

UCLA

Volume V. 1989-90 - California Immigrants in World Perspective: The Conference Papers, April 1990

Title

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Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/7jp6m12s>

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Publication Date

1990-04-07

ISSR
Working Papers
in the
Social Sciences

1989-90, Vol. 5, Number 6

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by

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A version of this paper was prepared for the UCLA CONFERENCE ON CALIFORNIA IMMIGRANTS IN WORLD PERSPECTIVE, April 1990. The Conference was coordinated by Institute for Social Science Research and sponsored by the Immigration Research Program the Dean's office of the Division of Social Sciences, and International Studies and Overseas Programs, UCLA.

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SUBETHNICITY: ARMENIANS IN LOS ANGELES

by

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Presented at the California Immigrants in World Perspective"
Conference, University of California, Los Angeles, April 26-27,
1990.

Acknowledgement: This paper is based on research supported, in
part, by NSF grant #SES-8512007, and by grants from the
International Studies and Overseas Programs and from the Academic
Senate of the University of California, Los Angeles.

Introduction

Diversity is one of the major current themes in the field of immigrant and ethnic studies. Scholars are increasingly attentive to national-origin diversity among groups such as Hispanics in the United States (Portes and Truelove 1987; Nelson and Tienda 1985). They argue that differences in group characteristics, migration histories, and reception contexts affect the adaptation of immigrant groups. In some cases, however, ethnic diversity does not stop at the nationality level, and may take different forms. For instance, Iranians consist of ethno-religious subgroups (Armenians, Bahais, Jews, and Muslims), whereas Vietnamese include ethnic Chinese from Vietnam (Bozorgmehr 1990; Desbarats 1986; Sabagh et al. 1989). Armenians have co-ethnic counterparts of different national origins such as Iran, Lebanon, or the Soviet Union. The aim of this paper is document internal diversity among Armenians and thus demonstrate the need for taking into account subethnicity among Armenians.

Subethnicity

Subethnicity refers to the presence of ethnic groups within an ethnic group. Subethnicity exists whenever an ethnic group consists of native-born and/or foreign-born subgroups. This ethnic mixture results from the successive influx of an ethnic group from different countries of origin into a locale. Sharing an all-encompassing ethnicity, each subgroup has a different national identity and cultural heritage. Subgroups may also differ with respect to characteristics depending on their position in their

respective countries of origin and migrant selectivity.

Although neglected in the literature, subethnicity is not a new phenomenon in the United States. Successive waves of Jews from Germany and Russia into New York City originally fragmented the Jewish community at the turn of the century (Rischin 1962, 1986). More recently, the immigration of Chinese from Hong Kong and Taiwan into major Chinese centers established by earlier Cantonese settlers in New York and San Francisco has diversified Chinese ethnicity (Lai 1988; Lyman 1986; Nee and Nee 1973; Zhou and Logan 1989). In Los Angeles today, in addition to the Jews and the Chinese, Armenians are a sizable, visible, and growing ethnic group containing ethnic subgroups. Armenians in Los Angeles are the newest example of an ethnically diverse group, enabling us to examine this important and unstudied historical phenomenon.

Armenian Migration to Los Angeles

In order to better understand ethnic diversity among Armenians in Los Angeles, we need to examine their migration patterns into this area. Armenian immigration to the United States has been primarily triggered off by political rather than economic reasons. There were two major waves of Armenian immigration: pre-1920s and post-1960s. The earliest wave of Armenian refugees fled the Ottoman Empire in the late 19th and early 20th century (Mirak 1983). The second wave of Armenian immigration started after 1965 when the restrictive U.S. Immigration Act of 1924 was finally lifted. The second wave of Armenian immigration was also caused by

political turmoil in Egypt, Turkey, Lebanon, and Iran (Mirak 1980). Thus there is an unusual mix of countries of origin and generations among Armenians. One group includes the survivors of the first wave of immigrants and their descendants who are now a middle-age second generation, and a young or very young third and even fourth generations. By contrast Armenian immigrants after 1965 include mostly a first generation ranging widely in age, so **that** there are both first-generation and third-generation Armenians of the same age. They differ, of course, in terms of country of origin.

