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THE MARDINITE COMMUNITY IN LEBANON: MIGRATION OF MARDIN'S PEOPLE



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PREFACE

ORSAM published a comprehensive report titled “The Forgotten Turks: Turkmens of Lebanon” in 2009. This report had undertaken an elaborate study aimed at uncovering the Turks living in Lebanon. In the following six years, we have witnessed the developing of relations between Turkey and the Turkmens in Lebanon. Meanwhile, we have seen that there are more Turkmen settlements in Lebanon and felt the need to update the report. With the support of the Republic of Turkey, Presidency of Turks Abroad and Related Communities, we have conducted a field research in order to update the report and republished it in June 2015 under the title, “Turkey-Lebanon Friendship Bridge: The Turkish Presence and the Ottoman Heritage in Lebanon.” This report has also covered the communities in Lebanon such as the Mardinite community with their historic bonds with Turkey, the Cretan Turks, the families from Anatolia and the Circassians.

These reports have shown that a comprehensive study is required for each of these individual communities. It has led to an undertaking for a separate report about the Mardinite community in Lebanon. Residing majorly in Beirut and Baqa'a, the Mardinite community in Lebanon has originated from the people who migrated from the south east of Turkey for economic reasons. They maintain close relations with Turkey and some of them even preserve their Turkish citizenship. This report has determined that approximately 30,000 Mardinite people live in Lebanon of which approximately 15,000 have Turkish citizenship. Authored by Selcan Özdemirci, an assistant researcher in the Middle East Institute of the University of Sakarya, this report deals in detail with a wide array of issues such as the history of the Mardinite community in Lebanon, their identity perceptions, their reasons for migration to Lebanon, their main problems and solution proposals to these problems. We hope to cover a significant gap with this comprehensive study.

First and foremost, we would like to express our gratitude to Mr. Çağatay Erciyes, Turkey's Ambassador to Beirut. Continuing on the efforts of his predecessors, Mr. Erciyes attaches great importance to academic studies about the Turks in Lebanon. Due to his encouragements for writing this report and laborious efforts during the field research, he deserves to be mentioned as one of the people who labored the most for this report. Secondly, we thank Selcan Özdemirci for the field research that she conducted in Lebanon and this elaborate report. In addition, we wish to express our gratitude to Gülşen Sağlam, a Mardinite from the Yeni Nesil Association who provided a tremendous aid to the field team by arranging the required interviews. Lastly, we extend our sincere thanks to the entire Mardinite community and their representatives who have dedicated their precious time and shared their valuable information with us. We wish everyone a good read.

Assoc. Prof. Şaban Kardaş
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ABSTRACT

In Lebanon where eighteen different sects live, the rhetoric of the social and political structure is constructed through sectarian differences. Relying on a sectarian quota system, the country lives through difficult problems in many central topics such as minorities, political representation and social rights. This research focuses on the minority community in a historical perspective who migrated from Mardin to Lebanon in various times for various reasons and aims to put forth their problems learned through interviews and field observations. This report seeks to show that the Mardinites in Lebanon who does not form a homogeneous community, have different referents for their identity perceptions, therefore ignoring these basic differences are effective in their political problems.

As of 22 February 2017, the number of Turkish citizens in Lebanon registered to the Turkish Embassy in Beirut is 18,642. The Mardinites comprise the eighty five percent of this number. Besides, the Turkish Embassy in Beirut estimates that the total number of the Mardinites living in Lebanon is approximately between 25,000 and 30,000. There are three distinct ethnic groups – Aramites/Assyrians, Kurds and Arabs, and two religious groups –Syriac (Orthodox Christians) and Muslims (Sun-

ni) - among the Mardinites in Lebanon. Yet, the current literature on the Mardinites in Lebanon falsely labels them as the Kurds in Lebanon as a whole. Kurds are approximately 10-15% of the total Mardinite community in Lebanon. Nevertheless, they have been labeled as Kurds for long years. Currently, the Mardinites have been raising their voices against that. As a matter of fact, the departure point for this research is the complaints of the Mardinites with regard to their labeling and problems relayed to ORSAM through the Turkish embassy in Lebanon in 2016.

The Lebanese Christians had embraced the Mardinite Syriac when they first came to Lebanon, and they had gone through an easier adaptation period in which their basic needs were met by the Christian community and foundations. Having no serious problems in their social lives, the Syriacs have chosen to avoid politics in Lebanon. They have largely identified themselves through religion and gone through a quick integration period. At the same time, the Arab Mardinites identify themselves over references to Turkey or Lebanon. The Merdallites identify themselves as Turkish people with Arabic descent, Mardinite Arab, Lebanese Turk or just Mardinite. The Merdallites that we talked to complain that “They understand

that we came from Turkey due to our accent, Kurds speak either in Kurmanji or in Ammi language but the Lebanese people call us 'Kurds'. We want to change that."

There are four reasons for the Mardinite migration to Lebanon: War and compulsory military service, rebellion and instability, the declaration of the Republic of Turkey, the identity politics of the period and economic problems. The Mardinites who had to move to Beirut temporarily due to these problems, currently have various problems that could be categorized in four main titles such as citizenship, education, social exclusion/nationalism and political representation.

The Mardinites were first regarded "stateless" and they had to endure a long struggle to obtain citizenship. Inhibitive practices about the Mardinites' citizenship which lasted until 1994 had both complicated social harmony and had caused various basic problems of the Mardinite community in areas such as education, health and labor, which had basically led to the exclusion of the community from both public and social life. They also remarked that they had problems about obtaining Turkish citizenship. They demand that the process for obtaining citizenship to be accelerated with new legal regulations and measures concerning the difficulties about acquiring the required documents.

Younger members of the Mardinite community who are of university age have complained that the universities do not admit them because of their ethnicity regardless of their grades in the entrance exams. They also remark that they are being reminded of they are not genuine Lebanese and need to find a "vasita (mediator)"¹ in order to enter a university of find a good job. Those among the younger Mardinites who want to receive education in Turkey uttered their various problems. They ask for support in order to get education in Turkey. They also state that they

cannot benefit from the scholarships that Turkey provides for Lebanon. In addition, they expect assistance from Turkey for unemployment which is another serious problem in Lebanon. For that they seek to foster closer relations with the Turkish companies working in Lebanon and look for employment opportunities.

The Mardinites think that they should have political representation based not on religious denominational identity but on their ethnicity like the Armenians². They demand that at least 1 of the 27 seats reserved for the Sunnis in the Parliament should be given to them. The current political system does not enable representation for Mardinites and seem to take their support for the Sunni bloc as granted. Yet, the Mardinite community cannot redress their problems since they have no representation in the Parliament. Nonetheless, the Mardinites have for the first time won the Municipal Authority and a seat in the Municipal Council in the local elections of 2016.

Remarking that each of the social groups in Lebanon has a protector, the Mardinite community states that they suffer inhibitions in social and public life due to their ties with Turkey and foreign status, therefore they as more material and moral support from Turkey. The Mardinites have started developing a significant identity and self-consciousness since they obtained citizenship in 1994 and have become more vocal against those who regard all migrants from Turkey as Kurds. Turkey's policies for developing closer relations with the Middle East as well as increased education and citizenship opportunities might have had some effect on the identity building and self awareness of the Mardinites. They remark that civil society organizations formed by Mardinites such as the New Generation Society, Ravda Cultural Center, the Lebanon Turkish Youth Center as well as Turkish or-

ganizations such as Turkish Cooperation and Development Agency (TİKA) and Yunus Emre Foundation are very helpful for them. Yet they also state the need for an

umbrella organization which will gather all these organizations and provide infrastructure for them in order to solve their problems.

