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FLEXIBILITIES AND CONSTRAINTS – CONFESSIONALISM AND THE NEW COMMUNITIES IN LEBANON

Flexibilities and Constraints – confessionalism and the New Communities in Lebanon

The paper analyses the Lebanese political system called Lebanese consociationalism (confessionalism) focusing on its dynamics and reaction to social changes, particularly demographic. Scholarly literature defines the system as a power-sharing model, a set of political tools implemented to contain challenges arising from ethno-religious pluralism of a society. Important section of the theory is dedicated to conditions that impact dynamics of these systems and decide about its reaction towards challenges, in consequence impacting their stability, durability and success. The following paper joins discussion about Lebanese confessionalism and its reaction towards challenges, especially those posed by changing demographic composition. The paper refers first to the case of the Armenian community in Lebanon and their successful integration into the system also labelled as „lebanonization” as a significant example of the system’s dynamics. As contrasting case the paper also recalls the case of total systemic rejection and marginalization of a community – the Palestinians who came to Lebanon after 1948. The aim is to point at the conditions influencing the system’s divergent responses and operation in the context of dealing with the new communities.

Keywords: confessionalism, Lebanon, Armenians, power-sharing, Palestinians.

INTRODUCTION

The paper analyzes the dynamics of the Lebanese political system, called Lebanese consociationalism (confessionalism), by looking at its reaction towards social changes, particularly demographic challenges it faced with the arrival of two foreign communities in Lebanon in the 20th century – the Armenians in 1915 and the Palestinians in 1948. Both communities arrived to Lebanon as refugees but received completely different treatment – the first one was gradually assimilated and became one of the historical communities of Lebanon, the latter totally rejected and pushed out to the margins of socio-political life. The paper presents the two cases and examines the communities' relationship with the confessional system in an attempt to explain factors determining the different reactions and explore the system's dynamics. It will look at the conditions influencing the system's divergent responses and operation in the context of dealing with the new communities. The inclusion of the Armenian community, its successful integration to the confessional political system and "lebanonization"¹, which makes the Armenians declare themselves nowadays as holding two identities, presents itself as an interesting case of system's openness and flexibility. Contrary to the Armenian "success story" is the case of the rejection of the Palestinian community, which in turn was pushed out to the margins of the system leading to a situation described by certain scholars as "a regime of segregation"². Close examination of the two cases will: a. point at the system's flexibilities (the opportunities, instances when the system is open for integration) and constraints (when the system is closed and resists changes) b. identify the factors behind these divergent responses in an attempt to shed light on crucial aspects related to the system's functioning.

The analysis is based on an assumption that the examined communities were not passive objects in their encounter with the Lebanese system. Regardless of the obvious advantage of the latter as the receiving institution, it is important to stress the agency of both sides in this confrontation and for this reason, the paper also aims to investigate "the newcomers'" interaction with the system. Several interesting areas of inquiry emerge with acknowledging this reciprocity.

¹ N. Migliorino, *(Re)constructing Armenia in Lebanon and Syria. Ethno-cultural Diversity and the State in the Aftermath of a Refugee Crisis*, Berghahn Books, New York 2008.

² L. Schiocchet, *Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon: Is the Camp a Space of Exception?*, "Journal of Middle East and North Africa Migration Studies" 2014, vol. 2, no. 1, pp. 142-174.

Aside from looking one-sidedly at the systemic reasons behind the inclusion of one community and exclusion of another, it turns attention also to the communities as actors that, at least to some extent, could negotiate their relationship with confessionalism. Questions as to whether the examined communities could have exploited the system (providing after all vast autonomies of operation) and if so, how and to what extent? Or, whether the system was able in any way to mold the communities to fit the confessional arrangements and requirements? Did the communities' status acquired with the confessional system affect their collective self-identification, in relation to their homeland? These questions take the analysis a bit beyond the scope of this paper, however, still seem worth even brief addressing in this discussion about the system's stance towards the new communities.

LEBANESE CONFESSIONALISM – A TOOL FOR CONTAINING AND ACKNOWLEDGING RELIGIOUS PLURALISM

Scholarly literature defines the Lebanese political system as a power-sharing model, a set of political tools implemented to contain challenges arising from ethno-religious pluralism of a society. Important part of the power-sharing theory is dedicated to studying the dynamics of these systems and particularly, to evaluation of these tools in terms of their ability to deal with and mitigate intercommunal conflicts. Such solutions are present in many Asian, African and European political systems, which produces quite diverse spectrum of cases to study their implementation and functioning. Most of them seem to suggest that the ultimate success is largely determined by the extent to which these mechanisms corresponded with local conditions³. The case of consociationalism is of a model that was developed empirically, originating from multiple studies of various power-sharing agreements and institutional solutions implemented in fragmented societies. Collecting and analysis of these cases has led Arend Lijphart to build empirically grounded theory of consociationalism⁴.

³ See K. Trzciński, *Hybrid Power Sharing: On How to Stabilize the Political Situation in Multisegmental Societies*, "Politeja" 2018, vol. 15, no. 5(56), pp. 85–107, DOI: 10.12797/Politeja.15.2018.56.06; U. Schneekener, *Making Power-Sharing Work: Lessons from Successes and Failures in Ethnic Conflict Regulation*, "Journal of Peace Research" 2002, vol. 39, no. 2, pp. 203–228.

⁴ A. Lijphart, *Democracy in Plural Societies. A Comparative Exploration*, Yale University Press, New Haven 1977.

In the Middle East, the Lebanese confessional system presents itself as a unique case in which acknowledgement and respect for ethno-religious plurality is reflected in the design of a proportional political system. The system provided relative stability in the turbulent history of Lebanon, which included recurring sectarian crises often leading to bloodshed, of which the civil war of 1975–1989 has remained the most serious and recent example⁵. It does not mean that all crises that occurred within the system had to necessarily take form of an open conflict and bloodshed comparable to the scale of the civil war. The system was in fact many times contested by the Lebanese communities that demanded a larger share in the power-sharing settlement without turning to violent measures⁶. These examples of conventional contentious politics should in fact be interpreted as important indicators of how the system operates in terms of its efficiency and correspondence with the changing social dynamics and interests of participating communities⁷. In the last couple of years Lebanon has been also witnessing new types of political mobilization undertaken by organizations and groups from outside the confessional system – non-confessionally based groups that consider themselves marginalized by the confessional formula⁸. These new groupings, founded on identities other than confessional, become more and more politicized representing new tensions existing within the Lebanese society, and as such, may pose serious challenge to the Lebanese confessional status quo in the 21st century.

