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SOCIAL MOBILITY TRENDS IN THE ARMENIAN DIASPORA: ETHNOSOCIOLOGICAL STUDY OF ARMENIANS IN LOS ANGELES, TEHRAN AND BEIRUT

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Keywords: Armenian Diaspora, social mobility, ethno-social environment.

The aim of the article is to reveal the peculiarities of social mobility among Armenians in diaspora communities, which was accomplished by conducting a comparative analysis of the Armenian communities in Los Angeles, Tehran and Beirut. To achieve the aim, the following objectives were set: to identify and compare the socio-professional structures of the three communities; to show the dynamics of inter-and intra-generational social mobility of Armenians in three different ethno-social environments. The study was conducted through 3 methods: standardized interview with community members, non-participant observation, in-depth interviews with representatives of community organizations. The features of the host country influence the dynamics of social mobility. The different parts of the same ethnic group in the Armenian Diaspora occupy different social statuses and professional strata, depending on the country of origin or host country.

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TRENDY MOBILNOŚCI SPOŁECZNEJ W DIASPORZE ORMIAŃ-
SKIEJ: BADANIE ETNOSOCJOLOGICZNE ORMIAN Z LOS ANGE-
LES, TEHERANU ORAZ BEJRUTU

Słowa kluczowe: diaspora ormiańska, mobilność społeczna, środowisko
etnospołeczne.

Celem niniejszego artykułu jest określenie specyficznych cech mobilności
społecznej Ormian w diasporach poprzez analizę porównawczą społeczności
ormiańskich w Los Angeles, Teheranie i Bejrucie. Aby osiągnąć ten cel, wy-
znaczono następujące cele szczegółowe: identyfikacja i porównanie składu
społeczno-zawodowego Ormian z trzech wspólnot; przedstawienie dynamiki
międzypokoleniowej i wewnątrzpokoleniowej mobilności społecznej Ormian
w trzech różnych środowiskach etnospołecznych. W badaniu wykorzystano
trzy metody: wywiady ustrukturyzowane z przedstawicielami trzech spo-
łeczności ormiańskich, obserwację nieuczestniczącą oraz pogłębione wywia-
dy z przedstawicielami organizacji społecznych. Specyfika kraju przyjmują-
cego wpływa na dynamikę mobilności społecznej. Różne grupy o tym samym
pochodzeniu etnicznym w diasporze ormiańskiej, w zależności od kraju wy-
jazdu lub kraju zamieszkania, mają różny status społeczny i znajdują się
w różnych warstwach zawodowych.

Introduction

Social change in diasporas, particularly the process of intergenerational so-
cial mobility, has become the subject of wide discussion in the field of science
and research. This problem is mainly discussed from two main theoretical
perspectives: integration and social progress of the group. Social mobility,
as an important part of changes, allows to reveal the social potential, invo-
lvement and interrelations of the group in the society. We proceed from the
approach that an ethnic group acts in a foreign environment as a separate
social system with its internal structure. Obviously, the group carries not
only the influence of the environment, but also the consequences of changes
in its own ethnic characteristics that occur as a result of constant communi-
cation and societal interaction. Integration of an ethnic group into a foreign
environment is a process of consolidation of actions and beliefs not only for
representatives of the ethnic group, but also for local residents. In particu-
lar, the actions of residents or state policies can influence the acceptance
of this group in a given society, determine the structural conditions of its
residence, thereby managing the inclusion or exclusion of the group in that

country. This article attempts to show the course of socio-professional mobility of diasporic groups in the above-mentioned context. It is based on comparative ethnographic and sociological research of three environments (Los Angeles, Beirut, Tehran) of the Armenian Diaspora.

