, many Armenian families decided to migrate to Western countries.

This insecurity and “failed state” practices in Lebanon led to terrorist methods to be popular among Armenian youngsters. As mentioned in the history of Armenians in Turkey, ASALA was one of these terrorist organisations that developed in Lebanon. In addition to its terrorist attacks against Turkish diplomats and officers, ASALA initially aimed to kill members of the Dashnak in order to forcefully protest their methods and position regarding the “genocide of 1915”. When Lebanon was occupied by Israel, ASALA had to move its headquarters to Damascus and turned into contract killers that were used by different secret services. Also, there were other groups, namely JCAG (Justice Commandos of the Armenian Genocide), that adopted violence and radical methods by using the discourse of “genocide” as a justification (Milgiorino, 2008:154-155; Wilkinson, 1983; Hyland, 1991; Gunter, 2007).

As is seen in the short history of Armenians in Lebanon, they had highly fluctuating experiences. The seeds of the Armenian community took root and sprouted in the refugee camps, and they were then able to establish neighbourhoods. In a short time, Lebanon became one of the most important centres for Armenians regarding political, economic and cultural strength. As Milgiorino (2008) mentions, the Armenian community in Lebanon was the third largest diasporic Armenian community (175.000) in the world after the Soviet Union and the USA in the 1970s.

The presence of Armenians is still felt intensely even if the population of the Armenian community decreased radically due to the civil war. It is easy to understand which neighbourhoods of Beirut belong to the Armenians through symbols, shops, streets or architecture of the churches. For instance, while walking on the streets of Borj Hammoud, one may come across the flag of Armenia and the Dashnak or find different street names helping Armenians to remember where they come from. Currently, it is estimated that the population of Armenians in Lebanon is around 150.000 (Minority Right Group, 2008). It is difficult to find official statistics and figures related to Lebanon because the last census was conducted in 1932. Since then, there were not any formal records. Lebanese society and politics depend on critical ethnoreligious balances; it is believed that new census would jeopardise the Lebanese social system. However, it is possible to understand population trends indirect ways.

The Armenian community also has power in the economic system of Lebanon. As Abramson cites (2013:195), Armenians’ contributions to national economy were 15 per cent in 1975 even though their proportion was 8 percent of the Lebanese population. Their contributions allowed Armenians to increase their incomes. Armenians' income was forty per cent more than the Lebanese national income. Armenians are known as artisans, merchants, and professionals of every variety. They have a reputation in Lebanese society for their industry and honesty (Milgiorino: 2008:133).

The first generation’s efforts and interactions in the earlier years of Lebanon enriched the Armenian community. Differently from Kurds and Palestinian who remain marginalised, disenfranchised people, detached from Lebanese society in

sentiment and practice, Armenians can integrate into not only economic life but also social and political life. They have difficulties to reach fundamental rights such as citizenship, equality and political representation. The social exclusion leads them to live in isolated places.³ The possibilities of the Armenian community cannot be compared to what they have (Abramson, 2013:211). No other country in the Armenian diaspora provided opportunities to represent the Armenian community in the parliament. The Armenian community has the official representation and communal autonomy (Nalbantian, 2011:56). Armenians boast six seats in the 128 member-legislature. Five of the seats are allocated to Apostolic whereas one seat belongs to the Catholic Armenians. They are also guaranteed a ministerial position. Nevertheless, Protestant Armenians as the largest single Protestant group are not officially entitled. They do not have their seat, but they can be represented by various coalitions with other political groups (Abramson, 2013: 197). In the Armenian diaspora, Lebanon is unique in being the only country that guarantees its Armenian community both parliamentary and ministry representation (Nalbantian, 2011:56).

In addition to economic capital and power in parliamentary and ministry representation, the Armenian community is distinctive in terms of social and cultural capital. By standing on the heritage remained from the mandate period, they were able to establish cultural and social institutions. In 1944, Armenians were highly productive in publishing. Migliorino (2008:67) states, there were 57 publications in Lebanon. The number of the publication might be seen as the small proportion in the Western literature; however, it can be considered a significant success for the Armenian community which consisted of efforts of refugees. Behind their success, the contributions of political parties and churches cannot be ignored. Each church and political party possess publishing house, daily and even radio and TV stations. For instance, there are two main printing houses run by Lebanese Armenians; namely, Hamazkayin and Antelias. It is possible to observe connections with political parties. Hamazkayin also is known as Dashnak’s printing house and bookstore. As Migliriona (2008: 210) states they sold 7.500 items throughout book fair in 2002. Moreover, the Armenian community is also highly rich to have daily in this cultural production. In similar to political fragmentation among the Armenians, each political parties have own dailies in Lebanon. Aztag, Ararat and Zartonk are well-known newspapers are circulated among Armenians. Even if they deal with the economic crisis and have limited budgets, they are printed around 3.000 copies every day Migliriona (2008: 212). Before the Syrian war, they were sold in Syria as well. However, they are circulated only in Lebanon. In addition to printed media, social media helps Lebanese Armenians to announce their voices easily. Even though there are not any figures, it is possible to come across those web pages, social groups or blogs are published through Lebanese network. Cost efficient media