The most recent crisis of 2019, that the international media labelled as the Lebanese Revolution⁹, calls for a new approach regarding the future of Lebanese consociationalism, exploring the possibilities of how to acknowledge the question of religious diversity. Confessionally

⁵ W.E. Aboultaif, *Power Sharing in Lebanon. Consociationalism Since 1820*, Routledge, Abingdon 2019; B.M. Seaver, *The Regional Sources of Power-Sharing Failure: The Case of Lebanon*, "Political Science Quarterly" 2000, vol. 115, no. 2, pp. 247–271.

⁶ W.E. Aboultaif, *Power Sharing in Lebanon*, pp. 58–74.

⁷ R. Tonta, *Czynniki mobilizacji szczytów w Libanie w latach 1960–1982*, Askon, Warszawa 2014.

⁸ N. Bahlawan, *Nowe ruchy społeczne wobec systemu politycznego w Libanie po 1989 roku*, Wydawnictwo Instytutu Kultur Śródziemnomorskich i Orientalnych Polskiej Akademii Nauk, Warszawa 2019.

⁹ Mass protests erupted in October 2019, triggered by information that the government intends to implement tax on using applications such as WhatsApp. The protests expressed frustration of the Lebanese people caused by years of worsening economic situation, humongous waste of public resources and one of the highest levels of corruption in the world, accompanied by complete negligence demonstrated by the ruling class. See also N. Bahlawan, *The Crisis of Confessionalism. Lebanon Between Tradition and Modernity*, "Studia Polityczne" 2021, vol. 49 no. 3, pp. 149–168, DOI: 10.35757/STP.2021.49.3.07.

based interest groups remain deeply rooted within the Lebanese social and political structure, one cannot imagine their removal without complete disintegration and destruction it would immediately cause to the social body. This line of thought perhaps implies expanding confessionalism and developing it to accommodate the interests of multiple social groups (existing next to the confessional) without prioritizing one over other. A closer look at the factors that determine the dynamics of the confessional system, unveiling the mechanisms of its operation and system's flexibilities and constraints offers an interesting argument in the discussion about the system and its ability to adapt to changing social circumstances.

THE ARMENIANS – FROM REFUGEES TO THE HISTORICAL COMMUNITY OF LEBANON

The origins of the contemporary Armenian communities in the Levant are related to the policy of systematic ethnic cleansing, massacres and deportations of the Armenian people that were undertaken by the Ottoman authorities right with the beginning of the WWI¹⁰. Major part of the community forming the present diaspora in Lebanon and Syria are refugees and survivors of the forced mass deportations and tragic death marches¹¹.

In the first years of their presence, the years of the French Mandate 1920–1943, the Armenian refugees remained a hosted but foreign community, locating themselves on the margin of the society. The Armenians presence in the public administration was rather limited and they were not much involved in the affairs of the post-Ottoman Levant. Adopted distance from political life could partially be explained by the fact that the main political actors of Lebanon and Syria of the time were struggling for the formation of new political entities, preoccupied with negotiating visions of the Levant after the fall of the Ottoman Empire and confronting the mandate regimes. These discourses had little in common with the displaced and disenfranchised Armenian people, who neither belonged to the local class and elites tied with the current regimes nor could relate to the Arab nationalist discourse. The Armenian leadership of the time was driven primarily by national concerns, focusing on the preservation of

¹⁰ A. Boudjikianian (ed.), *Armenians of Lebanon: From Past Princesses to Present-Day Community*, Haigazian University, Beirut 2009.

¹¹ R. Kevorkian, *The Armenian Genocide. A Complete History*, I.B. Tauris, London 2011.

the community's identity in the new circumstances. The leaders were also deeply divided, reluctantly cooperating with Lebanese parties for purely pragmatic interests, aimed at pursuing internal affairs¹².

The Lebanese system, at the time still in the phase of its formation, provided frames and particularly favorable conditions for the reconstruction of the traumatized Armenian survivors, in the process of re-establishing themselves in the new place. The concepts of communal representation, leading role of the church elites, autonomies in the religious and cultural affairs, primacy of religious affiliations, permitted not only the preservation of Armenian identity but also reproduction of the social structure and organization from the places of their origin¹³. The confessional system, which originated from the Ottoman millet system, delegated all civil matters to the communal religious authorities that managed them almost exclusively. In this framework, Armenian institutions continued to rule autonomously in all issues regarding rites and doctrine, personal status affairs, including questions such as inheritance, marriage, birth registrations etc. The Lebanese state would only confirm and specify the area of autonomy granted to the religious communities and their authorities. Legal personality of the community was granted on the basis that the community submitted to the government their statutes. The documents were to specify the structure of communal religious life, including matters such as hierarchies, jurisdictions, mechanisms of formation and functioning of religious bodies¹⁴. The Armenian Apostolic and Armenian Catholic Churches were enlisted on this ground among the "historical communities of Lebanon", an act which represented an important recognition of a community that was relatively new to the region. Another important gesture from the Lebanese state came later with the recognition of the Armenian language as one of the accepted, second foreign languages in the national Baccalaureate examinations. Such moves were never repeated with any other community in Lebanon.

The initial strategy of non-involvement in the Lebanese affairs was a conscious and consequent choice made by the community, that with years evolved into carefully developed idea of Armenian neutrality, becoming something of an Armenian trait. There is also no indication that the Armenians were supporting the negotiations

¹² A. Boudjikianian (ed.), *Armenians of Lebanon*, pp. 92–93.

¹³ J. Nucho, *Everyday Sectarianism in Modern Lebanon. Infrastructures, Public Services and Power*, Princeton University Press, New York 2016.

¹⁴ N. Migliorino, *(Re)constructing Armenia in Lebanon and Syria*, pp. 48–50.

leading to the end of the French mandate rule nor the conclusion of the so-called National Pact in 1943, that became the cornerstone of independent Lebanon and which until today defines the backbone of the Lebanese political system. However, what pulled the community into the Lebanese “game of thrones” at the time was the question of the community’s numbers. Those were eagerly used to support the Christian block competing with the Muslim for hegemony in a crystallizing Lebanese power-sharing model¹⁵. The Armenians eventually, willingly or not, contributed to the Christian demographic majority and gave them bigger share in the confessional system for many years to come. The Armenian communities also received proportional representation in the Lebanese parliament, with Armenian Orthodox community getting 4 seats (candidates would be elected from Beirut, Bekaa Valey and Matn) and Armenian Catholics 1 (from Beirut electoral district). After the Taif Agreement in 1989 the Armenian Orthodox were granted additional 1 seat. Representative of the community (Orthodox or Catholic) always receive at least one position in the newly formed cabinet.