Social mobility and Diaspora studies

In social and cultural anthropology literature, social mobility is studied from several perspectives. Social mobility in the Diaspora at the individual or group level is measured not so much on the basis of sociological models, but rather by comparing socio-economic, professional statuses and revealing the content of social elevators and opportunities. The studied problem is based on theoretical approaches to social mobility. Social mobility is a complex and multidimensional phenomenon (Loury, Modood, Teles, 2005). Its theoretical framework has been formed by a number of researchers explaining both social stratification and its internal processes. The major approaches contributing to this framework are those of P. Sorokin, E. Schils, and T. Parsons, among others. The authors share a common view that social stratification is a dynamic phenomenon and is a result of social changes; social mobility is a form of expressing these changes. P. Sorokin was the first author in the field of social sciences, who used the concept of social mobility. He explained any change in the social status of a group or individual from the view of social mobility.

There are various social mobility types described in the scientific literature, but the main ones are the following: vertical and horizontal; individual and group, intergenerational and intragenerational (Sorokin 1927, pp. 130-135). Other researchers are concerned with developing a methodology of measuring social mobility. Blau and Duncan, for instance, consider a change in the status between father and son as a measurement of intergenerational mobility, thus determining upward or downward trendlines in vertical mobility (Blau, Duncan 1967). Most researchers also accurately analyze data on social mobility by applying Markov transition matrices (McFarland 1970, pp. 463-464).

The attempts to study different diasporas show the course of changes with regards to integration and adaptation, especially in the context of migration processes. The other aspect of such studies is related to ethnic identity features. Ethnic identity manifestations and social status in a given society can be interrelated and become a factor for the mobility (Kelly 2015).

Diaspora communities interact as independent social units in host countries. The character of that interaction is defined by several factors, that are grouped in several directions, including historical, cultural, social-structural,

physiological and political ones. In fact, as a result of this multifactorial interaction, social changes occur in different parts of the diaspora. In general, these factors can determine the place, role and importance of the diaspora group in a given society. In this process, the community accumulates social capital and resources for self-governance.

The diaspora communities are viewed as social units with their internal social processes. The socio-professional/occupational status of various groups in the Diaspora is often associated with ethnic specificities. Overall, the occupational status of ethnic groups in different countries can influence the mobility processes. In this regard, there are several studies of diasporas that allow us to see the socio-professional position of separate diaspora groups in different countries. The Jewish (Green 1988), Chinese (Collins 2002), Turkish (Liu, Xue, Huang, Weesep 2018), Russian (Ostapenko, Subbotina 2011), Korean (Fred, Bergsten, Choi 2003) and other diasporas have been studied from this perspective. There are also several studies of Armenians in different regions of Russia: Moscow, Krasnodar, and Saratov. However, there is a lack of such studies in the so-called classical communities of the Armenian diaspora, which prompted this study.

There are social, economic, cultural and ethnic differences in the communities of the Armenian diaspora. As socio-economic units, these communities are endowed with certain professional, cultural, social, and other potential. Based on this, they occupy certain social statuses in the host countries.

To identify the group status and its changes in a foreign environment, it is important to observe the socio-professional aspect of the features of the intergenerational and intragenerational mobility. In particular, the stages of occupational position are considered to be the main factors for social development and increase in status. The changes in the form of occupational activity between generations also point at the social foundation on which a person begins his/her professional life.

Methodology and data

Three Armenian communities have been studied and compared in this work, with the application of an ethnological and entosociological approach[1]. The reason for the choice of these communities is explained by the large number

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[1]The ethnosociological research was carried out within the framework of the state target program, "The main directions of comparative studies of the Armenians in the own and foreign environments: the problems and the perspectives of the study"(2013-2015). This article is part of a broader study. The full comprehensive study was included in the author's dissertation.

of Armenians and rich life experience in the selected cities. The author carried out a fieldwork in the cities of Los Angeles (USA), Tehran (IRI) and Beirut (LH) (2013-2015). Considering the multilayeredness and complexity of the study subject, both qualitative and quantitative methods were used in the research. Expert interviews were conducted with professionals in diaspora studies and research methodology, not only inside, but also outside these communities. This made it possible to obtain a variety of expert assessments and opinions on the Armenian communities. The interviews included but were not limited to lifestyle issues and living conditions of Armenians in the three cities; stereotypes in the ethnic environment; information about socio-professional strata; and issues of cultural, educational, and religious nature. More than 60 expert interviews were recorded.