INTRODUCTION

Governed under the system of consociational democracy ruling over a heterogeneous population Lebanon is a distinctive and important country in the Middle East which has influence over the entire region. Its parliamentary democratic polity is shaped with confessionalism (taifiyye). The sectarian quota system not only determines the political and administrative structure but also regulates all aspects of social and public life such as public institutions, army and social life. For this reason, sub-national groups with respect to ethnicity and religion have a great influence over the social life and political order of the country. In this sense, there is a variety of identities that the people in Lebanon adhere to rather than a single Lebanese identity. While the political system in Lebanon sought to preserve the social integrity by guaranteeing the existence of the “other”, it has deepened the current conflicts among the major sects in practice by underlining the differences.

The quota system that is applied in all areas from the government to elections, civil servants and private firm operates in favor of certain social groups excluding the other social groups from social and political life. It should be kept in mind that the current

sectarian quotas in Lebanon are not defined in accordance with population since no population census has been held in the country since 1932. The demographic structure in Lebanon has profoundly changed particularly after the civil war (1975-1990) as the Christians emigrated to other countries and Muslims –particularly Sunnis- immigrated to Lebanon due to the Syrian civil war and Israel’s attacks against Palestine. While the demography is changing, the political system shows no elasticity thereby limiting any chance for genuine political representation for social groups. In this context, the Mardinite community is among the “social others” as the “subaltern” of the system. This report aims to provide a historical perspective for the social and political situation of the Mardinite people who migrated to Lebanon for different reasons in different time periods and illustrate their basic problems through interviews and field observations. This report also shows that the Mardinites in Lebanon, who are wrongly called the Lebanese Kurds, are not a homogeneous group and define their identities over different reference points therefore their political problems are caused by a prevalent ignorance about their internal differences.

1. THE MARDINITES AS A SUBALTERN GROUP

The Mardinites who have been living in Lebanon for a long time can possibly be defined as a subaltern group in Antonio Gramsci's terms. While Gramsci used the term *subaltern* to indicate what the concept of proletariat does not cover, Ranajit Guha and Gayatri C. Spivak, scholars on post-colonial India, utilized the concept to refer to the people and groups who lost their chances at upwards –and outwards– social mobility.³ Endowed with the ability to speak as a basic feature, the agent builds its own existence through muted masses thereby excluding the subaltern from the social and political domain. The subaltern who is excluded in social, economic and cultural sense appears to be torn between in the threshold of *agentness*. Gramsci states in the *Prison Notebooks* that the subaltern classes which cannot fit in the mechanisms of the society will not be able to unite until they become a *state*; therefore their history is intertwined with those of civil society, states and state groups.⁴

In other words, one needs to read the history of the state that keeps the subaltern groups down in a different manner and analyze the effects of the historiography over the subaltern groups in order to define them and probe their potential to become an agent. That is because, “the historian needs to observe and discover the line of development from the primitive era to the autonomy that leads to unity.”⁵ In this framework, the subaltern is related to *some of the others*⁶ and one needs to study the identity and the history of the society that the identity is constructed within in order to initiate research about the potential for giving voice to the Mardinites who were silenced in the political domain. For this reason, this report rereads the history of the Mardinites shaped in Lebanon with a view to researching the potential for political representation and the main problems of the Mardinite community that are caused by their identity.

2. THE DIFFERENCES AND THE STAGES OF IDENTIFICATION

Many studies have regarded the Mardinite community in Lebanon as the Lebanese Kurds and have handled this heterogeneous group which migrated from Turkey in different times under the Kurdish identity. For example, while Guita G. Hourani highlights the in-group differences of the Mardinities in her comprehensive report, *The Kurds of Lebanon: Socioeconomic Mobility and Political Participation via Naturalization*, she nonetheless calls them Lebanese Kurds.⁷ The report by David McDowall on the subject also identifies the Mardinities as Kurds and explains them the majority of the Kurdish population in Lebanon which is almost 70,000 in number⁸ came from Mardin.⁹

In contrast to the conventional wisdom, our field observations and interviews with the Mardinite community in as well as detailed scrutiny of the present literature have shown that this community is composed of people belonging to different ethnic and religious identities and define themselves along these differences. This observation has been confirmed during the interviews by asking the interviewees

about their identification, language, religion and migration stories. In this context, the Mardinite community in Lebanon has three main ethnic subgroups: Aramites/Assyrians¹⁰, Kurds and Arabs. In religious sense, there are two groups: Syriac (Orthodox Christian) and Muslim (Sunni).

In Lebanon, the social groups identify themselves on religious denominations, yet the Mardinities are an exception. While the Arabs (Merdalites) reject being included in the Sunni bloc for social and political reasons, they identify themselves as Turkish Arabs¹¹ and view the Kurmanji-speaking Kurds and Christian Syriacs as ethnic and religious others. The Kurds distance themselves from the other Mardinities, while religion does not play an important role for their identity. Religious identity has been the main factor for the Syriac people who have been integrated into the Orthodox Christians in Lebanon. In the final analysis, one can argue that the Mardinite community in Lebanon is composed of three distinct social groups that are Syriac Christians, Arabs (Merdalites) and Kurds.

3. A QUICK OVERVIEW OF THE REGIONAL HISTORY

“Rebel against the empire and the heavenly laws if you must, but remain faithful to yourself and your inner light which is a part of wisdom and Divinity!” (Mani A.D. 216)

The first human settlements in Mardin, which is one of the oldest cities in Mesopotamia and one of the first destinations of Turks in Anatolia, dates back to the paleolithic era. Having embraced countless religions and different peoples, Mardin holds a special place in the Mesopotamian civilization. All groups within the cluster of the Mesopotamian civilization sometimes achieved integration and fought one another in other times, thereby forming an interaction that makes it hard to distinguish among them. Mardin is a precious example where all aspects of this interaction can be observed. The Mardinite identity serves as an umbrella where neither Syriacs can be distinguished from Kurds nor Kurds can be kept apart from Arabs. While the Mardinite community in Lebanon is handled under three groups in terms of ethnicity and religion, this report underlines that all three groups are strongly engaged with each other and enjoy a common cultural heritage that is shared through their emigration experience and uses the term “Mardinites” to cover all of them.

From Mardin to Lebanon

Various communities lived in Anatolia throughout history: Sumerians, Akkadians, Babylonians, Karamanids, etc. Known to house human settlements since the Paleolithic era (50.000 B.C.), Mardin has for a long time stood out for its multicultural, multilingual and multireligious character

that hosted different cultures and political structures. It was integrated in the Ottoman Empire during the reign of Selim I, with the conquest of the Mardin Citadel (1518) and was placed under the authority of the governor in Diyarbakir. It would be useful to remind that the territories of both Syria and Lebanon were captured during the reign of Selim I in order to better understand the spirit of the period and the movement of the people in the region. Considering the commercial, economic, social and organic links between the communities living in the southeast of Anatolia and in Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq in historical perspective, individual or mass migration is not only a way of escaping from political circumstances for the sake of personal safety but also a way that daily life is conducted.

The Battle of Marj al Dabiq (1516) that took place in the north of Aleppo between the Mamluk Sultanate and the Ottoman Empire had paved the way to the Caliphate and the dominance in the Middle East for the latter. Sultan Selim I conquered the territories of Syria, Lebanon and Palestine after this battle. The local people who adhere to the Sunni sect submitted to the Ottoman rule while for the people with different identities, a period of continues fighting that would last till the modern times had begun. The struggle by the Druze and Maronite communities ensued for dominance in the Mount of Lebanon against each other and the Ottoman rule resulted not only in a troubled administration system in the region but also a large civil war in 1860.¹² Having governed the region for a long time through the centrally appointed governors, the Ottoman Empire endorsed a system of co-governorship under Western pressure, yet it did

not achieve an end to the fighting among the Druze and the Maronite communities. After the World War I, France asserted its dominance in the region and Lebanon remained under the French mandate until 1943.

The mandatory rule by France¹³ in Lebanon started in 1920 and laid the foundations of the *consociational democracy*, which stands at the root of many problems that the country endures today. New border lines in the mandate that the League of Nations granted to France ensured that the Muslim population remained high and the Maronites depended the French support to assert their political superiority. In the Lebanese constitution, which took the constitution of the 3rd French Republic as a model, rates of representation for each sectarian group was defined in accordance to the population census held in 1932.¹⁴ According to that census, 785,543 people lived in Lebanon and the Maronites constituted the majority with the proportion of 51.7%.¹⁵ This census is important not only that it has determined prevailing quotas and regulations about a range of issues from political representation to social order, legal proceedings and public employment but also it is the only census that has been held in the country.

