The Lebanese system and Armenian cultural diversity between yesterday, today, and tomorrow: opportunities and limits

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Introduction

This chapter focuses on the relation between the Lebanese political and institutional system and the establishment and development, in Lebanon, of an Armenian cultural world, here defined by a complex of elements, including a diverse language, historical heritage, tradition, and artistic expression. In particular, its objective is to approach the question of the role that the Lebanese consociational system has historically played, or *can* play – today and in the future - in consenting, or supporting the formation, preservation, and development of a Lebanese-Armenian cultural distinctiveness. How has the Lebanese political-institutional system interplayed with the cultural needs of the Armenians who settled in Lebanon as refugees in the aftermath of the Genocide? How did (and does) the Lebanese institutional environment and system of governance of ethnic diversity respond to the cultural strategies and demands of the second, third and fourth generation of descendents of those refugees? Are the responses given yesterday still adequate today, and will they be adequate tomorrow? This chapter intends to offer some preliminary reflections on questions like these.

The central argument that this short work intends to put forward is that the Lebanese system appears to have presented the Armenian community with both opportunities and limits for its cultural strategies and needs. Historically, the nature of the state in Lebanon has created, or maintained, remarkable spaces of autonomy for communal groups, including the Armenians. Communities were able to occupy and use these spaces in order to dialectically define and cultivate their ethno-cultural distinctiveness. On the other hand, the Lebanese system has repeatedly – and tragically - shown a number of weaknesses. The repeated breakdowns of the fragile Lebanese political-institutional formula have left heavy marks on the country and its society. In the case of the Armenians, the Lebanese war of 1975-1990 and the protracted economic crisis that has followed have damaged significantly their presence in the country and their cultural, communal institutional apparatus.

These considerations suggest that, if the Lebanese system played a favourable role towards Armenian cultural diversity in the past, this might no longer be the case. On the contrary, it may be that the whole state-cultural diversity dossier in Lebanon is nowadays held prisoner of a political-institutional formula that fails to reform itself, holding back progress in an area – state-cultural diversity relations – where new interesting developments have emerged in other parts of the world, both at the level of academic and philosophical reflection, and at that of political practice.

The text is structured in two parts: the first considers briefly the opportunities the Lebanese system has traditionally offered (or continues to offer) to the Armenian community in the effort to preserve/develop its own distinct cultural identity. The second contains reflections upon the limits of the system, and offers a short, but hopefully useful, contribution to the Armenian-Lebanese debate upon possible reforms, mostly drawing from contemporary reflections and experiences in other parts of the world. A conclusion follows.

The Lebanese system and the Armenians: opportunities

The first part of the argument should be comparatively easier to argue, if for nothing else, at least for the fact it appears to be largely supported by the people concerned. It is not hard to find that the Armenian-Lebanese are generally aware of the virtues of the Lebanese consociational system, even more so when they compare their condition with that of other Armenian communities in the region (for example in Syria, Iraq, Palestine). Official statements from the community's political and religious authorities and interviews with Armenian-Lebanese in various capacities and from different social or cultural backgrounds reflect a general sense of appreciation for a context which – to use the words of an Armenian school principal – allows to feel "100% Armenian and 100% Lebanese at the same time."[1]

Of course, the argument that the Lebanese system has offered opportunities to the Armenian community is not just a matter of opinion by a sample of Armenian-Lebanese representatives, however qualified. An attentive analysis of the Lebanese system and of its evolution through the years shows that the politico-institutional make-up of the country has somehow objectively contributed to the remarkable resilience of Armenian cultural diversity in Lebanon.

Lebanon is often presented as a case study in comparative political science literature dealing with the question of the accommodation or

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[1] Author's interview, *Dbayeh*, May, 2002.

coexistence of diverse communities within a polity. The Lebanese system, variously described as "consociational," [2] "power sharing," or as a "*fédéralisme à base personnelle,*"[3] is based on the mutual recognition of a number of religiously defined communities and on the principle that these communities maintain a form of political personality within the state, bearing rights and duties; these include, crucially, cultural rights.[4] The importance of this constitutional "pillar" can hardly be underestimated: it places Lebanon on a remarkably different path from the European and North American constitutional traditions, which are largely centred on the individual as the legal bearer of rights and duties vis-à-vis the state. Post-Enlightenment Western constitutionalism tends to consider ethnic or sub-ethnic identities only as dimensions of one individual's private sphere of life. The state is, ideally, "difference-blind": it does not deal with ethnic groups as such, but limits itself to guaranteeing a non-discriminatory treatment to individuals in their access to civil and political rights.