In-depth interviews were conducted with the representatives of the Armenian community organizations (63 interviews). This allowed us to involve nearly all groups and strata of communities into the fieldwork. The organizations in each community were selected through a multi-step process, and pre-designed questionnaires were used during the interviews with the representatives.

Standardized interviews were conducted among the Armenians in Los Angeles, Tehran and Beirut, using quota and snowball sampling methods. Quota sampling was based on the following indicators: origin (immigrant/local), gender, age, and education. Then, from the quota groups, participants were selected using snowball sampling. The survey involved 230 persons in Tehran, 250 in Beirut, and 450 in Los Angeles. The quantitative analysis provided a dynamic picture of the social mobility in Armenian communities in connection with various indicators. The survey involved respondents over 18 years of age and mostly partaking in community life. Research tools have been developed, refined, and adapted to each community. The questionnaires were prepared in Armenian (Western Armenian and Eastern Armenian) and foreign languages (Russian, English, Arabic, Persian), and were filled out in respondents' preferred language.

The communities were selected on the basis of maximum difference in social criteria. This helped to understand the similarities and local differences between communities and their impact on social mobility.

When studying Armenian communities, one should refer to two independent groups of socio-environmental factors, which have an impact on the social or professional activities of the community members. They can be conditionally called external and internal factors. External factors pertain to the characteristics of the host country: traditional or modern society; liberal or conservative environment; religious, economic, and social

conditions, etc. Internal factors relate to the features of the intracommunal environment: the social structure of the community; number of members; social-demographic structure; dispersed or compact settlement; degree of cohesion; social relations; accepted intracommunal values, etc.

The differences between these factors and their influence on socio-professional strata can be revealed by studying the Armenians in the previously mentioned cities. The three cities (Los Angeles, Tehran, and Beirut) are characterized by a large population of Armenians and developed community life. Based on a number of approaches and studies of the Armenian diaspora, two main socio-professional groups (A-knowledge and skill-based workers, B-manual workers) were formed when studying the three communities. Groups A and B were subdivided: group A1 (unskilled workers), group A2 (medium-skilled workers), group A3 (high-skilled workers), group B1 (unskilled manual workers), group B2 (skilled manual workers) (Arutyunyan 2010, Karapetyan 2013, p. 95).

These subgroups not only indicate the form of economic activity but also carry special social characteristics. Thereby, a person belonging to one and the same group can occupy completely different social statuses in different societies.

Before proceeding to the discussion of the specifics of these socio-professional groups, a brief history of the three communities is presented below.

Historical overview

The Armenian Diaspora is a unique object of research as an example of the classical Diaspora (Tölölyan 1996, p. 3). Each of the Armenian diaspora communities have their own history of formation, way of life, community and spatial structures.

Since Tehran is a Muslim city, this religious difference has contributed to the demarcation of the Armenian community, its dense settlements, and the creation of a developed community structure. Even though, by law, Armenians in Tehran are considered to be an ethnoreligious minority, in everyday interactions and other relations, the primary difference is that of religion. The Armenian community of Tehran is more than 300 years old. It is spatially compact and has developed already traditional national-cultural centers and socio-political structures. According to unofficial data, the number of Armenians in Tehran currently ranges from 45,000 to 50,000. The community is governed by a national diocese – the national authority, which has its various structures and departments, levels and sub-departments. Currently,

there are 3 districts in Tehran densely populated by Armenians (Ayvazyan 2003, pp. 240-248, Bayburdyan 2013, pp. 33-34).