Maronites initially gained economic power due to their privileged status during the French mandate, yet have lost their demographic majority status in the later years because of emigration and the increasing Muslim population. Nevertheless, they maintain their privileged political position to which other ethnic and religious groups object to, for no other census for determining political representation has been held. When Germany invaded France during the World War 2, Lebanon took the chance and declared independence. Yet, France continued to exercise its mandatory powers over Lebanon until it acquired its actual independence in 1943. Muslim and Christian leaders had left their quarrels aside, united against the mandate and

agreed upon the administrative regulations of independent Lebanon by forming the "National Pact" in 1943.¹⁶ Accordingly, Lebanon would be a parliamentary democracy shaped by confessionalism (*ta'ifiyye*) in which there would be a Maronite President, a Sunni Prime Minister, and a Shiite Chairperson for the Parliament that would have a Christian-Muslim ratio of 6/5. Even though the National Pact provided consensus for independence, the continuity of the sectarian political system prolonged the problems. The power sharing was updated with the Ta'if Accords (1989)¹⁷ in which the quotas for parliament seats were changed into what is still used today. The problems that Lebanon endures both in its domestic politics and in its relations with regional and extra-regional actors are rooted in this structure. Lebanon has gained its independence, yet has also maintained the basic political structure that the French had shaped. Therefore, Lebanon has carried along all the problems that this structure caused throughout its history up to now.

Having acquired its independence from France in 1943, Lebanon has still not been able to solve the problems caused by its colonial past and current political structure. Inter-group differences in Lebanon with regard to ethnicity and religion have become a focal point for foreign actors who carried out their interventions by exploiting these differences. Disagreements and conflicts within the country increased as Lebanon endured the spread of the conflict and invasion in Palestine into its own territory after the founding of Israel (1948) and the exile of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) to Lebanon. The conflicts escalated into a civil war in 1975 which continued until 1989.¹⁸ While it is true that the civil war in Lebanon started after the arrival of the Palestinian people, it would be useful to keep in mind that the civil war had more than one cause and Lebanon's own structural problems brought about such a long and violent civil war. The Lebanese civil war opened

the country to further interventions by Syria and Lebanon, as South Lebanon remained under the Israeli occupation and Syria refused to withdraw its troops from the Lebanese territory even after Israel left the country.

The Ta'if Accords in 1989 had settled down the civil war for a while, yet Syria found opportunities to encourage itself for its "Grande Syria" ideals. As a matter of fact, Syria deployed its soldiers in the Lebanese territory, under the pretext of the Israeli occupation and sought to improve its influence on Lebanon. Having enjoyed total dominance over Lebanon until the assassination of Rafik Hariri (2005), Syria had to withdraw in 2005 amidst increasing international pressure, objections from Lebanon and allegations of committing the assassination¹⁹, yet it did not forsake the status of the protector of Lebanon.

The political actors in Lebanon gathered into two groups depending on their perspective of the Syria-Israel question. According to the March 8 bloc led by the Shiite Hizbullah, "Israel is the number one enemy and Syria, the country of our cousins who shed blood for Lebanon's stability is Lebanon's most important ally..."²⁰ Nevertheless, for the March 14 coalition

composed of anti-Syria actors led by the Future Movement, "Syria has always wanted to dominate Lebanon, has never seen Lebanon as a separate country and is responsible for assassinations and political crisis in Lebanon". While Israel is an enemy, Lebanon should not be a front for the Arab-Israeli war and stop being an element in the warmongering policies of Hizbullah, Syria and Iran, rather must strive for its sovereignty.²¹

At the end of the day, Lebanon has been transformed into a structure different from that of nation-states in which a central state authority is non-existent and sub-state groups which enjoy foreign and international support are expected to engage in a perpetual struggle against each other. Such a dual structure has enabled political representation for a small group within the society; therefore those who do not belong to either one of the main groups were forced into a passive subaltern position. Under such circumstances, the fact that survival as a group depends on ethnic or religious identity and the degree to which that identity is granted recognition in the political and social center clearly depicts the difficulties that the subaltern groups such as the Mardinites experience in their struggle for existence.

4. THE COMMUNITIES THAT MIGRATED FROM MARDIN TO LEBANON

Throughout its history, Mardin hosted various civilizations and became a symbol of diversity. Accordingly, the Mardinite people who migrated to Lebanon also have diverse characteristics. This report identifies them as “the Mardinites,” actors in a common culture and common story of migration. Notwithstanding that, the internal differences of the Mardinites make it necessary to handle them in this report under three main subgroups: Kurds, Syriacs and Arabs.

4.1. Kurds (Kurmanji)

Kurds constitute approximately 10-15% of the total Mardinite community in Lebanon.²² While the total Kurdish population in Lebanon is currently unknown, several sources suggest the figure 75,000-100,000 at the end of the 1970s.²³ These figures include all Mardinite subgroups alongside the Kurds who came from Iraq and Syria. Nevertheless, a significant portion of the Kurds migrated to European countries such as Germany and Switzerland. The interviewees stated that Arabic and Kurdish Mardinites migrated to Europe for ensuring their safety, basic rights, freedoms and raising their living standards. They also said that they still talk to their relatives in Europe who acquired Lebanon citizenship after the civil war while living abroad.

The Mardinites have been called “Kurds” for a long time. The objections by the Arabs among the Mardinites have gradually started to attract public response. Two reasons, one historical and one socio-political, stand out for the fact that all the Mardinites in Lebanon were called Kurds. First, the Kurdish presence in Lebanon

can be traced back to the thirteenth century as most historians accept. After the Mamluk armies captured Tripoli from the European crusaders, they settled Kurdish and Turkmen tribes in the region tasked with protection.²⁴ Besides, there were also resident Turkmen and Kurdish tribes in the region during the Ayyubid reign which undertook military and administrative service.

Migration from Anatolia to the lands that is today called the Middle East has been a frequent phenomenon throughout the history and Lebanon has always been an important destination. The Kurdish tribe of Jumblatt which migrated from Hakkari is now a prominent feoffee within Lebanon. The family of Walid Jumblatt, political leader of the Lebanese Druze is an important example of the historical root and continuity of Kurdish immigration to Lebanon. After the Ottoman Empire ended the independence attempts by the Jumblatt family, the governor of Aleppo in 1605 AD, Fahreddin Ma'n, who had autonomy in Mount Lebanon, invited the family to Lebanon.²⁵ In addition, the tribes of Imad, Merabi, Abbud and Omayyi that have branches in Lebanon, Turkey and Syria are other examples of Kurdish immigration to Lebanon.²⁶ In the final analysis, the Kurdish presence in Lebanon dating back to the thirteenth century has made the country a preferred destination for the later period. In addition to the historical perspective, there is also a socio-political perspective about the Kurds' migration to Lebanon. Kurds' destination preferences have been shaped by various factors such as France's relations with the local Kurdish communities, Kurds' political conflicts in Anatolia that started during the downfall

of the Ottoman Empire and continued in the first phase of the Republic of Turkey, the social fabric of Beirut and the already existing links with relatives or kinsmen in Lebanon.

The French mandate period that started in 1920 in the territories of Syria and Lebanon that were under the Ottoman rule until the World War I has shaped the identity of the Kurds in Lebanon.²⁷ Close relations between the Bedirhan family and France were effective in many ways for the Mardinite Kurds' journey to Lebanon. Jalaladdin Bedirhan, an exiled political leader during the Ottoman era, had undertaken a series of research with French Kurdologists and intellectuals, and had been influential through both his political efforts and through his philological studies on the transcription of the Kurdish language with Latin alphabet and the reconstruction of Kurdish identity.

