

# The Kurds in Lebanon: Post-Naturalization Political Survival Strategies

Guita Hourani<sup>1</sup>

**THE COMMENTARIES****EDITOR IN CHIEF**

Joost JONGERDEN

**EDITORS**

Cengiz GUNES

Bahar ŞİMŞEK

The Commentaries is an initiative by  
the EUTCC.

**EUTCC CHAIR**

Prof Kariane WESTRHEIM,  
University of Bergen, Norway

**EUTCC SECRETARY GENERAL**

Prof Michael GUNTER,  
Tennessee Technological University,  
USA

**EUTCC BOARD MEMBERS**

Dersim DAGDEVIREN, KURD-  
AKAD, Germany  
Dr Joost JONGERDEN,  
Wageningen University, Netherlands  
Dr Thomas JEFFREY MILEY,  
Cambridge University, UK  
Estella SCHMID, Peace in Kurdistan  
Campaign, UK

## *Executive summary*

*This article looks at how the Lebanese Kurds negotiate their political survival as a community in the post-naturalization era. Using two focus group sessions to generate qualitative data, it examines the ways in which these formerly “stateless” people, outside the official forms of state recognition, have utilized their newly acquired status (naturalization) for political survival. It presents their views regarding the Lebanese confessional system, which recognizes them as Sunni Muslims rather than as an ethnoreligious group, thus reducing their opportunities for political representation and public employment. Thus, in the post-naturalization era, the Kurds of Lebanon are “politically surviving,” but in order to liberate themselves from a painful and degrading dependence on non-Kurdish “bosses,” they need to produce an educated and concerned elite group, overcome their internal differences, and invest in the education of their children and the broader development of their community.*

---

<sup>1</sup> Guita Hourani has a Ph.D. from the Graduate School of Global Studies at Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, Tokyo, Japan. She is presently a Country of Origin Information Expert on Lebanon for the Rights in Exile Programme in England and the Advisory Board Chair of the Oghma Group International (OGI) in Lebanon.

## Introduction

The undemocratic nature of the majority of the nation-states in the Middle East involves domestic restrictions on political participation, religious freedom, and the rights to association and free speech of ethnic minorities. These kinds of restrictions place a good deal of stress on these groups, putting in question their ability to survive and thrive as distinct cultures and communities. Lebanon, however, is one of the few Middle Eastern nations in which the constitutional order requires the support and tolerance of a variety of religions and ethnic communities, with the officially secular state guaranteeing equal rights to association, speech, and freedom of belief for all recognized communities. This tolerance and rights recognition has deep roots in the Lebanese political order, which has been overtly determined along the religious and ethnic lines that define the different parties, with a quota system in place distributing their access to political resources and social welfare.

The Kurds in Lebanon originally migrated from Mardin, in today's Turkey, during the French Mandate period. They were naturalized in 1994, but they are not a formally recognized group. They are treated instead as an element of the greater the Lebanese Sunni group, which has created a crisis of representation. Despite the fact that the Kurdish electorate in Beirut is estimated at around 12,000 voters,<sup>2</sup> they have been unable to convince the Sunnis to nominate any Kurds on their electoral list; neither have they been able to consolidate and mobilize their ranks to elect parliamentary representatives of their own. The Kurds see this lack of representation as evidence of bias by both the Sunnis and other communities.

---

<sup>2</sup> The Minority Rights Group International, *World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples – Lebanon* (June 2008) estimates the number of Kurds in Lebanon to be 25,000, or 0.6% of the total population of the country (<https://www.refworld.org/docid/4954ce52c.html>), while the *World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples* (May 2020) put the number at 45,000, or 1% of the total population (<https://minorityrights.org/country/lebanon>).