According to data from 2003, there are about 600,000 Armenians living in Los Angeles and adjacent suburbs (in Glendale alone, which has a population of 200,000, there are about 180,000 Armenians). Unlike the Armenian community in Tehran, the Armenian community in Los Angeles is large and multilayered. It is distinguished by its social structure and intensive growth. Overall, the community is dispersed, but there are also several compact groups (Glendale, Hollywood, etc.), which are located in a fairly diverse ethnocultural environments. Today, the Armenian community has an active presence in Los Angeles reflected in its physical presence, its churches, traditional political parties, cultural-national centers, compatriot unions, a number of non-profit organizations, the press, among others, and, in recent years, also, through various professional associations. In this community, layers of the so-called old (classical) and newly formed diaspora can be distinguished. The classical diaspora, which created the Armenian schools, political parties, unions, Armenian language newspapers, was founded, before the 1980s, by the generations of Armenians from Beirut. There is also a new diaspora, which consists mainly of Armenians who emigrated from Armenia. In addition to the old and new diasporas, there are also the so-called American Armenians: those who have been there for 50 years are considered American Armenians and have their distinct culture (Ayvazyan 2003, pp. 33-46).

There are two major Armenian-populated areas in the Armenian community of Beirut: the towns of Bourj Hammoud and Antelias. Beirut can be distinguished by an abundance of Armenian community structures. Some of such structures are the three Armenian churches; traditional political parties; schools; Armenian news media outlets; cultural, charitable and other organizations; professional, youth and student associations; and the only higher education institution in Diaspora-Haigazian University. These structures operate primarily under the auspices or control of religious communities or political parties (Ayvazyan 2003, pp. 294-295).

Socio-professional characteristics of Armenians in three Armenian communities

The professional strata occupied by Armenian communities in the social structure of the country are an important indicator of community development. The results of the quantitative survey indicate that there is one primary group in each of the three communities: in Los Angeles and Beirut the primary group is A, and in Tehran it is B (Figure 1).
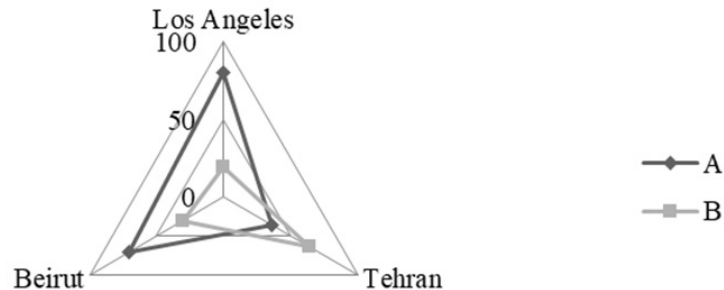
Figure 1. Comparison of Armenians in Los Angeles, Tehran, and Beirut by
socio-professional dimension (%).
Source: author's own work.

It shows the difference between these communities in terms of deve-
lopment and capacity. It is assumed that the social progress of an ethnic
group in a foreign environment may be due to a number of circumstances,
depending on traditions, values, state systems, and so on.

In Los Angeles, living standards and growth expectations are quite
high, leading to a dynamic behavior. This statement has been derived from
the qualitative interviews with various members of the community. One of
the members says: "Once you set foot in Los Angeles, you have to think
about getting an education, learning the language, undergoing professional
training, if you want to get somewhere in any field."

This contrasts with Tehran's case, where the religious and other speci-
ficities dictate relatively modest living standards. The existing boundaries
(both on the scale of a country and community) can predetermine a certain
direction for a person's social status in a certain city, and very often, parti-
cipating in community organizations or engaging in various crafts is enough
for the community members.

In Beirut, the community governance and the vast opportunities affor-
ded to minorities enable the Armenians to have social progress and to hold
high socio-professional positions in various fields.

According to the data from the expert interviews, the soci?-professional
employment of the Armenians in Los Angeles has changed significantly over
the past 20 years. Even 20 years ago, the professions of a jeweler, a con-
struction worker, a shoemaker, a mechanic, and of other crafts, were con-
sidered the most acceptable and lucrative. However, the current interest is
in such fields as medicine and law. The number of civil servants has incre-

ased significantly. The younger generation is mostly interested in such areas as engineering, art, and finance, which, by the way, matches the common trends of the country.