Most of the earlier Armenian immigrants settled in the Eastern states, but some later migrated to Fresno to work in agriculture. Some of the second- and third-generation Armenians left the Fresno community and resettled in Los Angeles. The new wave of Armenian immigration is directed towards California and especially Los Angeles. Thus, Los Angeles has attracted both native-born Armenians from Fresno and from the Eastern states, as well as recent immigrants from a few Middle Eastern countries and the Soviet Union. Los Angeles is now one of the most ethnically diverse Armenian centers in the world.

Methodology

Armenians are a distinctive ethnic minority in the United States but until the 1980 census provided data on ancestry it was not possible to analyze their demographic and socioeconomic characteristics. The data set created for the Armenian population

in Los Angeles are from the 1980 Census 5% Sample based on two criteria: (1) persons who indicated Armenian as either first or second ancestry; and (2) persons who spoke the Armenian language at home. These criteria yielded a sample of 2,619 cases, representing 52,400 Armenians in Los Angeles County.

This paper also presents data from a probability sample of 195 Armenian Iranian heads of household who took part in the study of Iranians in Los Angeles.

Diversity in the National Origin of Armenians in Los Angeles

Table 1 gives the sample size and the population estimates of the different Armenian subgroups. More than two-thirds of Armenians in Los Angeles are foreign-born, suggesting that this city was a magnet for Armenian immigrants. For the United States as a whole, only 40 percent of Armenians are foreign-born (Sabagh et al. 1988). Among Armenian immigrants in Los Angeles, those from Iran and from the USSR are the largest groups (29 percent of all Armenians). Almost as numerically important are Armenians from Lebanon. These three subgroups account for 4 out of every 10 Armenians in Los Angeles. As the predominant place of origin of the first wave of Armenian immigrants to the United States, Turkey accounts for only 10 percent of Armenians in Los Angeles.

On the whole, Los Angeles has attracted the newest Armenian immigrants. Table 2 shows that two-thirds of all foreign-born Armenians residing in Los Angeles in 1980 arrived in the United States between 1975 and 1980. About seven out of ten of Armenian

immigrants from Iran, Lebanon, and the USSR arrived in this period. Recent migrants from Lebanon fled a war and those from Iran fled a revolution. The earliest migrants were from Turkey and from other countries, but even six out of ten of immigrants from these countries arrived between 1970 and 1980. It should be noted, however, that Armenians from Turkey residing in other parts of the United States included a much higher share of the old immigration (Sabagh et al. 1988). Because Turkish Armenians have the longest residence in the United States, they are distinctly older than any other subgroup. Thus, in Los Angeles their median age was about 64 years as compared to a median ages in the range 26 to 36 years for other foreign-born Armenians. The native-born had the youngest age profile with a median age of 25 years.

Socioeconomic Contrasts Among Armenian Subgroups

The significance of subethnicity among Armenians will be indicated by the extent of socioeconomic differences between Armenian subgroups. The greater these differences the greater the applicability of the concept of subethnicity to Armenians. The 1980 census variables used in the analysis include level of education, level of self-employment, and occupational **profiles**. The analysis of census data will be supplemented by a brief summary of findings on social and economic networks of Armenian Iranians from the study of Iranians in Los Angeles.

Educational Achievement

While educational achievement among **all** Armenian men and women in Los Angeles is fairly high, it is surprising that those who did not go beyond elementary school are more numerous than those with a post-graduate college education (Table 3). This peculiar educational profile reflects the vast differences that exist among Armenian subgroups. For men, nearly half of Turkish Armenians and about one quarter of Lebanese and other Middle Eastern Armenians had a limited elementary school education (Table 3). The noticeably lower educational achievement of Turkish Armenians could be partly attributed to their older age. By contrast, less than one out of ten Iranian and Soviet Armenian men and almost none of the native-born Armenian men had a comparably low level of education. While women had a lower educational achievement, differences among subgroups are comparable to those for men. Modal educational categories varied from elementary school for men born in Turkey to college for native-born and Iran-born Armenian men. For all other subgroups, the modal category is senior high school. The modal category for Armenian women from Iran, Lebanon, and the USSR is also senior high school, a level higher than for other Middle Eastern countries including Turkey. Although the Lebanese Armenians are part of the new immigration, their educational profile is different from that of Iranian Armenians. Clearly, the level of education for all Armenians masks significant subethnic variations in educational attainment.

