“The Lebanonization of the Armenian-Americans: From 1933 to the Present”

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In 1933, an Armenian priest was murdered in an Armenian Church in Washington Heights, NYC. The repercussions of the murder extended far beyond the boundary of Police District 11 to involve the authority of Armenian Church located in Antelias, Lebanon and its major rival, the Armenian Church of Soviet Armenia. This paper will analyze the expansion of the authority of the Armenian Church in Lebanon as it engineers-- through a murder in Washington Heights-- to redraw the boundaries of its power vis-à-vis its main rival, the Armenian Church of Soviet Armenia. This extension of power and the Armenian Church in Lebanon’s continued and present foray into the Armenian-American landscape raises larger questions of the permeation of borders and reveals the continued insertion of a Lebanese institution into the everyday lives of American citizens of Armenian decent. Because the accused were members and sympathizers of the Dashnak political party, all those affiliated with the party were banned from Armenian churches throughout the United States and were prevented from attending and participating in mass, weddings, baptisms, and burials. In response, in 1957, the excommunicated encouraged the Armenian Church in Lebanon to intervene, and it in turn established its own churches in America, beside (often contiguous to) existing ones. The Armenian Church of Lebanon’s unprecedented involvement created relationships that had not previously existed, bonding thousands of Armenians in America with an institution in Lebanon that claimed spiritual and ideological authority over them. While not separated by dogma, these Armenian churches in America became political rivals and vied with one another for the legitimacy to represent the entirety of the Armenian community in the United States, all in the name of larger authority, one based either in Lebanon or Soviet Armenia.