In Tehran, most Armenians are engaged in manual labor. The primary group is B1 (skilled manual workers). According to expert assessment, in Tehran, there is an upward trend in the number of workers included in the A3 group. Nevertheless, the image of Armenians as good artisans remains unchanged in the Iranian society. According to the community representatives, until now the crafts were considered to be family heritage. In Tehran, Armenians are mainly engaged in crafts and small trade. The number of administrative officials is more limited. There are successful professionals in the field of education. Yet there are very few successful businesspeople and companies.

One of the important characteristics of the Los Angeles community is its complex nature due to its origin and size. Armenians from different countries have different socio-professional behavior based on their previous experience. The Armenians who migrated to Los Angeles from Armenia and the Middle East make up the majority of the knowledge and skill-based workers (A1, A2, A3). The Armenians from the CIS countries and Europe are also mainly engaged in knowledge and skill-based work (A2, A3). Those who moved to Los Angeles from different regions of America are almost equally represented in both socio-professional groups (A and B).

Most of the respondents in Beirut are highly qualified. The data obtained from expert interviews show that Lebanon, especially Beirut, has a small market economy. Basically, there is no private production, industry is not developed, and the economy is mainly dependent on tourism. There is one important fact that should be taken into account when studying the Armenian community in Beirut: as mentioned by one of the experts, the Armenians, who arrived after the Genocide, brought with them crafts and professions that had not previously existed in Lebanon. These Armenians were mainly engaged in jewelry, sculpture, and leather production (Expert interview, Beirut 2015, the author's archive of ethnographic materials).These are the main factors that influenced the further socio-economic life of the Armenians of this city, in particular, the dynamics of changes in the socio-professional structure of the society.

A group of entrepreneurs has been identified in each of the three communities. These groups have been examined separately in each community to reveal their specificities. Data from in-depth interviews with entrepreneurs in three communities show that entrepreneurs in Los Angeles need a proper education and specialization to run an enterprise, regardless of its

size. In contrast, when we look at the entrepreneurs in Tehran and Beirut, their professional qualifications are not closely related to the received education (Data collected in Los Angeles 2013, in Tehran 2014, in Beirut 2015, the author's archive of ethnographic materials).

Intragenerational mobility in the three communities

The observation of intragenerational and intergenerational social mobility through retrospective analysis led to the inference about the socio-professional changes in the communities. The comparison of the participant's initial and current occupation shows the process of social mobility over one generation. In this comparison, the social vectors through which this generation moved to, become important. In particular, it is vital to discuss the factors that affect the period between the first job and the current job. In the framework of this research, four main factors are discussed: the existing social capital or family status, the position on education, the influence of community relations and national identity.

Knowledge and skill-based workers (A) are the dominant group in Beirut in both stages of work activity, i.e. initial and current occupation. The difference between work activities during the two stages indicates upward social mobility (Figure 2). At the second stage, the number of workers in group A has already increased and the number of workers in group B has decreased. There are prerequisites for linear ascending intragenerational mobility in Beirut.

The rich experience of the Armenian presence in Beirut allows Armenians to occupy higher social positions, based on the acquired reputation and resources in the community, including various community organizations as well as educational and cultural, scientific centers. In addition, motivation and aptitude for education contributes to upward mobility. University life promotes the involvement of young people in the community. The analysis of typical personal stories clearly shows that social progress is more natural in the city, which provides wider opportunities for integration. It is noteworthy that family status and social relations allow them to repeat the professional behavior of the previous generation. This is evidenced by the following quotations from the interviews: "We have been a family of doctors for three generations, and there is a tendency in families to continue to move in the same professional field".

"The current attitude towards Armenians gives us a guarantee to move forward in many professional spheres" (in-depth interview, Beirut 2015, the author's archive of ethnographic materials).