The protection of any cultural right or "right to diversity" of ethnocultural communities takes place indirectly, that is through the recognition of the cultural rights of the individual.[5]

The legal/constitutional recognition of groups in Lebanon is both deeply rooted in the traditions of the region, and closely connected with the circumstances which led to the establishment of the state in the twentieth century. The recognition of religiously-defined groups as legal persons is clearly an Islamic and Ottoman legacy, connected with the system of - however contested and renegotiated - rules and practices traditionally applied in dealing with Christian and Jewish diversity. But also, the recognition of groups is connected with the political needs and priorities of the French colonial authorities during the Mandate, in the context of the creation of the country in 1920. Finally, it relates to old traditional practices of coexistence, conflict resolution and compromise which marked the history

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[2] Arend Lijphart, *Democracy in plural societies*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1977.

[3] Antoine Nasri Messarra, *Théorie générale du système politique Libanais*, Paris, Cariscript, 1994, pp. 52-112.

[4] On the concept of "cultural rights," and on the debate that it raises, see C. Kukathas, "Are there any cultural rights?", in *Political theory*, Vol. 20, 1992, pp. 105-139.

[5] See the conceptual distinction between "group rights" and "individual rights" approaches to ethnocultural diversity contained in V. Van Dyke, "The individual, the state, and ethnic communities in political theory", in *World politics*, Vol. 29/3, 1977, pp. 343-369. In this influential article Van Dyke conceded two main exceptions to the dominance of the "individual rights" approach in Western political thought: the "plural society" tradition (J.S. Furnivall, M.G. Smith, L. Despres, and others), and the authors of the so-called "English pluralism" school, including in particular H. Laski, J.N. Figgis and D.H. Cole. These schools have in fact remained largely marginal in political doctrine and practice.

of the Lebanese mountain – traditions whose spirit was arguably renewed in the founding act of independent Lebanon, the "national pact" of 1943.

When considering the implications of these constitutional foundations for Armenian cultural diversity in the country, one characteristic of the Lebanese system appears particularly important: the structural weakness of the central institutions of the state, certainly a direct consequence of the practices of consociational power-sharing and crossed-vetoing. A crucial dimension of that weakness is the absence of a central agency able to promote – or impose - a strong national cultural policy. On the contrary, the system is characterized by the recognition of extensive areas of cultural autonomy for identified groups within the state. These peculiar characteristics have historically created remarkable opportunities to pursue autonomous cultural communal strategies for the "confessional families" which form Lebanese society. In Lebanon the state could never be used as a vehicle to transmit and construct solid national or regional identity models. Arabism, for example, which played such a defining role across the Middle East and North Africa in the 1950s and 1960s, was unavailable for the Lebanese state: its popularity within segmental components of the Lebanese society (most notably the Sunni community) became the banner of a dangerous *remise en question* of the national pact in 1958. Attempts to define and promote a national Lebanese identity (in the case of the *Université Libanaise*, for example) were constantly subject to the Caudine Forks of cross vetoing practices. As a result, Lebanese identity has tended to identify more with the commitment to a set of procedural rules, than with the adherence to any substantial content, the procedural rules becoming themselves the main "content" of the national community's culture.

The opportunities that the weakness of the central institutions of the state opened up have been exploited by all Lebanese communities, including the Armenians. Arguably, the Armenians have benefited comparatively more than any other, considering their conditions at the time when the bulk of the community was formed, during the 1920s: the refugees and genocide survivors, who spoke mostly Armenian or Turkish, and who came from a world culturally apart, had comparatively more cultural diversity to preserve – and more to lose - than anybody else.

Examples of the opportunities the Lebanese system has offered to the Armenians and of the positive role they played toward the preservation of an Armenian distinct identity and culture in Lebanon are many:

- One is certainly that of education, intuitively a key area of concern for any cultural community wishing to preserve its distinct identity: the structure, capacity and quality of the formal educational system, especially at the

primary and intermediate level, may play a crucial role in the preservation of language, national/ethnic history, music, dance, and – in general – cultural traditions. In this area of public policy the nature of the Lebanese system has manifested itself in two ways. First, the Lebanese state has not given priority to the establishment of a vast educational public sector, in contrast to most of the other countries in the region. In 1945, the public sector of the Lebanese educational system accounted for a mere 20.8% of the total school enrolment.[6] By 1961-62 the figure had climbed to 39.5%, but remained small compared to the 95.1% recorded in Iraq, 80.8% in Syria, 72.2% in Egypt, and 69.5% in Jordan.[7] In a trend that has largely continued until today, the private sector was given to play the leading part in the country's education, with the public sector playing only a subsidiary role.