The above mentioned distance of the Armenian community has begun to evolve in the next years towards moderate involvement in the affairs of Lebanon. In 1958 the Armenian political leadership was dragged into the confrontation between the Lebanese Christians and Muslims over the political direction that Lebanon should take¹⁶. Throughout the 1960s the Armenian politicians supported the reforms of president Fouad Chehab and his successor Charles Helou. Interestingly, during the Lebanese civil war the Armenian parties resisted pressures to take sides and adopted the so-called position of neutrality, which they maintained during the entire conflict. Some interpret it as a tribute to the Lebanese system and a statement against its demise, as the Armenian community refused to participate in the destruction of the state that provided them with shelter. However, distancing from the conflict and reluctance to take sides was also motivated by different stance versus the Palestinian issue, indicating perhaps independent interests of the Armenian leaders¹⁷. With the

¹⁵ T. Jaulin, *On Lebanese Politics and Migration: The 1932 Census and 1943 Electoral Law*, [in:] P. Tabar, J. Skulte-Ouass (eds.), *Politics, Culture and Lebanese Diaspora*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle 2010, pp. 162–175.

¹⁶ F. Traboulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon*, Pluto Press, New York 2012, pp. 129–139.

¹⁷ The leading Armenian party Dashnag for many years traditionally allied with the strongest Christian block, the Maronite Falange party, found itself now in uneasy position as their views regarding the Palestinian question differed from the Maronite leaders. N. Migliorino, *(Re)constructing Armenia in Lebanon and Syria*, p. 151.

eruption of the civil war, the Armenian representatives chose to act independently and according to their own interests, which emphasized their particular status in the Lebanese system.

The civil war has confronted the Armenians of Lebanon with several problems. Growing tensions among Lebanese parties demanded clarifying where the Armenians stand in terms of the conflict. The new situation forced the Armenians to reflect on their attitude towards Lebanon, being their hosting country or a new homeland already¹⁸. The experience of the civil war has put in question the issue of the Armenian adaptation in Lebanon, indicating that it is still an on-going process without one certain outcome. The Armenian parties managed to remain neutral throughout the entire conflict, even though the strongest of them, Dashnag and Hunchak, had armed and trained militias. The parties refrained from fighting and adopted the position of neutrality regarding the conflict, engaging however in every effort proposing a solution to the crisis, a formula which was later known as “the positive neutrality”. By standing aside the Armenians positioned themselves as the outsiders in the war-torn Lebanon, but it was done in an attempt to avoid exacerbating the conflict. Nevertheless, the decision was met with disappointment by some Lebanese parties – the Maronite Falange Party interpreted the Armenian neutrality as the sign of weak devotion to Lebanon or even an act of betrayal¹⁹.

The position adopted by the Armenian community and parties towards the Lebanese conflict revealed that the Armenians were aware of their different and special place in Lebanon. To a large degree they were participating in the system but their mode of integration reserved them space for autonomous reactions. It reflected their own view of the system, the role of the Armenian factor in it and also of the antagonisms between the other confessional communities. Other Lebanese actors had to cope with the Armenian independent handling of their relationship with the system. The so called “positive neutrality” also received a bit more understanding, as the conflict quickly spilled out of control and degenerated into frantic wars of

¹⁸ 15 years of conflict have destroyed the Lebanese economy and acute consequences of that were felt by all segments of the society. The Armenian people who mostly run private businesses and were overwhelmingly involved in sales and crafts were painfully affected by the war.

¹⁹ It led the Party to attack the Armenian neighborhoods in east Beirut in 1978 and 1979. The situation of many Armenians living in the Muslim side of Beirut was not much better, the community was also gradually forced to abandon their households and seek refuge in the Christian parts of the city.

everyone with everybody²⁰. Instead of engaging in the fighting, the Armenian leadership turned to diplomacy, supported peace initiatives as intermediators coordinating meetings with the Christian leaders. The Armenian representatives took part in several peace conferences that attempted to produce solutions to the aggravating Lebanese crisis. From the Armenian perspective, supporting the consociational status quo and preservation of the confessional formula was still a viable option for Lebanon based, however, on mutual respect and recognition shared by all religious sects, equality of rights and obligations in a fair and balanced distribution²¹.

On another level, the war has revived old Armenian fears and forced to reconsider the question of their stability and security in Lebanon. Destruction caused by interconfessional antagonisms eroded the sense of trust in confessionalism and generated widespread disillusionment about the prospect of living in Lebanon. In contrast to that, the experience of civil war and collectively shared endurance also seemed to reinforce the sense of belonging to Lebanon, as the communities had to rely on self-help and self-governance efforts to survive. According to Nicola Migliorino, who studied the evolution of the Armenian diaspora, their sense belonging to the lost homeland and their adaptation to the circumstances in situ, further “lebanonization” of the community was related to the shift from the feeling of “nation in exile” to that of being permanent transnational diaspora, based in Lebanon and attached both to its Armenian and Lebanese identity²².

PALESTINIANS IN LEBANON – LEGAL STATUS AS REFUGEES

The first Palestinian refugees that arrived in Lebanon originated mostly from the Galilee and the coast cities that fell to Israel in 1948²³.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 154.

²¹ The Lebanese Armenians went even further to propose an amendment to the Lebanese Constitution to memorialize the unwritten National Pact and create the Senate as a body representing all Lebanese religious sects in order to preserve equilibrium between them. Aware of the importance of numbers on one side and sensitivity of recognizing demographic changes in Lebanon on the other, the Armenian representatives advised to increase the number of MPs and adopt the principle of equality in the distribution of seats between the Muslims and Christians in the Parliament. R. Avsharian, *The Ta’ef Agreement and the Lebanese Armenians*, [in:] A. Boudjikianian (ed.), *Armenians of Lebanon*, p. 393.

²² K. Ghoukassian, *Lebanon in My Mind. The Civil War and the Centrality of the Lebanese-Armenian Community in the Making of the Armenian Diaspora Nationalism*, [in:] A. Boudjikianian (ed.), *Armenians of Lebanon*, p. 415.

²³ R. Sayegh, *Palestinians in Lebanon: Harsh Present, Uncertain Future*, “Journal of Palestine Studies” 1995, vol. 25, no. 1, pp. 37–53, DOI: 10.2307/2538103.

It is estimated that from 750 000 Palestinians expelled during the eruption of the Arab-Israeli conflict in 1947–1948 around 100 000 came that time to Lebanon²⁴. According to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) the number of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon has reached 487 000 in 2023. The data, however, includes only voluntarily registered refugees²⁵. Various other sources point at different numbers, from 450 000 to over 500 000²⁶.