The community of Beirut, with its whole social capital, ensures the socio-professional progress of its representatives, so the resources aimed at social progress in families are justified. According to the data, each next generation shows a higher number in the field of intellectual work. It can be noticed that the change between the first and current occupation can be significant. The reason for this may be the fact that if a family wants to provide high education, children carry out additional work in other areas (for example, in the service sector) before obtaining high qualifications in the main professional sphere.
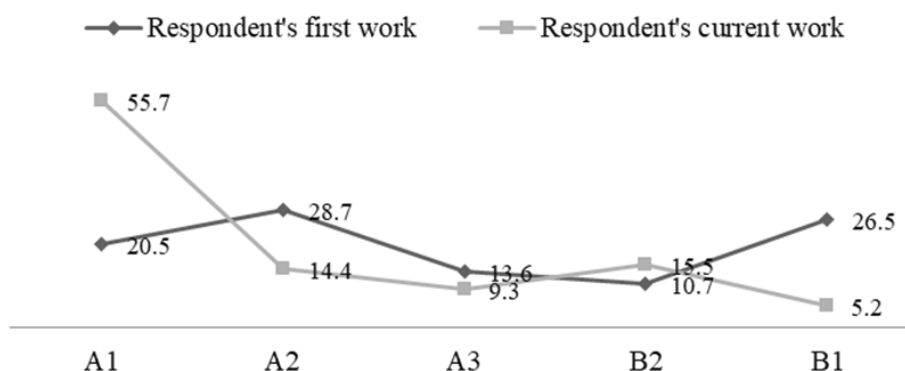
Figure 2. The dynamics of initial and current work activity of Armenians in Beirut (%).
Source: author's own work.

The change between the initial and current employment among the Armenians in Tehran is insignificant. This can be explained by the fact that they are engaged in family crafts and involved in community organizations as well as the degree of cohesion and density of the social network, which predetermine the type of employment for Armenians in Tehran. According to the in-depth interviews, the employment choices of the community members mostly fall on the familiar fields, popular in the community. For example, women mostly work in social and cultural or religious organizations of the Armenian community. And men mostly work in Armenian stores, the service sector, etc. In this case, intragenerational mobility is stable, and slow growth is observed in each socio-professional group (Figure 3). In Tehran, the types of work activities in an individual's life are strictly related to religious or community boundaries and family experience. The language knowledge and the level of higher education is also an important factor. Mostly, people who have received higher education abroad and return to the community, have wealthy families, and keep intensive relations with foreign

countries, hence a high level of foreign language proficiency. In contrast to Beirut, there are no major differences between the spheres of the first and current occupations in Tehran. If a family decides that a child should either continue the father's work, acquire a new craft, or get formal/professional education, all resources are directed to achieve this goal until the child is employed for the first time.
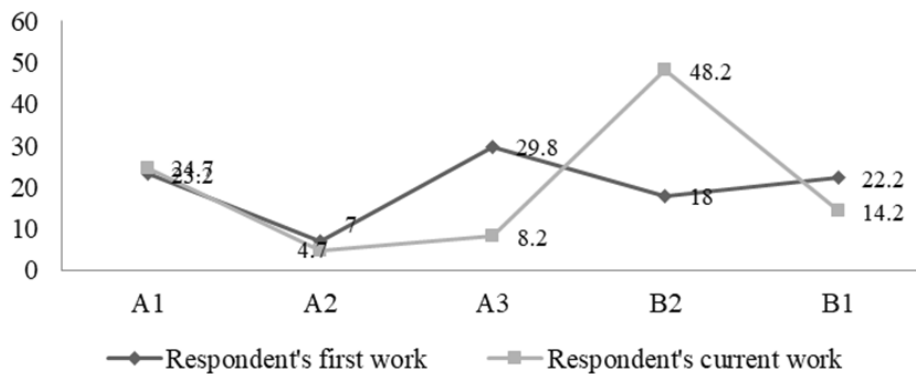

Figure 3. The dynamics of initial and current work activity of Armenians in Tehran (%).
Source: author's own work.

