

A Mandate to Protect: Imperial Encounters and Affective Ideologies between France and
Lebanon, 1860-1931

By

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgments	i
Table of Contents	v
List of Figures	vi
Abstract	vii
Preface	ix
Introduction	1
Chapter One Lebanon: A “French Citadel” in the Levant?	23
Chapter Two Encounters in Qraiyeh: Industrial Interests and Imperial Influence at a French Silk Factory in Mount Lebanon	79
Chapter Three Allegations, Insults, and Honor: Sites of Contact and Conflict in Pre-Mandate Beirut and Mount Lebanon	122
Chapter Four A Moral or Military Mandate? Allegiance, Intervention, and Martyrdom between France and Lebanon during the Great War	169
Chapter Five Mandating Protection: France, Greater Lebanon, and the Politics of Affective Empire	219
Conclusion	265
Bibliography	273

LIST OF FIGURES

1. Poem from Sisters of Charity of Besançon to Charles Guerin, 8 September 1926. 108
Archives des Sœurs de la Charité de Besançon, Région Orient-Liban, Album.

2. Painting from Qraiye, anonymous Sister, 1926. 111
Archives des Sœurs de la Charité de Besançon, Région Orient-Liban, Album.

ABSTRACT

This dissertation argues that an ideology of protection shaped Lebanon's transition from informal French protectorate to official colonial mandate after the First World War. France's imperial relationship with Lebanon, I contend, derived not only from historic religious, economic, and geopolitical influence, but also from colonial fantasies of filial devotion and paternal prerogative, maternal affection and parental responsibility. My work explores how languages of sentiment and allegiance enabled early twentieth-century French and Lebanese men and women to negotiate local conflicts, challenge colonial practices, and stake claims to imperial protection. Within an imagined "France of the Levant," this narrative of protection sustained a conviction in French imperial prestige through the traumas of war and colonialism, even as its affective ideals were reconfigured on the ground.

"A Mandate to Protect" considers a series of different encounters: between writers and travelers, industrial and religious personnel, expatriates and diplomats, political and military officials, and colonial administrators and commentators. This approach aims to understand how imperial authority was articulated, contested, and reconfigured across diverse contexts, ranging from a colonialist conference in Marseille to a silk factory in Mount Lebanon, from disputes at the Beirut harbor to meetings of wartime informants off the eastern Mediterranean coast. Moving beyond a historiographical focus on colonial governance and politics, I propose that gendered registers of allegiance and obligation were embedded in everyday sites of contact even before they were institutionalized through colonial structures. And by bridging the divide between France's unofficial protectorate and postwar colonial mandate over Lebanon, I show how proponents and critics of Franco-Lebanese alliance adapted ideals of protection across shifting imperial frameworks, carving out a particular status for Lebanon within the idealized French

Levant. I build on recent scholarship on the postwar mandate system as well as colonial protectorates to argue that imperial hierarchies were upheld—and threatened—not only through diplomatic and legal channels, nor exclusively according to nationalist or sectarian agendas. Instead, I adopt a more intimate scale of analysis, illuminating how notions of protection structured a wide array of encounters.

PREFACE

With the bias of hindsight, two moments in the process of writing this dissertation seem to capture its shifting and evolving form. The first occurred sometime in the fall of 2013, in a small reading room in the archives of the Lyon Chamber of Commerce. I had been conducting research there for several weeks, poring over records of the city's silk industry and its involvement in Lebanon. The original iteration of my dissertation project focused exclusively on this commercial relationship, as an inquiry into how economic interests shaped—and were shaped by—cultural understandings of the Near East in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The more charts and graphs of silkworm cocoon exports and raw silk imports that I consulted, however, the more I realized that this perspective on French interests in Lebanon was telling me at once too much and not enough.

Too much, because the term “interests” was asserted so forcefully—in tables and figures, by industrialists and imperialists—that it seemed to demand closer inquiry. Not enough, because its frequent invocation—in both its “moral and material” guises, and often accompanied by its close semantic cousin, “influence”—too readily linked France's cultural and economic forms of intervention, as if an orphanage and a silk factory each contributed equally toward the same goal. That goal seemed focused less on producing greater quantities of silk or protecting vulnerable children than on augmenting an abstract quality of “prestige.” Beyond the exploitation of commercial capitalism or the disingenuousness of the “civilizing mission,” something deeper seemed to be informing this terminology. A variable seemed to be missing, or unspoken. The language of interests and influence—so common in contemporaneous literature as well as historiography—was not telling me enough about the historical relationship between France and Lebanon. Calculating the balance between the two, or between economic investment and cultural

attitudes, would only get me so far. They were not only inextricable; they were interwoven with other ideas and assumptions, situating Lebanon within an entire mental and ideological universe.