In the beginning of the 20th century, the Kurdish people living around Mardin and Tur Abdin migrated to regional cities from Anatolia for various reasons. Migration by the Mardinite Kurds to directly Lebanon or via Syria increased as the First World War started²⁸, and Kamuran Bedirhan's influence and power in Lebanon made the country a popular destination for Kurds. The Mardinite Kurds moved in small groups such as families, yet the biggest migration wave happened in 1925 when the Sheikh Sa'it rebellion took place.²⁹

The Mardinite Kurds' economic, political and social problems intensified in the last period of the Ottoman period and widespread migration started with the First World War. As the beginning of the 1900s saw a series of rebellions and uprisings throughout the southeast of Anatolia, economic hardships and social instability caused people to seek new places to live. According to our interviews and research, people saw this as a temporary measure and went to Izmir, Istanbul, Damascus, Aleppo and Beirut with intentions of re-

turning after collecting some money. Fast urbanization trends in the Middle East also became influential since the migration destinations leaned towards regional cities. Large cities became centers of attraction as symbols of opportunity and welfare as rural areas were identified with deprivation and poverty in economic, social and political sense.

Most of the émigré Kurds originated in the villages of Ovabaşı (Metina), Çimenlik (Merce), Söğütlü (Kinderip), Kuruköy (Cibilgrav) and Güzelağaç (Merska) around the districts of Nusaybin, Ömerli and Midyat in Mardin. The Kurds of Mardin speak in the Kurmanji dialect.³⁰ The second and third generation émigré Kurds in Lebanon mostly speak Arabic in their daily lives. Yet they prefer the Lebanon dialect rather than the Merdalli dialect of the Mardinite Arabs in Lebanon. The Mardinite Kurds in Lebanon identify themselves as Kurds and Lebanese. Kinship and tribe relations have influence over their migration routes.

Due to kinship relations dating from the Ottoman era and even from before, commercial relations and military service, the Kurdish tribes are dispersed in Lebanon, Syria and Turkey as small families thereby providing available destinations in the migration route. While some Mardinite Kurds preferred a direct route to Lebanon, others stayed first in Syria then moved on. The reasons for Kurds' migration are (i) war and forced conscription, (ii) rebellion and regional chaos, (iii) social exclusion and polarization in the new Turkey, (iv) economic problems. Since other groups had similar reasons for migration, all these reasons will be analyzed in detail in the subchapter "the Mardinites' reasons for migration".

Known for his close relations with the French, Kamuran Bedirhan made Lebanon a center of attraction for Kurds. The Kurdish migration has taken place in different times, yet two periods stand out for

their intensity. The first intense migration wave was seen when the First World War and the Sheikh Sa'it rebellion took place (1910-1925). The second wave was observed between 1940 and 1960.³¹ Kurds have three reasons for leaving Turkey in these periods: safety concerns, economic problems and political issues.

Forced conscription during the First World War (1914-1918) stands out as the first factor that triggered migration. Our interviewees stated that the first generation émigrés came to Lebanon as a way of evading conscription. Secondly, the Sheikh Sa'it rebellion in 1925 is another factor that accounted for migration. Kurds took shelter and safety among their relatives in Beirut. Lastly, the increasing unemployment and difficult living conditions in Mardin where the war years and inter-state competition took its toll led Kurds to move to Beirut, which was a regional focus of attraction in economic terms in need of more workers.

Most of the émigré Kurdish people were from the villages of Söğütlü, Kuruköy, Güzelağaç, Çimenlik and Ovabaşı and they settled mostly in Beirut and the valley of Baqaa albeit on a lesser scale. Kurds had carried out some political activities simultaneously with the independence process which affected Kurdish identity on a regional scale. The Kurds like all other Lebanese people suffered tremendously from the Lebanese civil war and some of them migrated to the European countries. After initially being regarded as "apatride" when they first came to Lebanon, the Kurds' experience on social adaptation and political representation remains similar to that of the Mardinite Arabs despite also having some varieties. The families which depended on agriculture and livestock in Mardin had to work as unqualified labor under harsh conditions in Lebanon therefore having economic and social problems which were reflected in the question for political representation. The Mardinite Kurds, particularly the first generation

émigrés, are politically more active than the other Mardinite groups and have been participation in politics via their civil society organizations or political parties such as the Kurdish Democratic Party of Lebanon, Rizgari or other groups within the March 8 bloc.

4.2. Syriacs

There are various claims about the origin of the name of Mardin. One of the claims is about the Syriac word, "marde", which means "city of citadels". The Romans continued to use that word as "Maride", while the Arabs called the settlement "Meridin/Merdin". Another claim purports that the name of the city is derived from the Arabic tribe of *Merdanis*. Among the three groups that we handle in this report, the most ancient one is the Syriac. Having contested origins in terms of geography, philology and politics, Syriacs as a community in the Mesopotamia have existed since before the Christianity. Throughout history, they have lived in many areas but today they majorly live in the southeast of Turkey, Syria and Iraq.³² The Syriac community which was integrated into the Ottoman rule in the 16th century during the reign of Sultan Selim I, had suffered deeply during the First World War and its aftermath. Once they lived in forty five villages and had eight churches around Mardin, yet they now have only one church remaining after their population reduced greatly due to immigration.³³

Ilyas Georgeous, a Mardinite Syriac priest in Lebanon, told us that the Syriac immigration started after the mobilization years. Remarking that the last period of the Ottoman Empire had been "years of oppression" for Syriacs, Georgeous stated that after the killings of some Syriac people in 1895 in Diyarbakir, threats against the Syriacs increased and tensions escalated each passing day in the following period.³⁴ From the beginning of the 20th century onwards, the Syriac people have started to migrate elsewhere such as Syria

and Lebanon. Underlining the fact that at that time they had no economic problems, Georgeous remarked that the main reason of the immigration was safety concerns. The Syrians seeking safety preferred Lebanon for a numerous Christian population lived there and Arabic was the common language. The Syrians of Mardin speak the same Arabic dialect (Merdalli) as the Arabs of Mardin. Religion is an important factor in their self-identification and they regard themselves as “Lebanese Syrians from Mardin”.

When the Syriac people first came to Lebanon, they were welcomed by Christians and received aid from religious communities and foundations, thereby having an easier adaptation process compared to the Mardinite Arabs. Having had no serious social problems, the Syriac community has preferred to stay out of active politics.³⁵ They do not have problems with being represented through the Lebanese Christian political groups since they have shown that they will adopt a moderate stance as long as they are safe. It would be safe to assume that the Syrians are the fastest group among the Mardinite émigrés with regard to social adaptation in Lebanon. In addition, the Syriac community does not have any problems in its relations with Kurds or Arabs, while lately they enjoy closer relations with Turkish Arabs. Both sides have spent considerable efforts for this. For example, Syrians showed a great deal of interest to the conference and photo exhibition organized by the Turkish Arabs titled “Mardin: Kingdom of the Sky” demonstrating that Mardin can provide an umbrella for all these groups to come together.³⁶

In the final analysis, the Syriac people of Mardin had suffered extensively under the mobilization due to their religious identity therefore war had become a major reason for their immigration. In contrast to the mass migration of the Armenians, the Syrians migrated in small families or indi-

vidually along the route towards Syria and Lebanon. The presence of Christians and kinship relations determined their migration destinations. Artisans and tradesmen among the Syrians in Mardin continued their trade in Lebanon as well.

4.3. Arabs (Merdalites)

The Mardinite Arabs, which were mostly labeled Kurds by the Lebanese people, had initially not uttered objections against such labels, however over time they have started to develop arguments about their distinct ethnic identity. The French dominance over Lebanon in the beginning of the 20th century when it was at war with the Ottoman Empire and later with Turkey was one of the reasons why Arabs had to admit being called Kurds to get accepted in Lebanon. In addition, there were other advantages that came with the identification as Kurds. The Arabs of Mardin who left their identity documents behind while running from conscription or blood feuds, did not initially develop reactions against being identified as Kurds for they managed to benefit from the social aid provided by the Bedirhani family to the Kurds.