Among the studied communities, the Armenian community in Los Angeles is both the largest and the most multi-layered. Armenians there can work both in line with the specificities of their ethnicity and their home countries. In addition, there are organizations and unions (e.g. the Union of Iranian Armenians, the Organization of Istanbul Armenians) that help Armenian immigrants to find the right job or build social connections. One of the community members notes: "When I moved from Constantinople to the United States, I already knew where to get help. I applied to the Union of Constantinople Armenians, where I got introduced to the local conditions and found a temporary job up until I learned English. I started visiting the organization and become a member" (Data collected in Los Angeles 2013, the author's archive of ethnographic materials).

The observation of the intragenerational mobility of Armenians in Los Angeles shows that there is a social growth among the workers of group A, and the number of workers in this group has decreased (Figure 4). In Los Angeles, there are obvious differences among the families. There are great differences between the first and current occupations. The latter relates to their experience, information about the country as well as available economic and social resources. For families who moved from other countries,

the problem of English language proficiency was initially relevant. And only after completing a certain educational process, those who moved could think about moving forward in work.
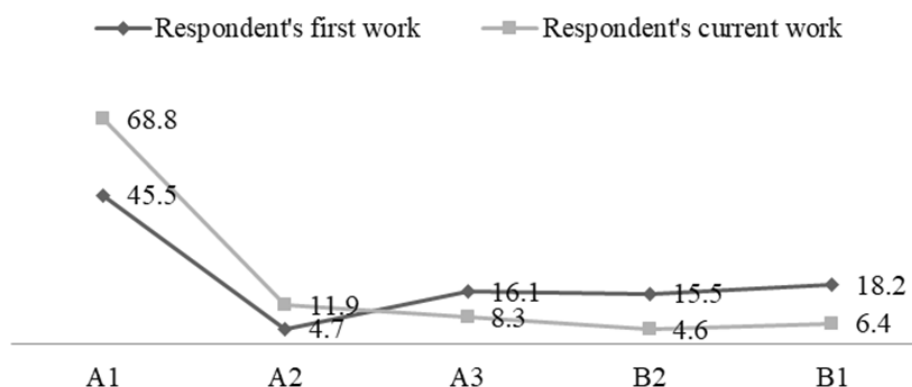

Figure 4. The dynamics of initial and current work activity of Armenian in Los Angeles (%).
Source: author's own work.

Intergenerational mobility in the three communities

Intergenerational mobility has been measured by considering a number of theoretical approaches and the specifics of the research material. The measurements are achieved by correlating the respondent's occupation to that of his/her father.

The comparison of the socio-professional spheres occupied by the past and present generations of Armenians in Beirut shows the following changes. Almost half of the older generation was engaged in manual work. Compared to that, three subgroups of group A recorded growth in social mobility in younger generation. Subgroup A1 and A2 recorded an increase of about 20% and 10%, respectively. The number of manual workers decreased in both subgroups. The current generation has a higher socio-professional status than the previous one. Overall, inter-generational mobility is progressive among the Armenians in Beirut (Figure 5).

The correlation between the occupational positions of the previous and current generations in the Armenian community of Tehran shows that the current generation almost equally repeats the work activity of the previous generation, displaying highest accumulations in the group of manual workers.
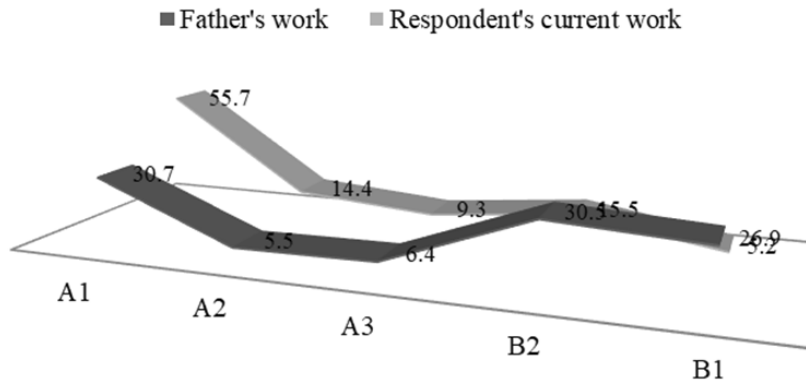
■ Father's work   ■ Respondent's current work

Figure 5. Trends in intergenerational mobility of Armenians in Beirut (%).
Source: author's own work.