   - Second, the state has maintained the principle that the private sector should be granted a considerable degree of autonomy: the regulatory framework that was developed during the history of independent Lebanon has consistently allowed private subjects to open schools and to organize or adapt the curricula under conditions of remarkable freedom from controls and constraints. After independence, the main pieces of relevant legislation were the Ministerial Decree 1436 of 1950, which regulated the sector of private education, and the Law of June, 15, 1956, (*Tandhim al-hayah al-ta'allimiyah fi al ma'ahid al khassah*), which set rules for the teaching bodies. With the exception of prescriptions regarding the teaching of the history of Lebanon and of the Arab world, the law merely established forms of moderate state supervision over private schools, mostly in order to offer protection to the citizens from unscrupulous and under-qualified principals and to guarantee a certain quality of education.[8]

   The opportunities offered by this regulatory context suited brilliantly the cultural strategy of the various components of the Armenian community, and the Armenian educational apparatus developed remarkably until the early 1970s. By the school year 1974-1975, the Armenian community could count on 56 primary and secondary schools, enrolling about 21,000 students, and on a few institutions offering higher education programs.[9]

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[6] Figure calculated on the basis of data contained in R.D. Matthews and Matta Akrawi, *Education in Arab countries of the Near East*, Washington, American Council on Education, 1949, p. 422.

[7] Data reported from J.K. Ragland, *The free educational system of the Republic of Lebanon*, unpublished PhD thesis, University of Oklahoma, 1969, p. 3.

[8] Ibid., pp. 68-88.

[9] These included, most notably, Haigazian University, established as "Haigazian College" in 1955. For data on the schools see particularly Jirayr Tanielian, *Lipananahay tebrotze: tiver yev mdoroumner* (in Arm., for *The Armenian school in Lebanon: data and thoughts*), Beirut, Sipan, 2002, p. 28.

A second area where the Lebanese context has offered opportunities to Armenian cultural diversity is that of personal status law. In this case too, as in that of education, these opportunities have been mostly connected with the absence of a strong regulatory "core." Up to this date, Lebanese legislation on personal status is essentially based on the scheme drawn during the French Mandate, in substantial continuity with the Ottoman tradition: most of the questions regarding personal status remain under the exclusive jurisdiction of the communities. Calls for an expansion of the role of the central institutions of the state in the management of this dossier have emerged periodically in the Lebanese political debate, but agreement on structural reforms has failed to materialize, the lack of norms regulating civil (secular) marriage being perhaps the most well-known example of these unsuccessful efforts.

The direct consequence of this context has been the consolidation and institutionalization of the role of religious authorities (or other forms of representation) of each of the Lebanese confessional communities. In the case of the Armenians, this has fit particularly well with the Armenian tradition and has contributed remarkably to the preservation of the community's distinctive identity. The central role that the Churches have historically played in Armenian societies, which goes far beyond their function as religious authorities, and includes their important significance as cultural symbols, centres of production and vehicles of Armenian culture, could be maintained and reinforced with the blessing of the political system. In the context of the Lebanese constitutional arrangement the Armenian Churches were in fact implicitly assigned the task of performing important functions both within the internal life of the community, and in connecting the community with the wider, national society. For Armenian families the Churches became – or I should rather say remained - the main "face" of authority in all those areas where the Lebanese state could not project its own. This included, in particular, the core components of personal status law, like the regulation of marriage and divorce.