## Historical Background

After the end of World War I, the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne preserved the Turkish national geographic entity in Asia Minor, putting an end to Western support for separate states for the Kurds and Armenians.<sup>3</sup> Kurdish nationalists viewed this treaty as a betrayal, causing the collapse of the project of an independent Kurdistan – a cycle of hope and disappointment that has been repeated through the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. However, the French Mandate authorities in Lebanon did their best to encourage the development of an intellectual cadre of Kurds centering around a nationalist discourse and boasting such figures as Emir Kamiran Bedir Khan and his brother Celadet. The French strategy at the time was to exert pressure on Mustafa Kemal's Turkey, and the Kurds were an instrument to this end. The Bedir Khans founded the League of Xoybûn (Independence) in 1927 in Lebanon as a political articulation of nationalism, which helped narrativize the Kurdish struggle by projecting an ancient ethnic unity to ground a modern Kurdish national identity.

The majority of the Kurds in Lebanon did not exercise their right of option to choose a nationality as provided for in 1924<sup>4</sup> by the Treaty of Lausanne.<sup>5</sup> Thus, they were officially stateless. In these circumstances, Emir Kamiran proposed a compromise solution to the Mandate authorities regarding their status,<sup>6</sup> which resulted in a

---

<sup>3</sup> Othman Ali, "The Kurds and the Lausanne Peace Negotiations, 1922–23," *Middle Eastern Studies*, 33 (3) (1997): 521–534, p. 526. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4283891>

<sup>4</sup> The first implementation of the Treaty of Lausanne in regards to Lebanese nationality was Decision 2825 of 30 August 1924 (Lebanese Nationality (and Turds residing in Lebanon), Official Gazette, issue no. 1804, dated 30 September 1924.

<sup>5</sup> "Persons over eighteen years of age, habitually resident in territory detached from Turkey in accordance with the present Treaty, and differing in race from the majority of the population of such territory shall, within two years from the coming into force of the present Treaty, be entitled to opt for the nationality of one of the States in which the majority of the population is of the same race as the person exercising the right to opt, subject to the consent of that State." Article 32, "The Treaty of Peace with Turkey Signed at Lausanne, July 24, 1923." [https://wwi.lib.byu.edu/index.php/Treaty\\_of\\_Lausanne](https://wwi.lib.byu.edu/index.php/Treaty_of_Lausanne).

<sup>6</sup> Archives Diplomatiques, Nantes, France (CADN), Fonds Beyrouth, Services Spéciaux, no 2202. Information spécial no 1899, "La nationalité Libanaise et les Kurdes."

certain percentage of the Kurdish community obtaining residential identification cards.<sup>7</sup>

After the dissolution of the Mandate in 1943, the situation of all “stateless” residents remained to be determined. In 1952, the 1946 Lebanese-Turkish agreement<sup>8</sup> extending the “right of option” was reopened.<sup>9</sup> An unknown number of Kurds were naturalized under the provisions of this agreement.<sup>10</sup> In 1962, a new identity status was created, the “Nationality under Consideration” (*jinsiyya qayd al-dars*), which applied to stateless residents and mostly benefitted the Kurds. The year 1994 marked another major development due to Naturalization Decree No 5247, under whose provisions an estimated 10,000 to 18,000 adult Kurds were naturalized.<sup>11</sup> This decree had the effect of amplifying the Sunnis electorate.

Because Islamic societies tend to be more sensitive to identification by religion than by ethnic origin, it is more politically convenient<sup>12</sup> for the Kurds in these societies to emphasize their Sunni status than their Kurdish culture. This involves giving implicit support for Arab nationalism and suppressing the “legitimacy of non-Arab national political claims”<sup>13</sup> and the nationalist projects evolving from them.

The Kurd-Sunni alliance in Lebanon was the result of a compromise, with both sides getting something – Sunnis would benefit from the increased political pull in Beirut, while Kurds would gain a firewall against assimilation and Arabization. The Kurds of Lebanon constructively resist assimilation and Arabization by a) maintaining

<sup>7</sup> Tejel Jordi, *Le mouvement kurde en exil. Continuités et discontinuités du nationalisme kurde sous le mandat français en Syrie et au Liban (1925-46)*, (Bern, Peter Lang, 2007), p. 43.