However, linear dynamics shows that both generations of highly skilled knowledge and skilled manual workers have the highest indicators. Among the Armenians in Tehran, there is a tradition of transmitting the occupation across the generations (Figure 6).
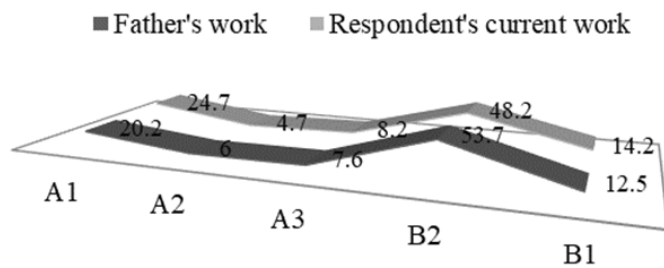
■ Father's work   ■ Respondent's current work

Figure 6. Trends in intergenerational mobility of Armenians in Tehran (%).
Source: author's own work.

That is not the case among Armenians in Los Angeles. In comparison with the previous generation, the number of manual workers among current generation has decreased (Figure 7).
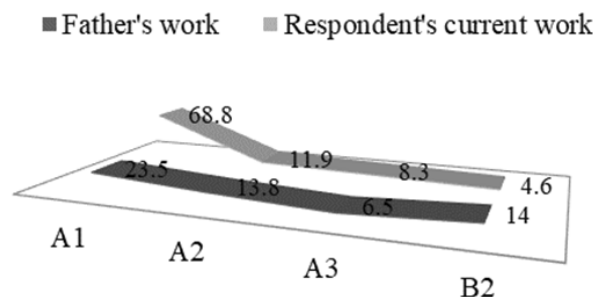
Figure 7. Trends in intergenerational mobility of Armenians in Los Angeles (%).
Source: author's own work.

To conclude, in Los Angeles there are conditions conducive to the social progress of the individual, providing various opportunities and means to obtain the desired social status, which also creates space for fluctuations in social mobility.

By contrast, the socio-professional groups formed in the Armenian community of Tehran are mostly stable. In the traditional "closed" environment of Tehran, the social status of Armenians as a national religious minority is more stable. The existence of intergenerational transmission of labor means that the social behavior of several generations remains stable and can only be disrupted by major or abrupt social changes.

Unlike the Tehran community, Beirut's governance system contributes to the potential for social progress of various minorities. There is high likelihood of a rapid and progressive occupational change across the generations.

Socio-professional changes within an ethnic group in other-ethnic environment are conditioned not only by national characteristics but also by changes in the socio-economy of a given country, popular demand, and other factors. Thereby, social changes taking place in the Diaspora can change their direction and intensity. The impact of environmental differences is evident when comparing the same ethnic groups and communities in different countries.

Based on the research data, it can be argued that different groups of the same ethnos have been occupying different social statuses and professional strata in the Diaspora—depending on the experiences they had in the country of origin, as well as the specificities of the host country-and, as a result, show different trends in social mobility.

Factors affecting social mobility are the movement and relocation to a foreign environment, the socio-economic potential of the family, the bo-

undaries of ethnocultural, religious and identity. Sources of information that are constantly updated in communities are also important from the point of professional orientation. High education is a catalyst for mobility and success in the Diaspora communities. The focus on education and the resources invested in education should ensure success. In communities with dense social relations and "closed" borders, there are other ways to realize social and professional strata, for example, informal ties. From the point of view of involvement in society, the professional strata play a special role in ensuring the image of the community.

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