Due to the Lebanese state's deliberate strategy of negligence, the Palestinian refugee community relies entirely on the support of the UNRWA. The Agency was created as a subsidiary organ of the General Assembly to carry out direct relief and works program and "to prevent conditions of starvation and distress among them and to further conditions of peace and stability"²⁷. Since its establishment in 1950, the UNRWA has been providing support to Palestine refugees in Lebanon, who otherwise would have no access to public services. The Lebanese government established a Central Committee for Refugee Affairs in 1950 to coordinate with UNRWA, followed by the creation of a department for this purpose in 1959²⁸. The department was responsible for managing refugee documents (beyond the UNRWA ration card) and establishing camps, but it mostly focused on keeping control of the life in the camps. The Lebanese Deuxième Bureau (DB, the Lebanese army's intelligence bureau) was commissioned to exercise heavy control over the camps and it concerned both security issues as well as attempts made by the Palestinians to improve their dwellings. The DB would also arrest political activists, recruit collaborators, interfere in UNRWA appointments and even destroy additional housings built by the refugees²⁹.

²⁴ D. Martin, *From Spaces of Exception to Campscapes: Palestinian Refugee Camps and Informal Settlements in Beirut*, "Political Geography" 2015, vol. 44, pp. 9–18, DOI: 10.1016/j.polgeo.2014.08.001.

²⁵ UNRWA in Action, https://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/unrwa_in_action_2023_eng.pdf [accessed: 17.11.2023].

²⁶ P. Beyenesi, Z. Abuhaidar, *The Palestinian-Lebanese Paradox. The Socio-Cultural Conundrum of Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon: Law, Economics and Culture*, "Society and Economy" 2017, vol. 39, no. 2, pp. 251–270, p. 256, DOI: 0.1556/204.2017.39.2.5.

²⁷ J. Suleiman, *Trapped Refugees: The Case of Palestinians in Lebanon*, unpublished presentation at the International Conference: Protecting People in Conflict & Crisis Responding to the Challenges of a Changing World, Harris Manchester College & Queen Elizabeth House University of Oxford, September 2009, p. 6, https://al-shabaka.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/trapped_refugees_js_2009.pdf [accessed: 17.11.2023].

²⁸ S. Al-Natour, *The Legal status of Palestinians in Lebanon*, "Journal of Refugee Studies" 1997, vol. 10, issue 3, p. 360–377.

²⁹ I. Feldman, *Conflicted presence: The many arrivals of Palestinians in Lebanon*, "Migration Studies" 2022, vol. 10, issue 2, pp. 190–213, DOI: 10.1093/migration/mnab048.

Since its establishment, the UNRWA mandate would not entitle the Agency to provide the Palestinian refugees with legal protection. Its mission would be entirely restricted to education, health and social services, provision of which is considered as a type of “relief protection”, affording the Palestinian refugee fundamental economic and social rights³⁰. Approximately 90% of UNRWA’s workforce is also comprised of Palestinians, which is a form of supporting the community, taking into account high rates of unemployment among them and the refugees’ disenfranchisement. The Agency’s 63 schools operating in Lebanon educate 40,000 students and its 27 primary health care facilities provide more than 524,000 health services annually³¹. Despite UNRWA’s support, refugees cannot meet their health expenses and spend more than 30% of their income on food. It is estimated that 65% of the Palestinians in Lebanon live under the poverty line. Only 61% of Palestinian children are enrolled in secondary school and less than one third of Palestine refugees who graduated from secondary school in the academic year 2016–2017 are currently enrolled in university. This is direct consequence of the restrictions imposed on the Palestinian access to state education. In principle, as foreigners, Palestinians are entitled to benefit from the ten percent of places reserved for foreigners at government secondary schools. In practice, however, this right is limited and a matter of national preference, e.g. access to government vocational training schools is exclusively restricted to Lebanese nationals and at public universities some faculties are reserved only to Lebanese students³².

As in other Arab host countries Palestinian refugees in Lebanon are in principle eligible for an identification card and a renewable special travel document. The “Casablanca Protocol” signed in 1965 stipulates, that Palestinian refugees, while keeping their Palestinian nationality, shall be accorded the same treatment as nationals of Arab League states, including the right to work and employment, the right to leave the territory of the state in which they reside and to return to it, issuance and renewal of travel document, as well as the

³⁰ According to the definition, Palestinian refugees are “persons whose normal place of residence was Palestine during the period 1 June 1946 to 15 May 1948, and who lost both home and means of livelihood as a result of the 1948 War”, United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, <https://www.unrwa.org/who-we-are> [accessed: 17.11.2023].

³¹ https://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/content/resources/unrwa_in_numbers_eng_1.pdf [accessed: 17.11.2023].

³² J. Suleiman, *Trapped Refugees*, p. 5.

freedom of residence and movement between the Arab League states³³. Document set the framework of the rights regime for Palestinian refugees granting them the right to work, to leave and return to the country, along with the travel papers to facilitate movement. Lebanon, however, signed the Protocol with reservations regarding the right to work (depending on the country's economic situation) and entries into and exit from Lebanon. It became a clear indication that the refugees' presence would be subjected to serious limitations. Regulatory and security bodies commissioned to control the refugee affairs, especially the Deuxième Bureau and the Lebanese Army were the institutions that have implemented this framework of restrictions.

According to further state legislations, the Palestinian refugees' right to residency and travel became subject of arbitrary implementation and changes depending on the political atmosphere. In September 1995 the Lebanese Minister of the Interior issued Decree No. 478 Regulating Entry and Exit of Palestinians into and out of Lebanon, stating that "Palestinian outside Lebanese territory will have to obtain an entry visa to Lebanon". Aside from being inconsistent with the provisions of the Casablanca Protocol, it was also a clear violation of article 9 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to which Lebanon had acceded³⁴.

As for the living conditions, major part of the Palestinian refugees lives in 12 camps scattered throughout the country. The camps are overcrowded and affected by poor infrastructure, sanitation and housing. Camp inhabitants have extremely limited possibilities to improve their housing conditions, not only for the economic reasons but also due to the Lebanese authorities' restrictions, including even the movement of building materials in and out of the camps. In the early 1950s when it became clear that their displacement will not be solved anytime soon, the refugees attempted to convert their temporary shelters, mostly tents into buildings that could provide them with durable protection. These actions were met with charges submitted against them in the Lebanese Courts of Law by the owners of the parcels who gave their lands for sheltering to the refugees in 1948, but now were afraid the Palestinians might take their lands³⁵.

³³ Protocol for the Treatment of Palestinians in Arab States ("Casablanca Protocol"), <https://www.refworld.org/docid/460a2b252.html> [accessed: 17.11.2023].

³⁴ The decree was, however, later revoked by the Lebanese authorities. See: J. Suleiman, *Trapped Refugees*, p. 5.

³⁵ I. Feldman, *Conflicted presence*, p. 199.