<sup>8</sup> The agreement concluded on December 7, 1946 between the Lebanese and Turkish state and ratified by the Lebanese Parliament on February 12, 1947 stipulated the choice of nationality. Concerned with the renewal of the delay to applying for citizenship according to the Treaty of Lausanne, the agreement was implemented in 1952 and renewed twice until 1958. Its main purpose was to provide an opportunity to people of Lebanese origin who had previously been unable to opt for Lebanese citizenship.

<sup>9</sup> Thibaut Jaulin, “Démographie et politique au Liban sous le Mandat: Les émigrés, les ratios confessionnels et la fabrique du Pacte national,” *Histoire & Mesure*, 24.1 (2009): 189–210, <http://journals.openedition.org/histoiresmesure/3895>.

<sup>10</sup> Rondot Pierre. “Les nouveaux problèmes de l’État libanais.” In: *Revue Française de Science Politique*, 4.2 (1954): 326–356, p. 332.

<sup>11</sup> Salah Abu Chakra, *Al-Akrad: Shāb al-Muānāt* (Beirut: Dar al-Hadi, 1999), p. 150.

<sup>12</sup> Mordechai Nisan, “The Minority Plight,” *Middle East Quarterly* 2 (3) (1996): 25–34, p. 26.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*



their distinguishability from the dominant Sunnis adopting some of the cultural traits of the group; b) preserving their previous cultural practices (e.g., publicly celebrating Nowruz; dressing in their colorful ethnic clothes on such occasions); c) resisting xenomania-assimilation (against/of customs, manners, fashions) ; d) speaking, reading, and publishing literary material in Kurmanji; e) supporting the Kurdish cause through statements, protests, and marches; f) reinforcing pride in their homeland and forefathers; g) reaching out to other communities and building relations with non-Sunnis (particularly the Armenians, Syriacs, and Assyrians); h) demanding the opening of Kurdish schools similar to those of the Armenians (to maintain their language and develop their identity); and e) advocating for justice, equality, freedom, women's rights, human rights, and deconfessionalization of the Lebanese governmental system.

Drawing from her fieldwork on self-representation in and among minority groups in Malaysia, anthropologist Judith Nagata suggests three reasons why a group might prioritize one identity over another in constructing what she terms a "situational identity," namely, a) the desire to express either social distance or solidarity; b) expediency, or the immediate advantages to be gained by a particular reference group selection on a particular occasion; and c) considerations of social status and upward or downward social mobility.<sup>14</sup> Nagata argues that "some individuals will always be moving in the direction of the dominant culture" and that success in this will be "viewed less as a changing of status than as shedding of ethnicity."<sup>15</sup>

Applying Nagata's model of "situational identity" to how the Kurds of Lebanon process their own history and group identity helps us understand the motives of dynamics of the Kurds' expression of solidarity with Sunni causes and battles, such as the 1975 Civil War in Lebanon and the Palestinian cause.<sup>16</sup> The Kurd participation in

---

<sup>14</sup> Judith Nagata, "What Is a Malay? Situational Selection of Ethnic Identity in a Plural Society," *American Ethnologist*, 1.2 (1974): 331-350, p. 340.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 332.

<sup>16</sup> Nisan, "The Minority Plight," p. 27.

fighting in this cause is surely not grounded simply in ideology but also in expediency: such identification has helped Kurds to survive individually and in community, earn a living, and finance their own organizations, which tend to be dependent on “political donations” from their Sunni patrons.

Since and insofar as this identity is part of a project of upward social mobility, however, the Sunni self-representation brings limited rewards. Thus, for example, Kurds are remembered during election time and promised various benefits but forgotten when the mainstream Sunni groups have won their elections. That is, there are no “spoils” for the Kurds. Indeed, vulnerability, clientelism, and fighting for Sunni causes have all been part and parcel of the give and take marking the Kurdish path to survival in the often violent landscape of Lebanon.