This Arabic-speaking group (Merdalites) is the most crowded among the émigrés that migrated from Mardin. Their current population is estimated to be around 30-35 thousand, two-thirds of the total Mardinite population in Lebanon.³⁷ Reaching exact figures about population is difficult since the last population census in Lebanon was held in 1932 and the Mardinite émigrés were not given ID papers with reference to their ethnicity. It is known that there were approximately 20,000 registered voters in Lebanon who originate from Turkey. The registered number of Turkish citizens in Lebanon is 18,643 as of 2017 according to the Turkish Embassy in Beirut.

The Mardinite Arabs' migration to Lebanon shows a great deal of similarity with that of the Kurds in terms of timing, causes and destinations. At this point, it is needed to correct a widespread error in the field. The tribes of Mardalite and Mihallami are seen as two large Kurdish tribes who share a same ethnic identity but differ on language.³⁸ In fact, the Mihallami tribe living in Turkey, Syria and Lebanon is a Kurdish tribe that speaks Arabic³⁹, yet the Mardalite tribe is an ancient Arabic tribe that is dispersed in the region. The Mardalites, who moved from Mardin to Lebanon and Syria, are distinguished from the other Arabs on the account of their dialect. Since the Arabs of Mardin used to depend on agriculture for their livelihood, they suffered a great deal from regional instability and therefore had to migrate. At that point, Beirut stood out among other alternatives as a prosperous metropolis offering attractive new opportunities.

The families of Atris, Fahro, Fettah, Harb, Miri, Omari, Ramazan, Rammu, Şa'bu, Şeyhmusa and el-Zeyn are the Mardalite branches that moved to Lebanon. Almost all Arab people from the villages of Üç Kavak (Raşidiye), Ömerli (Ma'serte), Yemişli (Killis) and Söğütlü (Kinderi) around Mardin currently lives in Beirut. Beirut's outlying slum neighborhoods of Basta, Zikak Bilat, Burc Ebu Haydar, Ayşa Bakkar and Burc el-Barajne are the places where the Arabs of Mardin have been living since their arrival. In addition, a few Mardalite Arab families live in el-Hiyara and Bir Elyas in the valley of Baqaa.

The Mardalite migration took place mostly in small groups such as families. It started simultaneously with the Kurdish migration and intensified in two periods. The first period between 1920 and 1945 has seen war and rebellions. The main motivations of the Arabs who migrated in this period are threefold: war, safety and forced conscription. The two world wars and the rebellions in the southeast of Ana-

tolia had affected not only Kurds and Armenians but the entire life in the region. The Mardalites who depended on agriculture and livestock had to leave their lands due to the regional chaos. At first they regarded migration as a temporary measure and intended to "return" when the stability is restored.

For the second wave of the Arabic migration that lasted from the beginning of the 1950s to the 1970s, the main motivating factor had been economic problems. Lebanon was preferred as a popular destination due to factors such as the common language of Arabic and the presence of relatives. Once again, they regarded migration as a temporary measure and intended to return once they earn some money. They frequently made trips to Turkey and sought to invest in their villages and married people from Turkey. Such trips were sometimes disrupted by security concerns and completely stopped after the beginning of the Syrian civil war which blocked the land route. Despite that, the Mardinites have not severed their material and spiritual bonds with Mardin or Turkey, on the contrary their bonds in terms of identity, culture and relations have been strengthened lately.

The first generation of émigrés, who had worked in the agricultural sector in Mardin, worked in jobs that require physical labor such as porter and construction work. The second generation émigrés developed their labor potential and started working as small artisans, mechanics, painters and repairmen which require more qualified labor. Therefore, their economic status has been relatively enhanced. Even though they enjoy some advantages of the common Arabic language, the second generation émigrés have seen what the lack of education meant for their fathers and attached the necessary importance to the education of both themselves and their children. There are doctors, engineers and businessmen among the second generation Mardalites. The third gen-

eration émigrés, who have received higher education despite all difficulties, are multilingual and have fully been integrated into Lebanon. In our interviewees, the third generation émigrés stated that they feel both Lebanese and Turkish and have a great deal of affinity toward Turkey. In addition, the third generation seeks to learn Turkish and receive education in Turkey.

The Turks of Mardin define their identity over Turkey and Lebanon. The Merdalites identify themselves as Turkish Arabs, Mardinite Arabs or only Mardinites. The Merdalites that we interviewed complained that “They understand from our accent that we came from Turkey, Kurds speak either Kurmanji or Lebanese “ammi” language, yet the Lebanese people call us Kurds”. They state that lately they have higher awareness about their relation to and roots in Turkey and others need to take into consideration the sensitive situation about their roots. Particularly the third generation émigrés who have been born and raised in Lebanon define themselves “half Turkish half Lebanese”. Their love and interest toward Turkey are affected by the developing relations between the two countries and the Turkish cultural institutions operating in Lebanon. Young

people started having Turkish education in these centers and had the chance to get acquainted to the other families with a similar experience.

In the final analysis, the historical experience and the porous political borders in the region have made migration a widespread and natural practice among the regional people. In general, the migration from Mardin to Lebanon fits this overall course. Nevertheless, the natural course has been disrupted in two instances with pertaining to the Mardinite migration. The majority of the Mardinites living in Lebanon today belongs to the families that migrated in these two periods. The first generation of émigrés could not develop a reaction against being labeled as Kurds for there were benefits about belonging to the Kurdish identity and the French-Turkish tensions created a sense of necessity. The first émigrés had suffered a great deal from economic and social problems, which the second generation somewhat overcame. The third generation sees the Mardinite identity as a unifying factor and regards the religious and ethnic differences as secondary. Nevertheless, current political and economic problems affect the lives of the Mardinites negatively.

5. CAUSES OF THE MARDINITE MIGRATION TO LEBANON

This chapter handles the causes of the Mardinite migration under four point which were briefly mentioned in the previous chapters.

5.1. War and Forced Conscription

The First World War that took place between 1914 and 1918, and the liberation struggle in the aftermath had created an enormous need for manpower. In this period, long years of military service and heavy wartime conditions are two important factors that triggered migration. Most of our interviewees stated that their forefathers moved to Lebanon with the aim of avoiding compulsory military service.

5.2. Rebellions and Instability

The chaotic character of the region caused by rebellions and their aftermath is another cause for migration. Mardinites were motivated to find somewhere else to live for safety and stability concerns. Particularly, the Sheikh Sa'ïd rebellion of 1925 had been a turning point for Mardin and its entire people. 1925 witnessed the largest migration wave. Large and small uprisings in the southeast of Anatolia sparked instability in the region while the majority of Mardin's people fled to the major cities such as Izmir, Istanbul or Ankara, or migrated to other regional countries such as Iraq, Syria and Lebanon.

5.3. Declaration of the Republic of Turkey and Regional Policies

The third cause for the migration from Mardin is the regional effects of the newly-founded Turkish Republic's policies for national restoration. Turkey has sought to redress the wounds of the war by forming a new nation state, while at the same time the citizenship policies of the new state in its initial years had had a negative effect on non-Turks. Syriacs felt a security liability for their religion while Kurds for their ethnic identity and started moving to Lebanon and other regional countries. As the Ottoman subjects became "citizens" in the new republic, the focus on one language and one religion in the nation-state building process was perceived as a threat by the minorities, thereby triggering both migration and rebellion.

5.4. Economic Problems

The fourth and the last cause for the migration is the economic problems. From the wartime years onwards, the resources of the country were reserved for national defense while uprisings, war and stability affected the rural areas that were engaged in agriculture and livestock negatively. These widespread economic conditions were more harshly felt in the rural areas. Particularly, the fast urbanization process in the 1950s is another socio-economic cause that triggered migration to metropolitan cities in the Middle East.