As Ilana Feldman writes “In 1953, the government granted permission for refugees living within camp boundaries to ‘ameliorate their sheltering condition by new or additional construction’ in the camp. This grudging permission was a recognition that however much Lebanese and Palestinians might want their presence to be limited, these boundaries were being transgressed by circumstance”³⁶. Even the officers of the US Presbyterian church’s mission to the Middle East wrote in 1959 to UNRWA to suggest the removal of the refugees, who were given temporary shelter on their lands, for different, more appropriate location due to the fact the church intended “to make use of the valuable property”³⁷. The Lebanese government would generally take side of the angry landowners wishing to retrieve their properties. It even considered closing two camps, Burj al-Barajneh and Shatila, as well as a partial population removal from a third camp, Tel al-Zaatar, to a not-yet-built new camp. None of the camps was closed at the time, Tel al-Zaatar was destroyed later in 1976, during the civil war and after a siege and the massacre of its residents.

Lebanese legislation imposes also many restrictions on foreigner’s freedom to buy property. Even though in 2001 all Arab citizens, including Palestinians, were granted the right to acquire property without prior license and on a limited scale³⁸, few days later the Lebanese parliament passed additional law No.296 which amended the first article of the decree in such a way that prevented Palestinians from owning and inheriting property that they previously bought³⁹. This situation obliges Palestinian refugees to be trapped in the overpopulated refugee camps and such situation has been seriously worsened by the restrictions imposed by the Lebanese army on building in some of the camps, as well as prohibition on reconstruction the refugee camps totally destroyed during the Lebanese civil war⁴⁰.

The rate of unemployment among the Palestinians living in Lebanon was estimated at 23.2% in 2015. They are faced with formal and informal restrictions on the types of jobs and industries they

³⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 200.

³⁷ *Ibidem*.

³⁸ Up to 3000 m2 in Beirut and up to 5000 m2 in the rest of Lebanon. See: J. Suleimani, *Trapped Refugees*, pp. 4–5.

³⁹ The amended clause stated: “It is prohibited to any person who is not a national of a recognized state, or any one whose ownership of property is contrary to the provisions of the Constitution relating to ‘Tawteen/re-settlement’ to acquire real-estate property of any kind”. *Ibidem*, p. 5.

⁴⁰ See also: P. Beyenesi, Z. Abuhaydar, *The Palestinian-Lebanese Paradox*, pp. 251–270.

can be hired for with⁴¹. Palestinian refugees' right to work depends on obtaining of a work permit and is subjected to the principle of national preference. The Ministry of Labor would also issue a list of jobs and trades that were restricted to Lebanese nationals and update it according to the changing Lebanese market⁴². In 1995 the Minister of Labor at the time issued a list of about 50 jobs, trades and independent professions of the private sector that were restricted to the Lebanese citizens. Contrary to this, in 2005 Palestinian refugees who were born in Lebanon were permitted to work legally in manual and clerical jobs that were unavailable to them before, however, the restriction forbidding Palestinians from working in around 39 professions was kept in place, including professions such as medicine, law and engineering⁴³.

FLEXIBILITIES AND CONSTRAINTS – CONFESSIONALISM AND THE NEW COMMUNITIES IN LEBANON

The two cases illustrated above reveal different reactions of the Lebanese political system. For the Armenians, the newly established Republic of Lebanon not only became a shelter, but it also provided a unique opportunity to recover and reconstruct their lost homeland in the diaspora. With its political system that originated from the Ottoman millet system and the historical religious diversity of Mount Lebanon, it permitted all religious communities to preserve a degree of autonomy in terms of practicing their faith⁴⁴. This mode of participation was to ensure that each community would have its share in power. The idea of modern Lebanon as an independent and new state in the Levant partially evolved from the awareness of the region's religious diversity and the tradition of its political recognition. As it became more and more obvious that Lebanon cannot exist as purely Christian state without the Muslim component, the founders turned to the tradition of proportional interconfessional rule which

⁴¹ 36% employed in elementary occupations, such as agricultural labourers, sales and service workers, cleaners, etc. Lack of written contracts (only 14% of the Palestinian labour force have an employment contract); lack of employment benefits (87% of employed Palestinians do not benefit from either sick or annual leave); as well as insecure job tenure (48% of employed Palestinians are paid on a daily basis, 37% on a by-piece/service basis and 8 % work in seasonal employment).

⁴² J. Suleiman, *Trapped Refugees*, p. 4.

⁴³ P. Beyenesi, Z. Abuhaydar, *The Palestinian-Lebanese Paradox*, p. 257.

⁴⁴ U. Makdissi, *The Culture of Sectarianism: Community, History and Violence in the Nineteenth Century Lebanon*, University of California Press, Berkeley 2000.

with time evolved into a particular political system referred to as the Lebanese consociationalism or confessionalism. The basic principles that later developed into complex institutional arrangements, were that the system was to protect communities' autonomy in religious matters, permit them living according to their customs, preserve their identities and on the political level, guarantee their representation in the government and administration proportionally to their numbers. These principles that underpinned the foundation of modern plural Lebanon possibly paved the way for the inclusion of the Armenians in the first decades of the Lebanese Republic, but for some reasons were not implemented in the case of the Palestinian refugees who came to Lebanon in 1948.

In discussing the question of the “lebanonization” of the Armenians and the factors that permitted relatively smooth integration of the community in Lebanon, Nicolas Migliorino mentions precisely the specific religious policy that from the first years of the Armenian presence, both in Lebanon and Syria, favored consolidation and completion of the effort to re-establish their churches. Under the existing legislations the Armenian churches were able to expand their networks of religious institutions which accompanied the development of Armenian residential areas. He also points at “an essentially neutralist and secularist approach of the state coupled with modest advances in rationalization and secularization of the areas of traditional exclusivity of the religious jurisdictions. In the framework the Armenians could preserve valuable spaces of communal autonomy (...) with the Armenian Churches increasingly returned to being focal points of Armenian communal activity”⁴⁵. Church played then an important role as the informal center of authority responsible for internal communal affairs, an organization managing the Armenian social life centered around schools, charities and clubs, providing space and infrastructure for communal interaction in which the people could reconnect. The Lebanese consociational system generally recognizes and employs the social role of the religious authorities, allowing to certain degree the political interference of the highest representatives of the clergy, which is illustrated e.g. by important positions and esteem surrounding the religious leaders, such as the Sunni Mufti, the Maronite Patriarch or the Catholicos of Cilicia.

⁴⁵ N. Migliorino, *(Re)constructing Armenia in Lebanon and Syria*, p. 112.