A third example regards the question of the participation of the Armenians in the political life of Lebanon. Political confessionalism and the political formulas that put that principle into practice (the constitution, the National Pact, the *Ta'ef* Agreement, etc.), have provided the Armenian community with a number of protected, reserved spaces of participation: a number of seats in the Parliament, quotas in ministerial appointments, in the local administration and in the public service. According to the intentions of the French Mandatory, Armenian participation was not at all meant to be articulated through Armenian nationalist parties. However, it is a fact that these parties, and most notably the *Dashnak*, have largely monopolized the

Armenian political scene since perhaps the second half of the 1930s. Arguably, the opportunities offered by political confessionalism have played in favour of the Armenian parties' dominance of the Armenian political field, and created barriers to the Armenians' cross-confessional participation. The Armenian parties' monopoly of the political domain, with its ramification in the religious, educational and social life of the community (associations, schools, social services, etc.), has contributed remarkably to the preservation and development of the Armenian cultural world in Lebanon. In pursuing their Armenian national agendas (including the issue of the Genocide, and Turkey, but also - in general - the question of maintaining a distinct Armenian identity and culture), the parties have surely benefited from a political context where the requirement of participation in Lebanese and Arab dossiers was limited to a minimum.

In conclusion, the conditions of substantial autonomy in which the Armenian community was able to manage its educational agenda and questions of personal status, and a politico-institutional context that encouraged communal political representation represent pillars upon which the resilience of Armenian cultural distinctiveness in Lebanon has been constructed since the 1920s. These and other spaces of communal autonomy which were made available to the Armenians are closely connected with the weakness of the Lebanese state's "core."

Coping with crisis: the Armenians and the limitations of the Lebanese system

The limitations of the Lebanese system appear in some way inscribed in its virtues. In the previous section of this chapter the weakness of the central institutions of the Lebanese state was considered mainly with respect to the absence of a strong, nationally determined (and imposed) cultural *acquis*. In other words, the weakness of the state was considered from the point of view of the (positive) effects it has on the cultural autonomy of communal groups; of the opportunities that it creates for the Lebanese communities to "occupy" the cultural spaces left uncontested by the state. But the impact of the weakness of the central institutions has also other consequences, and not all of them play in favour of cultural diversity. Some of the negative consequences regard questions of political stability and of civil peace and security. These also may have a significant, negative effect for minorities and culturally diverse groups. Consociational systems are not necessarily, but often fragile. The power sharing formula which lays at their basis is subject to renegotiations and amendments; new agreements may be difficult to achieve,

and the practice of consociational democracy in ethnoculturally diverse societies indicates that consociationalism is often unable to properly and timely represent and accommodate social change.

The history of independent Lebanon has been marked by recurrent pressures for a "renegotiation" of the fundamentals of the consociational pact and of the national political identity. In some cases these attempts were accompanied by extensive political violence and dangerous phases of disruption of civil peace and security. What were the consequences for minority cultures, and for the Armenians?

The criteria for an assessment of the impact of the crises of the Lebanese consociational pact on Armenian cultural diversity have yet to be the object of a proper conceptualization,[10] but two facts appear uncontroversial. The first is that the Lebanese war of 1975-1990, has triggered important phenomena of internal and external migration, and that some of these have involved the Armenian community. Data on population is notoriously a minefield for researchers working on Lebanon, but it is widely accepted that the Armenian population of Lebanon has been significantly reduced by the war, due to emigration.[11] The second, in part connected with the decline of the Armenian presence in Lebanon, is that the institutional organization of the community has been severely damaged by the war, with particularly heavy consequences for schools, publishing institutions, and – in general – for the Armenian cultural production apparatus. A few details will help to illustrate the point. According to information contained in a recent publication on Armenian schools in Lebanon, between the last pre-war school year and the first post-war school year, the Armenian community lost about 20% of its schools and a striking 43% of its students.

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[10] Elements useful for such a conceptualization will be found in N. Migliorino, *(Re) Constructing Armenia in Lebanon and Syria: ethno-cultural diversity and the state in the aftermath of a refugee crisis*, Oxford and New York, Berghahn Books, 2008.

[11] A commonly held view, in the absence of publicly available, reliable censuses, is that the Armenian community in Lebanon was halved by external migration since the breakout of the war.

Table 1: Armenian schools and students in Armenian schools, Lebanon 1974-75 to 1991-92[12]

Academic year	No. of schools	No. of students
1974-75	56	21,000
1987-88	47	12,924
1991-92	45	11,939

The war hit hard other dimensions of the Armenian cultural world too, in at least two dimensions. The first regarded the protagonists of the Lebanese-Armenian cultural scene: since the first phases of the war, in 1975-76, many of the best artists and intellectuals of the community decided to leave the country and migrate to other Armenian Diasporic communities, in large part in the Western World. The second, whose consequences were felt at a later stage, regarded the public: the migration of a substantial number of Armenians of Lebanon to the United States, to France, Australia, and so on, resulted in a general decline of the demand of Armenian culture in the country. For those who remained, the world of Armenian culture was badly hit in its physical assets, in its organization and diffusion; cultural spaces were sometimes lost, and programs were disrupted by the lack of security and by the restrictions to movement that it imposed. Just to mention a few examples: a literary magazine like Antranik Zaroukian's *Nayiri* was closed and wasn't printed again until 1995, under new ownership; the daily *Ayk*, shut down; a number of the best authors and interpreters of Armenian theatre and music left the country.