Economic Characteristics

Armenians in Los Angeles consist of immigrant subgroups with a strong proclivity toward entrepreneurship. Therefore, we include self-employment in our analysis of their economic activities.

As with education, the occupational profile of all Armenians conceals subgroup variations (Table 4). For all Armenian men, about one-quarter are in the two **highest occupational** categories of executives and professionals, but for subgroups the range is from 16 percent among Soviet Armenians to about 30 percent for the Armenian Iranians and the native-born. At the other end of the occupational scale, the figure of 44 percent in crafts and operators for all Armenians contrasts to a range from a low of about one-third for native-born and Iran-born Armenians to two-thirds for Soviet Armenians.

The rate of self-employment among all Armenians is twice as high as that of the general population of Los Angeles (18 as compared to 9 percent). But even the figure of 18 percent self-employed for all Armenians masks important variations among subgroups. Self-employment reached the highest rate of 32 percent for Turkish Armenians. Native-born Armenians have the lowest rate of self-employment (11 percent), only slightly higher than for the general Los Angeles population. The rate of self-employment for other subgroups is close to that for Armenians as a whole.

Subethnic Social and Economic Networks

Subethnicity is documented not only by marked differences in socioeconomic characteristics, but also by the predominance of social and economic ties within subgroups. The survey of Iranians in Los Angeles provides evidence on the networks of Armenian Iranians (Der-Martirosian, 1989). The close friends of more than 80 percent of these respondents and their spouses were Armenian Iranians, as were the people at the social gatherings they attended. The respondents' children tend to be less exclusive in their choice of friends, suggesting that the direction of social ties might change among the second generation. Because of the small size of the Armenian Iranian labor force relative to the general labor force of Los Angeles, patterns of economic networks tend to be complex. The vast majority of business partners of self-employed Armenian Iranians are coethnics, but their employees or customers tend to be non-Armenians and non-Iranians. Also, salaried Armenian Iranians tend to have coworkers who are non-Iranians and non-Armenians. The tendency for economic networks within the subethnic group is greater for Armenian Iranians than for other Iranians. While no comparable information is available for the other Armenian subgroups, the data for Armenian Iranians show that subethnic groups do have clear social and economic boundaries.

Conclusion

We used census data on all Armenians, and survey data on Armenian Iranians, in Los Angeles to document the presence and significance of subethnic groups within the broader Armenian ethnic group. The following are some of the salient findings of this paper:

(1) Successive migration streams from various countries, and the presence of the native-born, have created complex ethnic diversity among Armenians in Los Angeles. The old immigration before 1950 was mainly from Turkey and the new immigration after 1975 is primarily from Iran, Lebanon, and the Soviet Union. These distinct immigration waves have resulted in a young and old age profile.

(2) The socioeconomic profile of all Armenians masks significant differences in subgroups characteristics. Native-born and Iran-born Armenians tend to have the highest socioeconomic status, as measured by education and occupation, while those from Turkey have the lowest. Conversely, Armenians from Turkey have the highest rate of self-employment, and the native-born have the lowest.

Survey data show the exclusivity of Armenian Iranians' social and economic ties, supporting the argument that subethnicity is more salient than an all-encompassing Armenian ethnicity. Thus, future research on Armenians, and other diverse ethnic groups such as the Jews and the Chinese, should take into account subgroup differences.

Table 1 Country or State of Birth of Persons of Armenian Ancestry,
Los Angeles, 1980.

Country or State of Birth	Sample Size	Population Size	Percent Distribution
Native-born population			
California	508	10,200	19.5
Other states	224	4,500	8.6
<u>Total</u>	<u>732</u>	<u>14,700</u>	<u>28.1</u>
Foreign-born population			
Iran	386	7,700	14.7
USSR	376	7,500	14.3
Lebanon	297	6,000	11.5
Turkey	256	5,100	9.7
Other Middle East	311	6,200	11.8
Other countries	261	5,200	9.9
<u>Total</u>	<u>1,887</u>	<u>37,700</u>	<u>71.9</u>
<u>Total Population</u>	<u>2,619</u>	<u>52,400</u>	<u>100.0</u>

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1980.