Due to the system's institutional design then "Lebanon could be regarded as a success story. The process of reconstruction of the Armenian world had proceeded to an extent and with a pace unparalleled in the region. Lebanon had become the new home for a fully developed system of communal institutions meant to organize and promote Armenian life and Beirut had grown into a true capital of the Armenian diaspora, an unrivalled cultural hub serving Armenians across the region"⁴⁶. The importance of the Armenian Lebanese diaspora and Lebanon from cultural perspective was also expressed in an article published the ARMENIA periodical by Mushegh Ishkhan, who wrote that "Nobody can deny that Lebanon is the cultural and educational center of the Diaspora. It has become a kind of modern-era homeland from where was heard the familiar voice of the Armenian spirit and language. Lebanon has become the center of Diaspora's light and hope, especially after destruction of our other Middle Eastern communities. Indeed, it is only there that the Armenian culture could flourish, the Armenian language keep pure, that new literature could be born. What most matter about Lebanon are our national and cultural wealth accumulated there. We cannot move them to any other place, nor we can create all this once again in a new environment. Support the Lebanese Armenian diaspora so that they survive the war so that little Armenia would not die (...) stigmatizing those who leave Lebanon"⁴⁷.

The case of Armenians in Lebanon in many ways remains exceptional⁴⁸. The Palestinians who also came to Lebanon in great numbers as refugees after 1948, with even closer ethnic (and sometimes even family) connections, speaking the same Arabic language and sharing the same faith as Christians and Muslims, have not received similar welcoming and recognition. Interestingly, they have never been considered to become yet another historical community of Lebanon, even though their places of origin were geographically closer than the

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 147.

⁴⁷ K. Ghoukassian, *Lebanon in My Mind*, p. 422.

⁴⁸ In order to shed some light on this unique Lebanese case, Migliorino compares the situation of the community in Lebanon with Syria and points at completely different modes of accommodation and ultimately different tracks of evolution of the Armenian cultural life. He concludes that the major reasons for the different turn result from different paths of political evolution that the two regimes went through. While Beirut became a flourishing cultural hub with active media, literature, theatre and music, political turmoil in Damascus have resulted in restrictions on freedom of expression that eventually encouraged gradual migration of Armenian intellectuals (mostly) to Beirut and contributed to the overall decline of cultural activity in Syria. N. Migliorino, *(Re)constructing Armenia in Lebanon and Syria*, p. 122-126.

ones of the Armenians. As it was presented above, the Palestinian refugees have endured some the worst conditions in the last 70 years, closed in 12 provisory camps and deprived of chances to improve their living conditions⁴⁹. They have a stateless refugee status, are not allowed to own estate, hardly any access to social services and healthcare except the ones provided by the UNRWA⁵⁰. The Lebanese authorities and society in fear of their possible resettlement (in Arabic *taawteen*) has pushed the community to the margins and resisted their absorption. Instead, the state has picked the strategy of perpetuating the status of the Palestinians as temporary refugees, under the pretext of awaiting the unlikely foundation of Palestine and repatriation, even though the question of their potential return has been for many years firmly rejected by the Israeli authorities.

The problematic status of the Palestinian refugees was directly related to the eruption of the 1975 Lebanese Civil War⁵¹. Trapped in the state where they were “foreigners of special kind” but de facto an unwanted community pushed into camps, with no rights and perspectives, resulted in a rather hostile or at best indifferent relationship with the Lebanese state as their host. The Palestine Liberation Organization, since 1971 formally seated in Beirut, became not only an active side of the conflict with its independent agenda, but according to many Lebanese, the actual reason that triggered the full-scale war⁵². The Palestinians also never claimed to be “positively neutral” towards Lebanon, their activity in fact proved the opposite of neutral from the beginning of their presence, when they undertook armed attacks against Israel from the Lebanese territories. Not only they did not hide their resistance agenda but expected from the Lebanese authorities and society to fully support these actions. The Israeli attacks that came in retaliation, however, were too high price to pay for some parts of the Lebanese society, which slowly withdrew their sympathy for the Palestinian struggle, as it dragged Lebanon into an open conflict with a much stronger enemy⁵³. During the 15 years

⁴⁹ UNRWA, *Where We Work: Lebanon*, <https://www.unrwa.org/where-we-work/lebanon> [accessed: 1.12.2021].

⁵⁰ Human Rights Watch, *World Report: Lebanon 2011*.

⁵¹ The biggest and the bloodiest conflict in the history of modern Lebanon is said to erupt on April 13th 1975 with an incident in which Phalangist militiamen attacked a bus carrying Palestinians activists and their Lebanese sympathizers, also civilians, killing all of them. Most probably the attack was intended as retaliation in consequence of multiple clashes between the Palestinian fighters (*fedayyin*) and the Phalangist militiamen.

⁵² See: M. Hudson, *The Palestinian Factor in the Lebanese Civil War*, “The Middle East Journal” 1978, vol. 32, issue 3, pp. 261–278.

⁵³ G. Tueni, *Une guerre pour les autres*, Éditions JC Lattes, Paris 1985.

of the war the Palestinian refugee camps were attacked by multiple sides of the conflicts (including various Lebanese militiamen), put under siege and destroyed with its residents brutally murdered. The infamous Sabra and Shatila massacre, when Christian Phalangists forces murdered thousands of camp residents under the eye of Israeli occupation forces remains the most known of these attacks.

The systemic rejection and political tension related to the question of the Palestinian community in Lebanon reveals certain features of the confessionalism's dynamics. What mattered in the Palestinian case was the issue of their religious diversity, including both Christians and Muslims. The Palestinian community as whole could not be in any way classified as confessional. Dividing the Palestinians according to the confessional lines and forming two separate communities that could fit into the system and get recognition, was very problematic from the national point of view. It would imply denying or downplaying the imperative of returning to homeland. Under Christian or Muslim denominations, the Palestinians – as a divided community – would probably have to fit into the Lebanese system and find themselves absorbed by the existing Lebanese confessions. This, in turn, could be interpreted as an attempt to marginalize their national identity. On the other hand, the inclusion of few entirely new communities – Palestinian Christians (Catholics, Orthodox etc.) and Palestinian Muslims (Sunni and Shia), would require a complete reorganization of the entire Lebanese consociational system. The Armenians, in turn, followed the existing pattern and fit into the Lebanese confessionalism along with the process of its formation and crystallization in the years of the French Mandate and early independence. In spite of the problematic nature of the religious composition of the Palestinian community or the forms of their potential integration into the system, it still seemed less problematic than the ideological dimension related to the potential abandoning of the Palestinian cause and their national struggle for the right to return. Since the 1970s the Palestinians guerilla fighters exploited to the maximum the weak central authority and absence of the Lebanese state for their own interests, which has put Lebanon under serious threat, ultimately brought the system down in 1975 and led to the devastation of the country in the following years.