Some two and a half years later, presenting work at a French history conference, a gentleman in the audience pointed me toward the variable I had, perhaps unwittingly, already been seeking. He introduced himself as Lebanese, made a kind comment about my presentation, and then expressed his conviction: “But the Lebanese really *do* love France.” I had encountered this sentiment in my research, and I was exploring it in my writing process. But what did it mean for a nation, or an entire population, to “love” a state, particularly a state that had, albeit briefly, assumed colonial sovereignty over the former? French schools—religious as well as secular—had indeed provided education for generations of Lebanese, and the French language was (and in many places still is) prominent in government, in culture, and in society. Yet to accept education, language, or even religion as the explanation for professions of affection too readily accepts the logic of those who themselves proffered these variables as proof positive of France and Lebanon’s natural connection.

Rather, I came to look to the notion of *protection* to explain how an imperial formation took shape between France and Lebanon. This concept, I hypothesized, underlay the certitude that material interests and moral influence could be mutually reinforcing forms of intervention. If the Lebanese loved France, both before and during—and indeed outlasting—the colonial period, then any French involvement in the country could only redound to a sense of French greatness. The relationship was at once theoretically unconditional—a familial bond—and effectively transactional. Lebanese gratitude emerged not simply out of a quid pro quo for educational, religious, cultural, or economic investment. These were encapsulated within the larger ideological domain of protection, whereby Lebanon and the Lebanese, in discourse if not in

practice, existed under the protective rubric of French authority. In exchange for its enduring protection, imperial France received guaranteed Lebanese affection. Quite aside from its political status, this relationship skirted the framework of the colonial, because France's "moral and material" intervention proceeded according to affective rather than extractive logics, premised on affinity and engagement rather than conquest or settlement.

Yet the point, for my intellectual undertaking, was not to establish whether France's connection to Lebanon was or was not "colonial." It was instead to understand what such a qualification might even mean and, more precisely, how a particular relationship premised on interests, influence, and prestige might have been constructed through abstract values of affection and protection. Through this question, perhaps I might be able to gain some insight, not only into the ambiguously imperial situation between France and Lebanon, but also into colonial ambiguity more broadly.

INTRODUCTION

By the early twentieth century, a particular colonial fantasy had taken hold in the French imperial imagination. Lebanon, a small, mountainous, and mostly Christian region of the eastern Mediterranean, was not even a formal colony within the expansive French empire. Yet it represented, in the words of a French government and industry spokesman in 1913, “a younger sister of our fatherland,” bound not only by historic religious, cultural, and commercial interests, but also by traditions of sentimental attachment.¹ Traveling in the region the following year, just months before the outbreak of the Great War, nationalist writer Maurice Barrès proclaimed France’s role as the enduring “protector of Lebanon.”²

What does it mean for an imperial nation-state like France, with an empire that stretched from the Caribbean to the South Pacific, Algeria to Indochina, to be called the “protector” of a place that qualified neither as a department, a colony, nor even a protectorate?³ Even before Lebanon and Syria were accorded League of Nations “mandates,” ostensibly to guide these countries toward self-government after the First World War, could professions of affinity and guardianship create a “colonial situation” in a non-colonial territory?⁴ What did such familial language imply about the history between these two places and their populations?⁵ How and why

¹ Gaston Ducouso, *L'industrie de la soie en Syrie et au Liban* (Beyrouth: Imprimerie catholique, 1913), iii.

² Maurice Barrès, *Une enquête aux pays du Levant* (Paris: Plon-Nourrit, 1920), 70.

³ Algeria, for instance, qualified as a department, while the majority of French overseas possessions were considered colonies, and Tunisia and Morocco became protectorates in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, respectively. On the idea of the “imperial nation-state,” see Gary Wilder, *The French Imperial Nation-State: Negritude and Colonial Humanism Between the Two World Wars* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

⁴ For a recent survey of the League of Nations mandate system, see Susan Pedersen, *The Guardians: The League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015). The notion of the “colonial situation” dates to anthropologist Georges Balandier’s seminal mid-century article. Balandier, “La situation coloniale: approche théorique,” *Cahiers internationaux de Sociologie* 11 (1951): 44-79. See also Balandier, “La situation coloniale: ancien concept, nouvelle réalité,” *French Politics, Culture and Society* 20, no. 2 (Summer 2002): 4-10.

⁵ Andrew Arsan has compellingly traced the genealogy of this language to the mid-nineteenth century, arguing that affective tropes constituted a meaningful circuit of Mediterranean empire. “‘There Is, in the Heart of Asia,...an Entirely French Population:’ France, Mount Lebanon, and the Workings of Affective Empire in the Mediterranean, 1830-1920,” in *French Mediterraneans: Transnational and Imperial Histories*, eds. Patricia Lorcin and Todd

were the economic and political imperatives of empire expressed—as well as contested—in an idiom of affection and kinship, proximity and protection? And what consequences did an ideology of protection have, not only on the form and meaning of colonialism but also for individual people and the encounters between them?