Besides the potential – or dramatically real – consequences of the Lebanese system's precariousness, it is necessary to consider another, perhaps subtler, limitation as far as the future of Armenian cultural diversity in the country is concerned. The effects of this have become more evident after the war – although the question is by no means new. This depends on the fact that the constitutional recognition of groups in Lebanon is the result of an incomplete extension of the sovereignty of the state, rather than an affirmative act of recognition of cultural rights. The fact that Lebanese consociationalism allows communities to enjoy wide spaces of autonomy in domains concerning communal cultural affairs does not stem from a political-philosophical recognition of any right to cultural diversity, but – quite the contrary – cultural "rights" emerge in the gaps left by the state, as a by-

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[12] Jirayr Tanielian, ibid., p. 50; the same study also appeared in *Zartonk* on August 17, 24, 31 and September 7 and 14, 2002

product of the cross-vetoing procedures on which consociationalism is built. This comes with consequences. In fact, if, on the one hand, the consociational agreement prevents the Lebanese state from interfering with the cultural affairs of a community - and, thus, protects effectively the community against any unwanted state intervention - on the other, governmental intervention in support of a specific communal cultural heritage in need is normally out of question. In other words, the price of the guarantee that the Lebanese state gives to the autonomy of ethno-cultural groups (the guarantee that they can run their cultural affairs in full autonomy) is that the state is unable (or unwilling) to provide governmental support to a community whose cultural heritage is in need, or threatened, even when the community in need of support would be willing to accept that help: the burden of the preservation of cultural diversity falls squarely on the shoulders of the community in question.

In the case of the Armenian community, the "burden" of preservation and cultural development – most notably the financial burden of maintaining a vast cultural apparatus including schools, clubs, etc., has been traditionally sustained by the Armenian-Lebanese community itself (for example through the fees that families pay to Armenian schools, associations, the donations to and from Churches, or political parties, and so on), or by other Armenian Diasporan communities (for example thanks to the contribution of organizations such as the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, AGBU, etc.). What if the community is not able to "support itself" any more? This is more than a simple hypothesis in Lebanon, as the economic crisis that has affected the country since the end of the civil war has taken a toll on the budget of the average Armenian family, severely limiting its possibility to contribute to maintain the (re)production and diffusion of Armenian culture in the country.

The example of the schools can help again to make the point. In spite of a legal context that continues to grant full autonomy and independence and the fact that many Armenian school boards and school principals do not hesitate to describe these institutions as "ideal" for Armenian education, the system of Armenian schools in Lebanon never made a full recovery after the civil war. On the contrary, the number of Armenian schools and students has continued to drop since 1990. In the ten academic years between 1991/92, and 2001/02, the number of schools has fallen from 45 to 33 and the number of students is currently just above 8,000 – a substantial loss compared to the nearly 12,000 of 1991-92. [13] The continuing crisis of Armenian schools depends on a

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[13] Ibid.

plurality of factors, but certainly prominent among them is the question of the overcapacity of the Armenian educational system. The population decrease caused by the war had a partially delayed effect on the schools: some of these, already suffering from a lack of students by the end of the war, have managed to continue activity for a few years into the 1990s. Besides that, further migration after the war, has contributed to exacerbate the problem. Also, the effects of the post-war economic crisis on the Armenian families' income have taken their toll on school enrollment. As Lebanese average incomes have been put under stress by the slump, families have found it increasingly difficult to pay for private education, and enrollment in Armenian schools has dropped. While the income crisis affects most components of the Lebanese society and not Armenians alone, its consequences could become particularly disruptive for Armenian culture in the country, since the teaching of Armenian language and culture is virtually only available in private Armenian schools.[14]