### **Post-1994 Naturalization Political Survival Strategies**

Both male and female participants of the two focus groups carried out agreed with the statement that challenges to their cultural identity have political effects. Their complaint was precisely the above, that Sunni politicians only acknowledge their existence during election campaigns when, because it is politically expedient, they are welcomed as Sunnis; the rest of the time, they have to endure the usual bigotry against Kurds and are treated as second-class citizens. Participants also saw themselves in terms of a double discrimination. They experience discrimination against both their religious sect (Sunni) and their ethnicity (Kurdish). They compared this situation with another minority ethnic group, Armenians, who are classed as Christians and were helped by Christians when they migrated to Lebanon. This has made the Kurds of Lebanon question whether they would have received the same support if they had been Christians.

The (majority of the) participants lamented that *wasta* (nepotism or “pull”) was required to access public jobs, which are an important resource in the Lebanese economy, both direct and indirect. They



not only offer a range of comparatively highly paid positions, as well as contracted and temporary work, but civil servants also, and crucially, interface with various Lebanese groups (on critical matters concerning healthcare, education, sanitation, etc.). Such employment, therefore, has important spillover effects, especially where there is no Kurdish element in the public sector for Kurdish citizens to negotiate with. In fact, the lack of a proportionate Kurdish sector is one of the biggest barriers to the post-naturalization state employment of Kurds.

Participants in the focus groups explained that because their Kurdish identity is dissolved, officially, in their Sunni identity, and because public positions are allocated according to sectarian quotas, they end up being in line for jobs behind other more established Lebanese Sunnis. They said that the parliamentarians they voted for have no sense of honor, shelving their promises as soon as they are elected. Many interviewees stated that they would abstain in the next parliamentary elections. Both men and women explained that the lack of unity within their community had weakened the Kurds politically; they accounted for this by the political ignorance prevalent among Kurds and all Lebanese alike, as well as attributing it to the clientelism and vote-buying that undermines attempts at solidarity.

The male participants regretted the shutting down of two Kurdish political parties<sup>17</sup> in 1999 by the Syrian occupiers in Lebanon, which essentially left the Kurds disenfranchised vis-à-vis the political establishment. The participants blamed the Syrians for blocking the election of Lebanese Kurds into parliament. Some claimed that political parties had tried to intimidate them into voting for their candidates; they also argued that Sunnis were too bigoted against Kurds to give up a Sunni seat in parliament to a Kurd.

Male participants talked about the irony of being in a situation in which some Lebanese hate them because Kurdish groups are fighting

---

<sup>17</sup> The Razkari Party or Riz Kari (Liberation Party) established in 1975 by Faissal Fakhro, and the Kurdish Democratic Party (Lebanese branch of the Iraqi-based Kurdish nationalist party) established by Jamil Mihhu in 1960 and licensed in 1970; the two parties have not been reestablished.

other Muslims (ISIS, etc.),<sup>18</sup> while others respect them for fighting against terrorists, by which they mean Islamicist paramilitaries. Kurdish Lebanese are therefore caught between the two sides. They declared that they have aided Kurdish parties outside Lebanon (such as the KDP and the PUK in northern Iraq) and that any progress towards political power for Kurds in Syria and Iraq will have a positive impact on their situation in Lebanon.

One of the survival tactics pursued by the Kurdish leadership in the era after the naturalization of 1994 was to reaffirm their client-patron relationship with the Sunnis, mainly by turning out for the largest Sunni political party, the Future Movement, in elections. Surveys and polls have shown that naturalized voters are the most easily mobilized and have demonstrated the highest participation rates in elections. The Kurds are no exception to this pattern, having demonstrated high levels of participation in Lebanese parliamentary elections since 1996.