What also can be noticed during the analysis is the slight difference in the situation of the Christian and Muslim Palestinians as refugees. It is related to the ultrasensitive issue of demography, and once again underlines the critical importance of the idea of preserving confessional

balance in Lebanon, which in turns means supporting the Christian element supposedly threatened by the Muslim domination. The numbers of the Armenians supported the Christians in the period when Lebanon was developing its institutions and power-sharing formula. The importance of preserving the confessional equilibrium was biased by the Christian sense of being a minority in the Levant – an island in the Muslim Sea. Therefore, the idea of preserving the confessional “balance” implied maintaining slight advantage of the Christians and their continuous efforts to secure it. The arrival of the Palestinians, most of whom were Sunni Muslims, has put this understanding of balance in jeopardy. In the first years of their presence in Lebanon, the state has given citizenship to single Palestinians and mostly Christians. In 1994 additional 150 000 Palestinians were granted citizenship, but again, most of them were Christians⁵⁴. This one-time move was then strongly criticized as confessionally motivated, aimed at increasing the number of the Christian population in Lebanon and maintain their demographic majority in the times when the numbers have already shifted in favor of the Muslims. Ever since the idea of giving citizenship to Palestinians became even more sensitive, controversial and strongly objected by other communities.

The arrival of the Palestinians in Lebanon has been particularly challenging for the confessional status quo. It is interesting to observe how the confessional factor influenced different responses in dealing with the Palestinian presence – how variously their presence was tolerated or rejected by the Lebanese. Scholars conducting studies on the status of Palestinian refugee community emphasize the particularity of spatial dimension of their exclusion by describing the framework of Palestinian settlement using the term of “campscapes”⁵⁵. Leonardo Schiocchet who conducted an ethnographic study of life in the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon between 2008–2014 and was particularly interested in the relationship between the camps and their urban surroundings, has brought up the unique status of Dbayeh refugee camp. Inhabited solely by Christian Palestinians and functioning in close proximity to the city of Jounieh, located in northern part of Lebanon – territory widely considered to be the Christian stronghold⁵⁶. It was the only camp that got “absorbed” by

⁵⁴ M. Howe, *Palestinians of Lebanon*, “Middle East Report” 2005, vol. 12, no. 5, pp. 145–155.

⁵⁵ D. Martin, *From Spaces of exception to ‘Campscapes’*, pp. 9–18. See also: N. Abujidi, *Urbicide in Palestine. Spaces of Oppression and Resilience*, Routledge, New York 2014.

⁵⁶ L. Schiocchet, *Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon: Is the Camp a Space of Exception?*, “Journal of Middle East and North Africa Migration Studies” 2014, vol. 2, no. 1, pp. 142–174.

the urban surrounding, breaking the rule of the camp as a space of exclusion. Dbayeh was also the only exception to the rule of relative autonomy given to the other Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon. As it was located deep in the Lebanese Christian territory, it was from the beginnings under pressure from the Lebanese Christian militias and never managed by the PLO or other Palestinian institutions. According to Schiocchet, for this reason it ceased to exist as a refugee camp and assimilated to the Lebanese surroundings as a poor, marginal neighborhood. However, this possibility of assimilation existed only insofar as its Palestinian refugees were all Christians⁵⁷. It became an exceptional camp in the Lebanese context because it was the only space in which a regime of assimilation was put in practice, rather than a regime of complete segregation. Schiocchet however immediately adds to this conclusion, that “This was by no means a “positive” development. It is better appreciated as another form of population control. (...) This characterization is based on the effacement of the Palestinian character of the population through the maximization of the Christian component of its identity”⁵⁸.

In result of their placement on the margins of the Lebanese political system, manifested spatially by closing them in the provisory camps, the Palestinians did not constitute a community that could be acknowledged in the Lebanese consociationalism. They have been operating in the environment determined by the confessional milieu, but have not become a “confessionalized” community as the Armenians in Lebanon have, the *ta'ifa* (*tawa'if* in plural), which in Arabic designates a “sect” – in the sense of a socio-political organization based on religious affiliation upon which the Lebanese state system is based. The confessional system strengthens internal confessional relations and ethnicizes religion, bringing it closer to categories such as nationhood. In case of the Palestinians religion remains one of the categories strongly affecting identity and sense of social belonging, but not more than the question of nationality. In the Lebanese context, the religious component of the Palestinian identity seems less sensitive than the national one, which in turn gets even more sensitized due to the community’s displacement and their secondary status as refugees. In case of the Armenian community, the national component did not produce any particular tension in the Lebanese context.

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 159–160.

⁵⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 159.

Finally, what also seems significant in the case of the Palestinian community is that it lacked confessional structures and hierarchies, which in case of the Armenian community came with the refugees and were installed in Lebanon. The Armenian Catholicos of Cilicia was seated in Antelias (north of Beirut) in the 1930s. The argument related to the existence of a formal organization of the community under the leadership of a confessional institution seems significant while comparing the cases of the two communities. It also underlines the importance of religious hierarchy and institutions in advocating the process of adaptation into the confessional system. As for the system's functioning, it illustrates the principal role of the religious authorities that seem to operate as intermediators in the process of integration of a community into the confessional system. Even though the clergy seems to be in the shadow of mainstream confessionalism, whose forefront is dominated by political rivalries between the secular communal leaders, it remains a behind the scenes kingmaker of the system. We can then assume that religious institutions operate as connectors, or to put it in other words, without existing religious institutions a community is not 'equipped' to enter the confessional system and cannot be included in it. In result, such community risks the fate of marginalization.

CONCLUSION

The examined flexibilities and constraints are linked to opportunities and limits that accompany the system's reaction to challenge. The two cases recalled above show contrasting responses of the system and become quite informative about its dynamics. "The Lebanese Armenian success story", as it was quoted above, was possible firstly because it began on the early stage of the system's formation. The internal communal organization, hierarchy and structure of leadership were also shaped and determined along with the system's developments. No major concession then was required to recognize the community in the power-sharing. At the moment of the proclamation of the Lebanese Republic, the Armenian people were already in Lebanon with their communal organization molded according to the demands of confessionalism. It was not that much the flexibility of the system that enabled inclusion of the new community, but rather the instance of parallel formation of confessionalism and of the Lebanese Armenians – an interactive process which might be also called their

“confessionalization” next to “lebanonization”. Incorporation of the Armenians represented by the recognition of their churches among the historical communities of Lebanon along with the Armenian language as one of the national languages, prompts interesting questions about mutual influences and interaction between the state and the community. If the Armenians were “lebanonized”, what impact this process has left on the Lebanese national culture? Can we say that the Armenian culture may be now recognized as the component of Lebanese national culture and would it mean the Lebanese national culture is some sort of a conglomerate?