Planning for the future: some preliminary notes and a conclusion

The question of what role a state should play when components of its intangible cultural heritage are endangered, or – more in general – vis-à-vis minority cultures that are parts of its national community is vividly debated in academic circles and among policy-makers in many countries in the Western world. Some argue in favour of a "free market of cultures," and suggest the fact that some cultural heritages survive, and others do not is a fact of life, and should be accepted. Authors belonging to an emerging multiculturalist school have argued, on the contrary, that the "free market of cultures" is not really "free," and that the market unduly favours "strong" cultures – that is, the cultures of the economically and politically dominant majorities - to the disadvantage of "weaker" cultures. Partly with the background of reflections of communitarian philosophical thought[15] the multiculturalists have managed to re-open the liberal debate on cultural diversity and the treatment of minorities, and argued that the "individual rights," color-blind approach which has long marked Western liberal constitutionalism fails to deliver

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[14] Interview with Ms. Manoushag Boyadjian, school principal, *Dbayeh*, 6 November 2002; "School fees are a nightmare for our families", *Howard Karagheusian Commemorative Corporation Annual Report*, 2002, p. 35.

[15] For a presentation of some communitarian positions as opposed to traditional liberal positions, see Stephen Mulhall and Adam Swift, *Liberals and communitarians*, Oxford, Blackwell, 2nd edition, 1996.

justice to cultural groups and is insufficient to effectively protect diversity.[16] Practical implications of these positions go as far as to call for the institution of a "special citizenship," with special rights recognized to designated ethnic or sub-ethnic groups; a solution that certainly recalls aspects of the Lebanese experience. But also, more specifically, many of the multiculturalists argue in favour of the duty of the state to lend effective support to cultural heritages in need. Many governments in the Western world have indeed adopted a new generation of policies in support of minority cultures, the rationale for intervening being the recognition of the existence of objective cultural rights of groups and the principle that minority cultures represent components of national cultures which deserve protection, and not alien bodies within them.

Recent experience has shown that the coordinated efforts of minority cultural communities and national governments can effectively reverse the decline of endangered cultural heritages. The case of Wales, in the United Kingdom, constitutes perhaps an interesting example of such successes. The use of Welsh language, which some academics considered endangered in the 1970s, has made terrific progress in recent years, largely thanks to the coordinated support of two local agencies, the Lywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru (the Welsh Assembly Government), and the Bwrdd Yr Iaith Gymraeg (the Welsh Language board), and of the British Government.[17]

Do the reflections of the multiculturalists and examples like the ones of Wales present any model, or indication for Lebanon and the Armenians? Answers and conclusions are not straightforward, nor easy to draw. Certainly it is hard to believe that in the context of the current form of political confessionalism in Lebanon the state will be able to play an active role of support towards Armenian culture in the country. It does not seem impossible, however, that – should the national Lebanese debate on political confessionalism become unblocked – some form of synthesis cannot be found, reconciling the need to preserve cultural autonomies for ethno-cultural groups with that of endowing the Lebanese state with the powers necessary to intervene effectively in support of its cultural traditions in need.

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[16] For literature on multiculturalism, see, among others, A. Gutmann, ed., *Multiculturalism: examining the politics of recognition*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1994; Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural citizenship*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1995; Andrea T. Baumeister, *Liberalism and the 'politics of difference'*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2000.

[17] For background information, and for recent statistics and maps, see the webpages of the Welsh Language board at the address http://www.bwrdd-yr-iaith.org.uk/ . Also see the pages of the National Welsh Assembly and of the Welsh Assembly Government at the address http://www.wales.gov.uk/index.htm .

In one case or the other, the Armenian community should hopefully be able to concentrate its efforts in considering and assessing options for the future. This could take the shape of an "Armenian cultural preservation plan for Lebanon" where all actors involved should, ideally, play a co-ordinated role: community members and families, communal institutions (schools, publishers, theatres, cultural associations, Churches, political parties, etc.), Armenian communities and Diaspora institutions outside Lebanon, the Republic of Armenia, the international community (including, for instance, UNESCO), but also the Lebanese state.