This behavior leads us to a paradox; on the one hand, such a high level of voting participation would seem to imply a politicization of the naturalized Kurds, but on the other hand, the rewards for this turnout seem negligible. Kurds have neither accumulated little political capital nor seem to have become more politically sophisticated in leveraging their position vis-à-vis Sunni parties. Rather, naturalized Kurds appear to be bound by a political activity that supposedly defines their emancipation; they do not feel “free” as voting citizens but rather feel imprisoned by their dependence on the Sunni power elite. At the same time, many focus group participants continued to present the belief that they owe their citizenship to the Sunnis and thus continue to assume that Sunni politicians can protect their rights. This creates a situation of invidious dependence rooted in the initial moment of naturalization. It may be that this perception is also held by non-Sunnis, which is

---

<sup>18</sup> This research was conducted at the height of the 2014 ISIS siege of Kobani, a Kurdish stronghold in Syria.





why other political parties have made no effort to “poach” the Kurds.

As the Kurds interviewed here generally expressed the belief that they remain vulnerable to being stripped of their citizen status (i.e., even after naturalization), they were more inclined to give their votes to Sunni parties for protection, notwithstanding the lack of Kurdish representation at the national level in parliament and at the municipal level in Beirut. They also softened their demand for recruitment into the civil service and the military bureaucracy and for financial support to establish neighborhood health, cultural, and educational centers in order not to upset the Sunni establishment. This leads to a mixed message. Participants would like acknowledgment of their power in elections in Beirut but are hesitant about mechanisms to use that power in their own interest.

The failure to successfully leverage their electoral power is likely not a matter of failing to understand their own self-interest but is rather an appreciation of their fragmentation and internal rivalry. S. F., a high-level official in the Future Movement, remarked that the Kurds have “voting weight but not political weight” because of their fragmentation. Due to their divisions, they have never forged a united electoral front. S. F. declared that the Future Movement deals with the Kurds as they do with any Sunni group or party, such as the Muslim Brotherhood or the Tawhid Movement, and not as an “ethnic” group. This view of the Kurds taken by the largest Sunni political party suggests that the Kurds have only a very narrow margin for negotiating with the Future Movement.

Since 1994, some Lebanese Kurds have asserted their identity as “Arab Kurds” – as the *Merdallis* (people from Mardin). The Merdalli diaspora includes Syrians and Arabs as well as Kurds from the Turkish city, itself renowned for its cosmopolitan make-up.<sup>19</sup> Thus, the Merdalli claim has weakened the collective force of the Kurds and is all of a piece with the program of assimilating the Kurds into

---

<sup>19</sup> Hüseyin Bakır, “Lübnan’daki Mardin Diasporası,” *Ortaoğru ve Afrika Araştırmacıları Derneği (ORDAF)*,

<sup>24</sup> March 2020. <https://ordaf.org/lubnandaki-mardin-diasporasi/>.

the majority Sunni Arab identity, which in turn has alienated Kurmanji speakers.

Naturalization afforded the Kurds of Lebanon very important rights and freedoms under the constitution. Theoretically, these rights and freedoms present Kurds with a possible route to gradually weaning themselves from dependence on the Sunni political bloc and thereby assume the “political weight” that is their due as Lebanese citizens. The prospect of this emancipation has been unrealized for several reasons, including but not limited to their inability to escape from the immediate benefits of their patron-client relationships (which are prevalent in the Lebanese political landscape);<sup>20</sup> the persistence of a lack of solidarity among Kurds (which weakens their collective bargaining power while favoring the interests of select individuals);<sup>21</sup> and the limited alternative sources of patronage (i.e., other than the powerful Sunni elites). Furthermore, as naturalized citizens, the Kurds “are not at all ‘free’ in their voting behavior, but are rather prisoners of the one thing that should have freed them, i.e., their citizenship.”<sup>22</sup> This is because they continue to believe that their Sunni patrons engineered their citizenship and will defend it – so the Kurds, out of historical loyalty, continue to vote for the Sunni electoral list.