Table 2 Year of Immigration of Persons of Armenian Ancestry, Native-Born, and Foreign-Born from Selected Countries, Los Angeles, 1980.

Year of Immigration	Percent Distribution						
	Foreign Born	Iran	Lebanon	Other Middle East	Turkey	USSR	Other Countries
Year of Immigration							
<i>Before</i> 1950	6.1	1.8	0.9	1.1	17.1	15.1	7.1
1950-59	5.1	2.2	3.0	5.3	4.9	7.0	14.6
1960-64	2.5	2.8	3.0	2.1	2.9	1.7	5.8
1965-69	6.9	4.9	8.5	7.8	9.8	3.3	15.5
1970-74	12.8	13.5	13.2	21.0	12.2	6.0	16.4
1975-80	66.6	74.8	71.4	62.6	53.1	66.9	40.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: See Table 1.

Table 3 Educational Distribution of Males and Females of Armenian Ancestry, Total, Native-Born, and Born in Selected Countries, 16 Years Old and over, Los Angeles, 1980.

Education		Percent Distribution								
bY	Sex	All Armenians	Native-born	Foreign-born					USSR	Other Countries
				Iran	Lebanon	Turkey	Other Middle East			
Males										
	Elementary	15.2	0.8	8.0	23.8	45.8	25.7	9.7	10.6	
	Junior High	9.2	1.1	5.5	10.3	21.7	12.2	13.6	8.8	
	Senior High	34.7	35.2	31.9	33.3	19.2	29.1	52.6	38.1	
	College	29.4	45.6	40.5	25.4	8.3	20.9	14.9	33.6	
	College 5 years +	11.5	17.2	14.1	7.1	5.0	12.2	9.1	8.8	
	Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	
	Sample size (1,085)		(261)	(163)	(126)	(120)	(148)	(154)	(113)	
Females										
	Elementary	17.9	0.9	14.2	18.5	48.0	32.6	11.0	13.5	
	Junior High	10.5	1.8	8.0	19.4	13.4	13.3	12.4	13.6	
	Senior High	39.9	48.7	43.8	34.3	29.1	28.9	44.8	41.5	
	College	24.6	35.3	28.4	24.1	7.1	18.5	26.9	22.9	
	College 5 years +	7.1	13.4	5.6	3.7	2.4	6.7	4.8	8.5	
	Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	
	Sample size (1,019)		(224)	(162)	(108)	(127)	(135)	(145)	(118)	

Source: See Table 1.

Table 4 Occupational Distribution of Males and Females of Armenian Ancestry, Total, Native-Born, and Born in Selected Countries, 16 Years Old and Over, Los Angeles, 1980.

Occupation by Sex	All Armenians	Native- born	Percent Distribution					
			Iran	Lebanon	Turkey	Other Middle East	USSR	Other Countries
Males								
Executives	14.1	19.0	16.8	10.2	12.5	14.6	8.3	9.4
Professionals	10.4	12.8	12.8	11.1	8.3	6.5	7.4	10.4
Technical	24.7	26.9	32.8	23.1	25.0	22.0	14.8	25.0
Services	6.5	7.9	4.8	6.5	5.6	6.5	4.6	8.3
Farming	0.5	1.2	0	0	1.4	0	0	0
Crafts	27.3	17.8	20.0	35.2	25.0	35.0	39.8	30.2
Operators	16.5	14.5	12.8	13.9	22.2	15.4	25.0	16.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Sample size	(874)	(242)	(125)	(108)	(72)	(123)	(108)	(96)
Females								
Executives	8.3	10.4	8.1	7.4	6.3	10.8	4.4	7.0
Professionals	14.5	21.4	9.7	13.0	12.5	13.8	10.3	11.3
Technical	46.2	53.2	48.4	42.6	43.8	36.9	38.2	49.3
Services	13.0	10.4	14.5	13.0	12.5	13.8	16.2	14.1
Farming	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Crafts	6.3	1.3	6.5	5.6	12.5	12.3	7.4	8.5
Operators	11.5	3.2	12.9	18.5	12.5	12.3	23.5	9.9
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Sample size	(506)	(154)	(62)	(54)	(32)	(65)	(68)	(71)

Source: See Table 1.

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