6. MAIN PROBLEMS OF THE MARDINITE PEOPLE IN LEBANON

All three subgroups of the Mardinite community have been living in Lebanon for a long time. They have been experiencing various problems in every aspect of life such as their self-identity, daily life, economic problems and education. Since Lebanon is a micro-model of the Middle East with its longstanding multicultural character, its social harmony and socio-economic stability depend on the content of the social groups and enhancing of the living standards. Therefore, solving these problems is necessary not only for the Mardinite community but also for entire Lebanon.

6.1. Citizenship

The biggest problem of the Mardinite community has been the citizenship problem up to now. They have had and still having difficulties obtaining either Lebanese or Turkish citizenship. Citizenship their most urgent and most serious problem since it stands at the center of all problems that the sub-communities experience.

After long years and many hardships, were the Mardinites able to obtain their Lebanese citizenship. They still have problems obtaining the citizenship of the country they live in. at first it is needed to underline that the people of the region is gradually getting more aware of the importance of citizenship in the nation-state framework. Those people who were subjects of a great empire, yet defined themselves through their tribe, family or religious differences have been transformed into citizens after many stages such as wars, new state borders, and the reflections of nationalism in the Middle East. The Mardinites in Leba-

non have lived through these stages in a painful way.

The end of the Ottoman Empire has brought about a series of treaties which would determine the fate of the regional communities. The League of Nations confirmed the boundaries of the French mandate in accordance with the Sykes-Picot Treaty which included the provinces of Lebanon, Syria and Hatay, while the territories of Iraqi, Palestine and Jordan were left to the British mandate.⁴⁰ The Section II of the Lausanne Treaty titled "Nationality" that was signed on 24 July 1923 has been developed in order to define the status of the people living in territories carved from the Ottoman Empire. The "law on citizenship" for the French mandate on Syria and Lebanon was based on the Article 30 of that treaty. According to that, "Turkish subjects habitually resident in territory which in accordance with the provisions of the present Treaty is detached from Turkey will become ipso facto, in the conditions laid down by the local law, nationals of the State to which such territory is transferred."⁴¹ The citizenship law which stipulates that the Ottoman subjects resident in the country that is detached from the Ottoman Empire will be citizens of that new state did not in practice bring about citizenship for the Mardinites in Lebanon at that time. This is partly because of the unwillingness of local authorities and partly because of the weakness of the Mardinites to put pressure on the government.

The French which retained their mandate in Lebanon until 1943 adopted policies that encouraged Kurdish nationalism, which would reinforce their dominance in the region in their thinking.⁴² Then,

Kamuran Bedirhan, who acted as mediator between the colonial administration and the resident Kurds, had managed to acquire temporary citizenship (residential ID) for some Kurds.⁴³ The Kurds that we interviewed stated that they called these documents the “Kamuran ID” among themselves. Bedirhan’s close relations with the French and the resulting privileges caused some Mardinities to identify themselves as Kurds. Even though they had some official documents, not only they were denied basic rights and freedoms but also what they had as basic rights were limited. In this period, the majority of the Mardinities did not have a temporary citizenship document or ID, even those who had had no rights to participate in politics or social life. Since the immigrants were mostly Muslim (Sunni and Shia), the Maronites maintained their objection against granting citizenship to them fearing that the delicate political balance among the groups would change in their expense. After the French and Bedirhan left the country in 1946, the Maronites started applying harsher policies about residence permits and citizenship to minorities and immigrants.

During the Prime Ministry of Sami Sulh⁴⁴, some Mardinities managed to acquire citizenship as a result of the initiatives by Kemal Jumblatt. In 1956, the Sunni’s insistent demands resulted in some regulations which granted citizenship to 4,500 Mardinities. Nevertheless, Sunni and Maronite politicians raised objections to the regulations fearing that the Mardinitic Kurds’ political power would increase. The regulations in 1961 altered the ID documents of the Mardinities and ruled that the line “unspecified nationality (cinsiyye gayri muayyene)” to be included in their IDs. According to the regulation, the children born to minorities or immigrants would be granted Lebanese citizenship. The “unspecified nationality” line would be instrumental in denying political rights to these people and define them as “non-

Lebanese”, thereby confining them to an area of exclusion with unclear borders.

A new regulation in 1962 added the line “nationality under construction (Cinsiyye Kayd ed-Ders)” to the IDs of immigrants and minorities. They also need to renew their IDs each year. People with such IDs are banned to own property in Lebanon, serve in the state institutions or the army or cast votes in elections.⁴⁵ In other words, they can live in Lebanon, making up for the labor gap in the country by working in underpaid jobs; yet cannot determine who will govern them how, acquire political representation or economic power.

These restrictive policies over the citizenship prospects of the Mardinitic community have made social adaptation harder and created countless problems for Mardinities in education, health and labor. Rafiq Hariiri, the first Prime Minister after the civil war set up a Citizenship Commission in 1992 in order to address the status of the stateless people in Lebanon. The report of the commission work was declared as a list in the official journal dated 30 June 1994. Accordingly, 39,460 families excluding the children were granted citizenship. In this period, 7,000 Mardinities were granted citizenship.⁴⁶ Approximately 30,000 of these families had the IDs with the line “under construction (Kayd ed-Ders)”.⁴⁷ Around 157,000 Mardinities received citizenship in 1994. From then on, the social, political and economic status of the Mardinities, who had been struggling for survival, has entered a recovery period.

Among the Mardinities, those who had endured a painful process for Lebanese citizenship still have some problems about Turkish citizenship. They complain about the heavy procedure about obtaining Turkish citizenship which prevents them from applying. Those who applied state that the procedure goes very slowly and they have to spend a great deal of effort for obtaining Turkish citizenship. Some of them overcame many difficulties and

obtained citizenship but they complain that their names are written differently in their Turkish and Lebanese IDs, therefore they have difficulty in explaining authorities that the two different names belong to the same person. While they state that they are generally pleased with the work of the Turkish Embassy in Beirut, they also complain about the slow pace of their procedures due to the inadequate number of personnel in the embassy.

6.2. Education

The first generation émigrés from Mardin to Lebanon were people with low education levels who had financial hardships. Beirut became a popular destination since it needed unqualified labor such as porters, construction workers and fruit or vegetable salesmen. Their income managed to make their ends meet, yet they couldn't benefit from education opportunities in Lebanon where education is not free since they had no citizenship. Even though they initially intended to return after earning money, they had to stay in Lebanon and visit Turkey occasionally.

The second generation Mardinite émigrés had better economic conditions and in parallel they were more interested in education. Today, the third generation émigrés have adopted successfully in the multilingual structure of Lebanon thanks to their education in Arabic and foreign languages such as English and French. Even though the third generation is eager to receive education, they are hindered by paid education and expensive schools.

The young people that we interviewed explained the difficulty they had while entering universities due to their ethnic identities regardless of the grades they had when applying. They are frequently reminded of their non-Lebanese status and it is impossible for them to enter respectable universities or find a good job without having a "vasita (mediator)"⁴⁸. The young Mardinites who seek to have education in

Turkey also have some difficulties. They receive their pre-university education in the Lebanese curricula, and when they want to enter Turkish universities, they are getting stuck in the university entrance exam since they were not prepared in accordance with its requirements. At this point, they ask for support which will enable them to receive education in Turkey. In addition, the Mardinite people who are also Turkish citizens complain that they cannot benefit from the Turkish scholarship opportunities for Lebanese students.

As of the 2000s, sympathy and interest toward Turkey among the young people have soared. The Mardinite people have started developing a sense of identity and self-awareness after receiving citizenship in 1994 and now develop their reactions against being labeled as "Kurds" in a more organized manner. One could argue that the rising self-awareness and self-identity of the Mardinites were directly proportionate to both their citizenship and education level and Turkey's developing relations with the Middle East. The works of the Turkish institutions such as TİKA and Yunus Emre Cultural Centre had a positive effect on the Mardinites and sparked interest toward Turkey. The cultural activities held by these institutions formed the intra-group bonds of the Mardinites, while at the same time a Turkish teacher assigned by the Turkish Ministry of National Education gave Turkish education to young Mardinites, strengthening their bonds with Turkey as well. Our interviewees think that such activities must be held more frequently. They also stated that if they had a cultural centre of their own they would have stronger bonds with both each other and Turkey.