Although Kurds have voted at increasing rates in each election since 1994, this does not represent the power acquired by their newly established level of political freedom but rather the opposite: their increasing dependence on the political machine of the *Za'im* or the political parties they support.<sup>23</sup> Clientelism is not just a problem for the Kurds. In fact, it is an epidemic that plagues the whole of Lebanon’s political landscape, which is divided between blocs controlled by bosses (the *Za'ims*). Critics say that this situation is worsened by the fact that the electoral laws in Lebanon

---

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 82.

<sup>21</sup> Hourani, “The Kurds of Lebanon: Socio-economic Mobility,” 81.

<sup>22</sup> Guita Hourani and Eugene Sensenig-Dabbous, “Naturalized Citizens: Political Participation, Voting Behavior, and Impact on Elections in Lebanon (1996–2007),” *Journal of International Migration and Integration* (JIMI), 13 (2012): 187–202, pp. 192, 201.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 201.



institutionalize Lebanon's political clientelistic system by mandating for parliamentary seats to be distributed on the basis of confessional representation and geographical divisions of the governorates, which in effect blocks a "bidding war" by other parties, such as Shiite or Christian ones, for Kurd votes.

As a result, the relationship formed between clients/constituencies and *Za'ims'* political leaders has become a "network of transactional ties, where economic and other services are distributed to the clients in exchange for political loyalty."<sup>24</sup> This loyalty is tested during elections through the *Za'ims'* political machine, which rallies identified voters and makes promises to them in exchange for their voting for the *Za'im* leaders – a phenomenon Corstange terms "vote trafficking."<sup>25</sup> This syndrome is amplified by the quota-based nature of parliamentary representation, which encourages a patron-client relationship structure working through sectarian allegiances, in addition to loyalty to the persons of the political leaders.<sup>26</sup>

Having observed and monitored Kurdish culture in Lebanon since the naturalization act of 1994, I have borne witness to Kurds' attempts to capitalize on the freedoms and rights accorded them by their citizenship, including by founding new activist, non-profit organizations<sup>27</sup> and establishing political parties.<sup>28</sup> In 2018, as a result of the more-than-decade of feeling shunted aside by the Kurds' supposed allies among the Sunni establishment, an independent Kurdish candidate ran in Beirut's second district elections in a Sunni parliamentary seat. Notably, this candidate was a woman, the Founder and President of the Nowruz Cultural and Social League, which showed a heartening freedom from prejudice by the Kurds.<sup>29</sup>

---

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 172.

<sup>25</sup> Daniel Corstange, "Vote Trafficking in Lebanon," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 44.3 (August 2012): 483–505, p. 487.

<sup>26</sup> Hamzeh, "2001," 171–172.

<sup>27</sup> For example: Future Generation (1997), The Kurdish Cultural and Humanitarian League in Lebanon (1999), The Kurdish Lebanese Association for Social Services (2004), The Kurdish Committee of Ain al-Marisa and Mina Al-Hosn (2006), The Newroz Cultural and Social Association (2014).

<sup>28</sup> For example: The Kurdish Loyalty Party (2008).

<sup>29</sup> Christiane Waked, "Kurds in Lebanon are Seeking Acceptance," *Al Khaleej Times*, July 4, 2018, <https://www.khaleejtimes.com/editorials-columns/kurds-in-lebanon-are-seeking-acceptance>.

Although Hanan Osman was not able to garner enough support from the twelve thousand Kurd voters (or others) to win the seat, she stated her happiness in breaking the wall of fear faced by the Sunnis of Beirut and, in the process, defying the stereotype associated with Kurds.

Expectations following the 1994 mass nationalization of Kurds in Lebanon were high. In the community, it was seen as a giant step forward in making Kurds equal citizens, on a par with the Lebanese Sunnis and with all Lebanese in general. Given their numbers in Beirut and the weight of their votes, they were thought to be in a good position to negotiate their share of the Sunni allotment of resources and quotas for public jobs. However, in election after election, it became apparent that Sunni elites might be willing, during elections, to mouth slogans, but in office, they still limited resources and clearly blocked any separate Kurdish parliamentary representation, probably thinking that such steps would reduce Kurdish dependence on Sunni politicians.