When drafting a cultural preservation plan, it is initially crucial that the aims to be achieved are properly conceptualized. In other words, it is important that the answers to the question: "what are we aiming at preserving?" receive the clearest possible answers. I believe that four "preservation levels" or "targets," could be envisaged. The first, which I would call "museum" preservation, is the least ambitious: it accepts that a declining cultural heritage will eventually disappear from general social use and focuses on the collection of its expressions to be saved and "stored up" for the next generations. A recent example of this approach is the extensive work carried out in the United Kingdom by the British Library on two extensive sound archives it holds, the Survey of English Dialects (which is composed of recordings collected by the University of Leeds between 1950 and 1961), and the Millenium Memory Bank (an archive of oral history recordings). [18] The second, a "museum plus" option would accept the disappearance of a cultural heritage from general social use, but strive to maintain it alive at an elite, academic level. Examples of such an approach could be assimilated to the use of communication in Latin among certain cultural elites. [19] The third, which could be described as "forced feeding preservation" accepts that a cultural heritage would not be able to "survive" on its own in the broader society; thus it invests resources into keeping a number of selected dimensions of the cultural menu going (for example the language, or a traditional dance, or publications which use a specific alphabet). The fourth level – the "*sustainable cultural diversity*" model aims at achieving a self sustainable, functioning cultural community, which does not require external intervention in order to continue to exist in all or most of its components.

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[18] Author's interview with Mr. Jonathan Robinson, Curator, English Accents and Dialects, British Library Sound Archive, March 2, 2004.

[19] See, for instance, Nuntii Latini – News in Latin, a radio broadcasted review of world news in Classical Latin, which is produced by YLE, the Finnish Broadcasting Corporation (http://www.yleradio1.fi/nuntii/id50.shtml).

Questions on the "governance" and management of a "cultural plan" should also be appropriately discussed, and all issues concerning the access and participation in the process addressed. Who should cooperate at forming and managing the plan? Who will be appointed to identify its contents? What checks and balances would the system envisage? These important questions, which are indeed complex, will appear less daunting when considering and building up on a number of precedents established in various parts of the world. To this extent, UNESCO's work on the subject certainly represents a valuable starting point.[20]

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[20] See for instance O. Salemink, ed., *Viet Nam's cultural diversity: approaches to preservation*, Paris, UNESCO, 2001.

Résumé

Le système libanais et la diversité culturelle arménienne entre hier, aujourd'hui et demain : quelles en sont les opportunités et les limites?

Le chapitre étudie le rôle qu'a joué – et continue de jouer- le système consociatif libanais dans la préservation et le développement de la culture arménienne au Liban ; est-ce que ce système pourra continuer à l'avenir à adéquatement jouer le même rôle ?

L'auteur analyse les opportunités et les limites qu'offre l'ensemble du système libanais. Historiquement, l'État libanais a créé et maintenu un large espace d'autonomie aux communautés culturelles constitutives de la société libanaise ; mais le système libanais a aussi fait montre de grandes faiblesses, comme l'effondrement répété de la fragile formule politico-institutionnelle, qui a lourdement marqué le pays et la société.

Les Arméniens sont conscients des avantages que le système consociatif offre. Un examen attentif du système montre effectivement qu'il reconnaît des droits culturels et légaux aux communautés religieuses du pays. Le "système éducatif" (en 1974-75, les Arméniens avaient 56 écoles primaires et secondaires avec 21 000 écoliers, et quelques institutions d'éducation supérieure), le "statut personnel" (le mariage, le divorce, etc., sont gérés par la communauté et ses institutions religieuses), la "participation à la vie politique" (droit à des sièges parlementaires en fonction de l'importance démographique relative du groupe, le droit à des postes administratifs, la participation au gouvernement par des postes ministériels..) font partie des avantages offerts par le système consociatif libanais.

Ces systèmes sont cependant souvent fragiles. Le partage du pouvoir est sujet à des renégociations. L'histoire du Liban indépendant a connu des périodes de "renégociation" violentes. La guerre de 1975-1990 par exemple a causé d'importants mouvements migratoires à l'intérieur du pays et vers l'étranger et le déclin des institutions communautaires : le nombre des écoles et des écoliers a régressé de 20% et 43% respectivement. La vie culturelle a faibli : des centres culturels ont cessé leurs activités et des journaux ont cessé de paraître.

Les développements et les expériences des théories du multiculturalisme en cours dans quelques pays offrent des solutions aux types de problèmes vécus par les groupes libanais. Le pays de Galles au Royaume Uni en est un des exemples. Grâce à l'aide d'agences publiques et du gouvernement britannique, la langue celtique (en perdition en 1970) fait aujourd'hui des progrès.

Un plan général de la préservation de la culture arménienne, qui mettrait en action des institutions locales et diasporiques est nécessaire au Liban, pour remettre en marche la vie culturelle de la communauté.

APPENDIX

Additional bibliography

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