As a group that is curious for education and outgoing towards the world, the Mardinites still suffer from serious problems concerning citizenship and marginalization. Firstly, these young people are deprived of the necessary education to enter universities, therefore are denied the

education they deserve due to inequality. Those who entered good universities in one way or another, in turn have difficulties working in their profession. Our interviewees also uttered their difficulties in detail about obtaining legal permits or licenses for working as doctors or lawyers. They state that even though legal restrictions do not exist, the nationalist mindset and the importance of “*vasita* (mediator)” prevent them from accessing many opportunities.

In the final analysis, the Mardinites have two-fold needs in education sector: one in Turkey and one in Lebanon. At first, they need an education institution in Lebanon where they can have more information about the Turkish culture, hold culture and art activities and receive Turkish language education. In addition, they need opportunities for receiving education in Turkey, particularly for successful students who lack financial means.

6.3. Social Exclusion - Nationalism

Our interviewees defined themselves as Lebanese-Mardinites. Yet, they tell that the Lebanese still think and act like that “they are not Lebanese.” Expressing their various problems in every aspect of life from education to social life, business and daily life, the Mardinites are almost constantly faced with political exclusion. Our interviewees told us numerous examples of the difficulties they face in their daily lives and mentioned that they are treated as second class citizens. Such discriminatory practices bring about economic hardships for them as well. Most of the Mardinite people belong to the lowest segment in Lebanon in terms of income distribution.

6.4. Political representation

The sectarian structure of the Lebanese political system has resulted in the politi-

cal neutralization of the Mardinite community. The Syriacs were integrated into the Christian political groups, while the Kurds and Arabs were included among the Sunnis. It has prevented the direct representation of the Mardinites and hindered their access to the authorities which would be able to solve their problems. Our interviewees suggested that they should be granted political representation not according to their religion or sect but according to their ethnic identity like the Armenians⁴⁹ and demand that one of the 27 seats reserved for the Sunnis in the Parliament should be given to them. The current political system enables the Mardinite’s support for the Sunnis rather than the direct representation of the Mardinites, therefore they cannot participate in the political will that is needed to solve their social and economic problems.

The Mardinites have become a more coherent and organized community thanks to increasing education levels, the activities of the Turkish Embassy, TİKA and the Yunus Emre Institute and their own civil society organizations. In the local elections of 2016, they managed to elect one municipal mayor and five neighborhood governors. Lebanon’s out-of-date sectarian quota system and deadlock election system have been criticized on many levels in the last three years. Prime Minister Saad Hariri, head of the new government that was formed in December 2016, remarked that their government is an “election government” whose main purpose is making the necessary regulations in the election law.⁵⁰ There is a specific need for updating the election and quota system since the country has undergone a significant demographic transformation since 1932. Fairer and more just political representation for each group as well as the Mardinites will be possible after the necessary revamps are made.

RESULTS AND PROPOSALS

Lebanon is the home of 18 different sects, each of which are very important in terms of social categories, life standards, political processes, representation opportunities and the deepest segments of daily life. While in need of manpower, the country hosted numerous immigrants from the Middle Eastern countries such as Turkey and Syria. The Mardinites have a considerable population and are among the migrant groups in Lebanon that struggle for survival.

The Mardinite community is composed of three subgroups that are Arabs, Kurds and Syriacs. They had suffered for long years in order to acquire Lebanese citizenship. Between 1944 and 1955, a very low number of Mardinites acquired Lebanese citizenship before a significant change happened in 1994. Since then, an increasing number of Mardinites have been receiving citizenship. As the citizenship hurdle was bypassed, they managed to have better economic and social status, therefore started to have a higher awareness about their identity. They have also started rejecting being called "Sunni Kurds" and instead construct their identity as "Turkish Muslim with Arabic descent living in Lebanon". In the final analysis, their living conditions have changed for the better with citizenship, yet they still have unsolved problems. They mentioned numerous problems caused by arbitrary practices by Lebanese officials about passport operations, registration in schools or other official institutions or sales procedures. They demand assistance from officials for resolving these issues.

The Mardinite community does not have serious problems among itself in general sense. In the latest period, Syriac and Ar-

abs have been developing closer relations. Kurds are politically distinguished from these two groups. Mardinite Arabs express that they neither have problems nor have close relations with the Kurds. They observed that with the beginning of terrorist attacks in Turkey in the 1980s, the Mardinite Kurds have been marginalized among the other Mardinite groups; therefore they do not have close relations with them.

In Lebanon's multicultural society, the Mardinite Arabs have some problems about harmonization with the Armenians who also migrated from Anatolia. During the interviews, we have been informed that the Armenians, who have a strong social and economic position in the country, sometimes treat the Mardinites in a discriminatory way causing tensions between the two groups. For example, according to some Mardinites, Armenian teachers discriminate against Mardinite students in some schools. In addition, some activities by the Mardinites are protested by Armenians. In this context, political representation and marginalization are the most important problems of the Mardinite community in Lebanon, aside from economic problems.

Mentioning that each social group in Lebanon has a protector and they face numerous limitations in public and social spheres on the grounds of their ethnic identity, Turkish links and non-Lebanese character, the Mardinite community asks for more material and moral support from Turkey. TİKA has opened two cultural centers for our citizens in Lebanon, yet our interviewees remarked the need for a greater cultural center that would bring together and unify all the Mardinites in

Lebanon. Stating that the Mardinite civil society organizations such as the New Generation Society and Turkish institutions such as TİKA, Yunus Emre Cultural Center are very helpful for their own community, the Mardinites stress the need for an umbrella organization that would coordinate all these institutions and provide infrastructure for finding their own solutions to their problems. According to our interviewees, the presence of such a cultural center will enable them to look out for their cultural heritage, come together and celebrate special occasions, thereby communicate better among each other and be empowered to act together when needed. Education is another important requirement that the Mardinites care about. The Mardinites state that while many minority groups in Lebanon have their own schools, the people from Turkey do not have one; therefore a school and Turkish language education will serve to strengthen their links with Turkey. In addition, it would be beneficial in the middle to long run for both Turkey and Lebanon to provide opportunities for students seeking education in Turkey with a view to presenting them better education and more accurate information about Turkey.

Unemployment, which is one of the biggest problems of Lebanon, is an important question for the Mardinites as a subaltern group. Since they suffer from ethnic and alienatory discrimination and are excluded from social mechanisms, the Mardinites ask for employment in the Turkish companies and institutions working in Lebanon. That way, they will be able to enhance their living conditions and will be able to participate better in social life. Those who have completed their education despite all hardships cannot work in their fields of profession even though

there is no official hindrance. They have acquired their citizenship in 1994 and have no legal restrictions about membership in trade unions, yet they cannot register in professional organizations and cannot work as lawyers, engineers or doctors unless they find a “vasita”.

The lack of political representation stands at the heart of all problems that the Mardinite people suffer from. As of today, the second and third generation Mardinites was born and raised in Lebanon, and the majority of them spent their whole lives there. Therefore, it is quite natural that they demand political rights and representations. Their inclusion in the Sunni factions did not necessarily provide representation for them. In contrast with the Shiites and Christians, Sunni groups have a dispersed character which benefits the local Sunnis at the end. Therefore, the Mardinites demand a seat reserved for themselves among the 27 seat quota of the Sunnis. They think, therefore they will have a means to express their demands and carry out further work to solve their problems about political participation.

In the final analysis, the Mardinites feel that they belong both to Turkey, where they have roots, and to Lebanon, where they live. They demand Turkey's support for forging closer relations and for acquiring a stronger and more active position within Lebanon. At that point, they ask for an umbrella institution that will bring together all Mardinites under one roof. They also want more Turkish institutions to operate in Lebanon, particularly in health and education sectors. In their opinion that will enable them work together and grow stronger, therefore they will be better positioned to represent Turkey in Lebanon.