On the other hand, rejection of the Palestinian community and locating them on the margins from the start as “stateless refugees” hinted at the system’s constraints, rigidity and ultimate inability to adapt to changing circumstances, which has also determined its fiasco in the longer perspective. The reason lies in the lack of agency, the Lebanese state is often labelled as the invisible institution which could be compared to a negative, standing in the shadow and allowing the communities to take primacy. Like a mold that was created only to produce the cast, the Lebanese state was created only to pass its powers and competences to the confessional communities. This model of consociationalism does not envision the state as an independent actor, which in this view is reduced to a domain subjected to the communities and divided according to their interests and current power relations. Therefore, there is no buffer zone between the competing communities, capable to act as an independent, non-confessional agent, mediator setting grounds for the debate concerning the relationship of the state with the communities on the other side. There was no framework to be used in order to work out a solution for cases such as the Palestinian one. The Armenian example did not offer much of inspiration as well, as their assimilation process accompanied the establishment and development of Lebanese institutions from their nascent period.

Migliorino offers a similar observation by indicating at opportunities and limits of the Lebanese system. In his view, the opportunities were constituted by the principle of cultural autonomy provided for the communities, while limits were the weaknesses that led to the civil war and in a way “betrayed” the Armenian hopes for Lebanon as the newly adopted homeland⁵⁹. However, the conclusion from his analysis

⁵⁹ N. Migliorino, *The Lebanese system and the Armenian cultural diversity between yesterday, today and tomorrow. Opportunities and limits*, [in:] A. Boudjikianian (ed.), *Armenians of Lebanon*, pp. 479–500.

could be that the very same factor operates as both – an opportunity and a limit, depending on the context. What in the first case is referred to as the autonomy granted by the state, allowing communities to preserve their identity and thrive, in the other becomes one of the sources of the state's weakness (resulting from the state stepping aside in favor of the communities' primary role). Excessive autonomy of groups does bring the risk of a weak and absent state, and in Lebanon it was precisely the case, which leads to the conclusion that these two phenomena may operate like two sides of the same coin.

Finding a solution to this dilemma requires working out a more comprehensive formula of relations and division of power between state and community. Consociationalism does not imply that the survival and success of a community must come at the expense of the state. Reducing it to a settlement in which the notion of the state is vague and invisible, its institutions exploited and unable to intervene is counterproductive. In the longer run it promotes antagonisms and traps the communities in the defensive mode. The status of the Armenians in Lebanon as newcomers and an adopted group, to a certain degree facilitates their questioning and constant reflection on their relationship with the Lebanese state, their identity, role and place in the society. This debate, however, should be initiated in each of the Lebanese confessional communities and then design institutions that represent more than just the principle of proportionality.

Interestingly, in discussing the future of the Armenian community in Lebanon, Migliorino points at the growing rift between the ideology of the leading Armenian parties (Dashnak and Hunchak) and the community which, in his view, has been gradually "discovering itself as Lebanese"⁶⁰. The parties in turn seem to fail to follow the demands of contemporary Armenian Lebanese diaspora, which has been in dire need of new formulas of coexistence and building new strategy for the preservation of Armenian diversity in Lebanon. Both parties, but especially Dashnak, have also been criticized for hegemony over the Armenian church and the communal institutions. The community's growing disapproval concerns extensive interference and control of local administration and economic life, as the party members are being accused of maintaining their own informal means of enforcement, often involving violence and intimidation⁶¹. It indicates the growing

⁶⁰ N. Migliorino, *(Re)constructing Armenia in Lebanon and Syria*, p. 187.

⁶¹ *Ibidem*.

need to renegotiate the relationship with their representatives, which in turn cannot be done without the greater framework of reforming confessionalism. The system in large extent favors and preserves the authoritarian nature of power relations between the community and their leaders. The problem of oligarchic rule and leadership monopolized in the hands of few political parties has become a major concern for each of the 18 confessional communities of Lebanon.

In spite of the Armenian support and contribution to the restoration of the Lebanese consociationalism after the war, the community's internal debate about the shape of the community, their leadership, the place and role of the Armenian factor in the entire confessional system remains far from conclusion. The effort however should be collective, as the discussion regarding the future shape of confessionalism should be undertaken by multiple social circles groups (not only confessionally based) and continue parallelly on the communal, as well as the state level. The discourse should be also broadened to include the status of the Palestinian refugees, regardless of the timing and framework of their return to Palestine.

The described above structural, institutional and social barriers in Lebanon remain major obstacles to the integration of Palestinians into Lebanese society. It is however worth to note that despite their longtime status as second-class asylum seekers, the Palestinians in Lebanon have increasingly claimed a right to be in Lebanon (especially the right to work) alongside the right to return to Palestine. Even in the new conditions resulting from the civil war, that often expressed new dimensions to their already conflicted presence, the community negotiates its attachment to and relationship with both here (Lebanon as country of residence) and there (homeland) without intending to assimilate. Without being legitimated nor feeling welcomed, the Palestinian presence in Lebanon continues faced with new legal restrictions imposed by the Lebanese state – as Ilana Feldman writes – with new intensities of social and political marginalization from Lebanese publics and continuously denied a discursive place in the polity and in debates about the country's future, even as they proved to have been a major political force. Still, the community, constantly in the process of recovering from subsequent conflicts, starting from the civil war, then the 2006 Israeli invasion, the Nahr al-Bared conflict in 2007, insist on rebuilding their camp houses, not temporary tents⁶².

⁶² I. Feldman, *Conflicted presence*, p. 207.

After the Taef Agreement the political class of Lebanon has not revealed much interest in launching the debate. Postwar reconstruction of the state under the aegis of the Lebanese confessional elites allied with the Syrian regime has focused solely on economy, leaving far behind sensitive issues such as the design of the consociational system or reform in terms of relations between the state and the religious groups⁶³. Suffice to say that the Lebanese parties could not even agree on the common history curriculum for primary and secondary schools. The special state commission established after the civil war in order to produce one textbook and unified curriculum to teach the history of Lebanon, found it impossible to compromise on what the book and program should include⁶⁴. In 2023, the question concerning the future and viability of the Lebanese consociational model undergoes one of the greatest crises and reaching its critical point, the need for the interconfessional debate and new solutions seems more pressing than ever.

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⁶³ More: K. Gebara, *Reconstruction Survey: The Political Economy of Corruption in Post-War Lebanon*, Lebanese Transparency Association, Beirut 2007; R. Naba, *Rafic Hariri un homme d'affaires premier ministre*, Harmattan, Paris 1999.

⁶⁴ A. Messarra, *La culture citoyenne dans une société multiconmunautaire. Le Liban en perspective comparée*, Librairie Orientale, Beyrouth 2013.

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