³ Further information about Palestinian refugees in Lebanon; Robers, Rebacca (2010) *Palestinians in Lebanon: Refugees Living with Long-term Displacement* (London: I.B Tauris).

tools not only allow Armenians to connect themselves with the rest of the world, but also they can strengthen relations with motherland “Armenia” easily. They can follow and react to news in Armenia easily. Finally, it should be noted that the Armenian community also has visual media facilities. FM radio stations and TV channels can contribute cultural production of the Armenians in Lebanon Migliriona (2008:212). All can be indicators showing how Armenian integration has been done in Lebanon.

It could be considered that fourth generation Armenian youngsters overcame difficulties in using Arabic and integrated into Lebanese society in contrast to their ancestors. Visibility of Armenians has increased quantitatively and qualitatively. In that vein, the Armenian community has 28 schools, over 20 churches (including Apostolic, Catholic and Protestant), radio stations, newspapers and cultural clubs.⁴ Differently from other diasporic communities, Lebanese Armenians have their university. Haigazian University has helped the Armenian culture to find a room at the highest level in the education system. It is one of the few universities which host “Armenianology” (in Abramson, 2013: 203).⁵ It is preferred by mainly Armenian students due to scholarship opportunities and cheaper tuition fee policy.

The Armenian community in Lebanon has to deal with serious issues even if their experiences are mostly positive. As a result of the civil war in Lebanon and on-going instability in the region, Lebanon has lost its economic charms Migliriona (2008: 179). In similar to other Lebanese people, Armenians also preferred to migrate to various countries to have a better life. They not only come to the European countries but also some preferred to live in the Gulf countries. Although their leaving has shrunk the size of the Armenian community in Lebanon, it has led to establishing new communities which are Lebanese origins in various countries. It could be argued that the population of Lebanese Armenians who migrated to different countries be 150.000.⁶

Conclusion

As Hawsen argues, Lebanon has become the second best country providing significant opportunities for Armenians (in Abramson, 2013:196). Even though roots of the Armenians can be found since the 14th century, their presences as a community relate to the events of 1915, the withdrawal of the French troops in Cilicia and the independence of the Sanjak of Alexandretta. It could be argued that

⁴ The first schools were opened in refugee camps and later in more congenial surrounds. Abramson (2013: 203) cites that there were 59 Armenian schools and 11.000 pupils.

⁵ The department of Armenian Studies was established in Saint-Joseph University and the American University of Beirut in 1955

⁶ It should be noted that there are not any official figures about the Armenian population. Therefore, all projections based on estimation. According to Schahgaldian before the Civil War, the population of Armenians was 250.000. However, currently, it is estimated that the Armenian community is around 100.000. Therefore, it could be assumed that 150.000 Armenians migrated from Lebanon during the Civil War.

refugees who were gathered in Lebanon be seeds of the Armenian community. Throughout the time, not only did their population increase, but also they have found a respectable place in the Lebanese society. The experiences of the Armenian community are not a straight line. Rather, their relations and experiences have been changed following socio-political developments. In earlier, they were close to the French mandate. However, later on, they did not hesitate to develop certain relations with nationalists. For this reason, the Armenian political elites have been able to maximise interests of the Armenians.

In earlier years, Armenians considered themselves as “a nation in exile”; however, they embraced and integrated themselves into the Lebanese society. Differently, from other diasporic communities, it was started that Lebanon was a religious and cultural centre for Armenians. Political representation, cultural production and headquarters of the churches differentiate Lebanese Armenians from other communities. Lebanon is the only country where the Armenian political parties find seats in the parliament. Even though the Armenian community has lost their former glory because of the civil war, economic crisis and subsequent migration flows, they have played crucial roles to establish Armenian communities in various countries.

It could be argued that experiences of Armenians have transformed Lebanon as religious, cultural and political centres. It is not exaggerated that Lebanon is a capital of the Armenian diaspora. Lebanese Armenians not only in the diaspora but also in Lebanon have distinct features.

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