ENDNOTES

- 1 The word "Vasit" refers to someone with a powerful and influential position who may act as a protector to someone requiring a position in universities, applying for a job or seeking to finish an official procedure.
- 2 The Armenians living in Lebanon have a quota of 4 parliament seats and 2 ministers.
- 3 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "The New Subaltern: A Silent Interview", *Mapping Subaltern Studies and the Postcolonial*, ed. Vinayak Chaturvedi (Londra: Verso, 2012), 324-339.
- 4 Antonio Gramsci, "History of Subaltern Classes: Methodological Criteria", *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, ed. ve çev. Quintin Hoare ve Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1989), 52-53.
- 5 Gramsci, "History of Subaltern Classes", 52-53.
- 6 Some of the 'others': alia: sub-altern -> alterate -> alius -> et al. For detailed information see, Ebru Yetişkin; "Post Kolonyal Düşünce ve Madun Çalışmalarından Neler Öğrenebiliriz?", 13. Ulusal Sosyal Bilimler Kongresi (Ankara: Türk Sosyal Bilimler Derneği, 4-6 December 2013). For a summary: <http://www.ebruyetiskin.com/postkolonyal-dusunce-ve-madun-calismalarindan-neleroğrenebiliriz/>, (accessed on 10 October 2016).
- 7 Guita G. Hourani, "The Kurds of Lebanon: Socioeconomic Mobility and Political Participation via Naturalization", LERC Research Paper Series 1 (November 2011).
- 8 The last population census in Lebanon was held in 1932. The lack of up-to-date knowledge about the population is one of the main problems of Lebanon since it is the main factor that the whole political system is based on. It is needed to point out that the population figures expressed in this report differs in various resources. The report is based on relevant sources and up-to-date reports.
- 9 David McDowall, "The Kurds", *Minority Rights Group International Report* (1996), 39.
- 10 The ethnic origin of the Syrians is a contested issue. The Syrians present two arguments about their origin. The first argument claims to be a political community based on the Assyrians and the Babylonians. The second argument advocates the unity of Syriac people based on belief and claims to be of Aramaic descent.
- 11 The interviewees defined them as Turks with Arabic descent, Arabs of Turkey, or Turkish Arab.
- 12 Violent clashes took place between the Maronites and the Druze during the civil war. After the civil war, the Western countries increased their pressure on the Ottoman Empire and their interventions in the region. The Ottomans ended the civil war by signing the decree of Cebel-I Lübnan (Mount Lebanon) Regulations declaring that Lebanon would be ruled by a Christian citizen of the Empire.
- 13 The French occupation started in 1918. The official mandate rule started in 1920 when General Gouraud declared the founding of the Greater State of Lebanon.

- 14 Albert H. Hourani, *Syria and Lebanon: A Political Essay* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), 121.
- 15 Albert H. Hourani, *Syria and Lebanon*, 385.
- 16 For detailed information, see Ussama Makdisi, "Reconstructing the Nation-State: The Modernity of Sectarianism in Lebanon", *Middle East Report* (July-September 1996), 25.
- 17 For the full text of the Ta'if Accords, see Taif Agreement, www.un.int/lebanon, (25 November 2016).
- 18 Ümit Çelik, "İç Çatışmalar ve Dış Müdahaleler Arasında Lübnan", *History Studies* IV/1 (2012): 127-128.
- 19 For detailed information, see Youssef Chaitani, *Post-Colonial Syria and Lebanon: The Decline of Arab Nationalism and the Triumph of the State* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2007).
- 20 Veysel Ayhan ve Özlem Tür, "İçsel Dinamikler ve Ulusal Aktörler Bağlamında Lübnan Krizinin Analizi", *Akademik Ortadoğu* III/1 (2008): 2.
- 21 Ayhan ve Tür, "İçsel Dinamikler ve Ulusal Aktörler", 2-3.
- 22 The information that we gathered from the interviews suggests that there are approximately 3,000-3,500 Mardinite Kurds in Lebanon. For the population figures of the earlier periods, see Lokman I. Meho ve Farah W. Kawtharani, "The Kurdish Community in Lebanon", *The International Journal of Kurdish Studies* XIX/1-2 (2005).
- 23 Guita G. Hourani, "The Kurds of Lebanon", 33.
- 24 Guita G. Hourani, "The Kurds of Lebanon", 31.
- 25 Ayhan ve Tür, "İçsel Dinamikler ve Ulusal Aktörler", 32.
- 26 Guita G. Hourani, "The Kurds of Lebanon", 25.
- 27 From the beginning of the nineteenth century onwards, France has shown close interest toward the Kurds of Middle East and has prepared the information environment and cultural atmosphere that is needed for the freedom movements to emerge.
- 28 From the beginning of the twentieth century onwards, Lebanon has acted as a shelter for the Kurds who had economic and political problems in the southeast of Anatolia. Kurds followed the route passing through Aleppo and Dora to Beirut during this period. Bedirhan's protectorship of the Kurds resulted in the recognition of the Kurdish identity in Lebanon.
- 29 Meho ve Kawtharani, "The Kurdish Community in Lebanon", 1.
- 30 The dialect of Kurmanji (Northern Kurdish) is the most spoken dialect of Kurdish and is defined by the linguists within the northwest dialects of the Persian languages. For detailed information, see *Kurdish Northern, Ethnologue Language of the World*, www.ethnologue.com, (accessed on 1 November 2016).
- 31 Meho ve Kawtharani, "The Kurdish Community in Lebanon", 137.
- 32 For detailed information about the Syriacs, see Bülent Özdemir, *Süryanilerin Dünü Bugünü, I. Dünya Savaşı'nda Süryaniler* (Ankara: Türk Tarih KurumuYayınları, 2008).
- 33 The Syriacs did not migrate en masse, rather they traveled by small groups or families.

- 34 Interview with Ilyas Georgeous, Beirut, 17 June 2016.
- 35 Interview with Ilyas Georgeous, Beirut, 17 June 2016.
- 36 “Lübnan’da ‘Mardin Gökyüzünün Krallığı’ Konferansı”, Anadolu Ajansı, 1 June 2016.
- 37 The population figures about these groups are not known due to the general problems in Lebanon about population figures. However, 21,000 Mardinite Arabs cast votes in the last municipal elections held in December 2016.
- 38 Example to the reports that accept both Mihallami and Mardalite tribes as Kurds: “The Kurdish Community in Lebanon”, 3.
- 39 Martin van Bruinessen, “Kurdish Nationalism and Competing Ethnic Loyalties”, *Peuples Méditerranéens*, 68-69 (1994), 9.
- 40 Guita G. Hourani, “The Kurds of Lebanon”, 35.
- 41 For the relevant articles of the Lausanne Treaty about nationality, see Barış Anlaşması (Trail de Paix), Lozan 24 Temmuz 1923 (Metin), SAM, http://sam.baskent.edu.tr/belge/Lozan_TR.pdf (Accessed on 1 November 2016).
- 42 Jordi Tejel, *Syria’s Kurds: History, Politics and Society*, çev. Emily Welle ve Jane Welle (Londra & New York: Routledge, 2009), 7.
- 43 Tejel, *Syria’s Kurds*.
- 44 Sami Sulh became Prime Minister of Lebanon for five times in 1942-1943, 1945-1946, 1952, 1954-1955 and 1956-1958.
- 45 Guita G. Hourani, “The Kurds of Lebanon”, 37.
- 46 Interviews with the Mardinite Arabs.
- 47 Guita G. Hourani, “The Kurds of Lebanon”, 38.
- 48 The word “Vasita” refers to someone with a powerful and influential position who may act as a protector to someone requiring a position in universities, applying for a job or seeking to finish an official procedure.
- 49 The Armenians living in Lebanon have a quota of 4 parliament seats and 2 ministers.
- 50 “Hariri Forms National Accord Cabinet”, Daily Star, 19 December 2016.