Since 2011, the Kurds of Lebanon have favored nationalist issues in greater Kurdistan (i.e., events in Kurdish Iraq, Turkey, and Iran, as well as Syria) over local ones – “often leading to the neglect of efforts to improve the general status of the community in Lebanon.”<sup>30</sup> Although there are several Kurdish NGOs, most are small, often run by one person or a single family. These organizations mostly fail to garner any significant membership or foster solidarity among Kurds to further the community’s concerns.<sup>31</sup> Despite all the problems that Kurds face in Lebanon, however, the focus groups participants all agreed with the statement that they were “better off than Kurds in Turkey, Iran, Iraq, or Syria in one aspect,” which was “freedom (freedom of belief, association, opinion/thought/conscience, assembly, movement, etc.)”

---

<sup>30</sup> Lokman Meho and Farah Kawtharani, “The Kurdish Community in Lebanon,” 21.

<sup>31</sup> Hourani, “The Kurds of Lebanon: Socio-economic Mobility,” 81.



## Discussions And Considerations

Although Lebanon has a record of accepting refugees and minority groups, the Kurdish community there has been unable since 1994 to overcome various socio-political challenges that hinder their full integration into the political system and socio-economic progress. There are at least three major reasons for this.

The first reason is the failure to develop an educated class within the community that is not only able to continue the task of furthering Kurdish national identity, self-esteem, and language preservation – especially after the departure of Bedir Khan from Lebanon to France in 1948 to take up a position as lecturer in Kurdish at the *Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales* (INALCO)<sup>32</sup> – but which might also strategically analyze the changing environment in the country and the region to better negotiate the people’s survival and prosperity. Until the Kurds of Lebanon successfully produce their own intellectuals, or at least “borrow” them from other communities (in France, Kurdistan, etc.), they will continue to be leaderless in a challenging situation – one that clearly offers Kurds the potential of paths towards a better future as equal and active citizens while at the same time confining them to a subordinate position in a manifestly ossified political establishment.

The second reason for the Kurds’ continued inability to integrate fully is the lack of solidarity. In fact, the Kurdish “community” – so-called – is deeply fragmented and so will continue to give its allegiance to external political leaders, namely the Sunni establishment, as a bartering token for mere survival. Unless the Kurds find a means to unite, they will continue to live in “their neighborhoods” (common residential areas) at the mercy of non-Kurdish and unsympathetic mayors, *mukhtars* (local public record registrars), and even parliamentarians. As other minority groups have shown, banding together in pursuit of a common goal is the key to

---

<sup>32</sup> Barbara Henning, *Narratives of the History of the Ottoman-Kurdish Bedirhani Family in Imperial and Post-Imperial Contexts Continuities and Changes* (13 Bamberger Orientstudien, University of Bamberg Press, 2018), p. 372.

gaining the kind of leverage that can improve their political situation and, thus, their overall situation.

The third major problem facing the Kurdish community is their economic stasis. Lifestyle improvements in education, salaries, and positions are fundamental to lifting any subaltern group from the doldrums of domination. This can only occur by addressing the problems of education and the acquisition of skills and key financial resources for the next generation to improve its status.

In the post-naturalization era, that is, the Kurds of Lebanon are “politically surviving,” but not more. In order to liberate themselves from a painful and degrading dependence on non-Kurdish “bosses,” they need to produce an educated and concerned elite group, overcome their internal differences, and invest in the education of their children and broader development of their community.

Regarding naturalization, the findings of this study suggest that it may have positive effects on political integration in terms of voting participation but that this is only a first step to attaining real power to improve the average community member’s lifestyle and opportunities. In the case of the naturalized Kurds, this means freeing themselves from the bonds of clientelism, increasing their political weight through strategies that leverage the strengths that come from their voting bloc, and cementing their socialization in the wider society. This will require making some tough choices on the part of the community and its leaders, but the potential benefits should be worthwhile.