This dissertation aims to address these questions by closely investigating the history of contact between France and Lebanon over the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This relationship—not quite colonial, yet within the realm of French informal empire—provides important insight into how imperial consciousness takes shape. Because Franco-Lebanese connections were often expressed in “languages of love,” and because Lebanon remained under formal Ottoman sovereignty until after the First World War, the relevance of this relationship to histories of imperialism may at first glance seem marginal.⁶ If Lebanon occupies a peripheral place in accounts of French empire after the First World War, it is almost entirely absent from histories of imperialism over the long nineteenth century.⁷ Few historians of French colonialism seem to have yet heeded JP Daughton’s call to interrogate the politics of imperial influence beyond formal colonial boundaries.⁸ Yet precisely for its affective quality and unconventional imperial dynamics, the Lebanese case raises questions of how an actively cultivated ideological proximity translated to formal structures of colonial rule. France’s mandate over Lebanon, my work suggests, did not emerge naturally from decades of exchange between the two regions, nor

Shepard (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2016). See also Andrew Arsan, *Interlopers of Empire: The Lebanese Diaspora in Colonial French West Africa* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), esp. 102-106.

⁶ Matt Matsuda, *Empire of Love: Histories of France and the Pacific* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

⁷ Christopher Andrew and A.S. Kanya-Forstner, *The Climax of French Imperial Expansion, 1914-1924* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1981); Robert Aldrich, *Greater France: A History of French Overseas Expansion* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1996); Martin Thomas, *The French Empire Between the Wars: Imperialism, Politics, and Society* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005); Alice L. Conklin, Sarah Fishman, and Robert Zaretsky, *France and its Empire since 1870* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

⁸ JP Daughton, “When Argentina Was ‘French’: Rethinking Cultural Politics and European Imperialism in Belle-Époque Buenos Aires,” *Journal of Modern History* 80, no. 4 (December 2008): 831-864. Historians of the British empire have arguably pursued in greater depth the overlaps and distinctions between domains of formal and informal imperialism. See Michelle Tusan, “Britain and the Middle East: New Historical Perspectives on the Eastern Question,” *History Compass* 8, no. 3 (2010): 212-222.

solely out of the power politics of the immediate postwar era. Rather, it developed through a notion of protection that upheld imperial hierarchies through discourses of authority and obligation, even as contestation over its meaning enabled elites as well as ordinary people to redeploy its underlying ideological premises.

Adopting a cultural and intellectual approach toward topics often associated with diplomatic and political history, “A Mandate to Protect” analyzes the texts of prominent writers, policymakers, and activists alongside the interactions of French and Lebanese men and women. While cultural histories of colonialism have abounded in recent decades, few have challenged the coherence and meaning of terms like “interests” and “influence” that accompany informal empire.⁹ Social and legal histories of protectorate regimes, meanwhile, have mostly addressed questions of sovereignty and jurisdiction, providing important insights into how colonial legal practices emerged through inter-imperial (and intra-imperial) tensions.¹⁰ But the concept of protection, I suggest, also gave rise to a malleable imperial ideology, one not exclusively tied to political or juridical structures. My perspective toward this ideology of protection is at once diachronic and synchronic, attentive both to continuities and ruptures over time and to dynamics

⁹ Within the voluminous literature in the French context, see for example Pascal Blanchard and Sandrine Lemaire. *Culture coloniale: La France conquise par son empire, 1871-1931* (Paris: Collection Mémoires, No. 86, Éditions Autrement, 2003). Among treatments of French cultural influence in the Levant, Mathew Burrows’ and Jennifer Dueck’s work on the pre-colonial and colonial mandate periods, respectively, focus more on formal cultural policy and geopolitical objectives than on everyday conflicts as sites of imperial negotiation. Burrows, “‘Mission Civilisatrice’: French Cultural Policy in the Middle East, 1860–1914,” *Historical Journal* 29 (1986): 109–35; Dueck, *The Claims of Culture at Empire’s End: Syria and Lebanon under French Rule* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

¹⁰ These include thorough and illuminating studies of the Egyptian and Tunisian contexts by Will Hanley, Julia Clancy-Smith, and Mary Lewis. Hanley, *Identifying with Nationality: Europeans, Ottomans, and Egyptians in Alexandria* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017); Clancy-Smith, *Mediterraneans: North Africa and Europe in an Age of Migration, c. 1800-1900* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012); Lewis, *Divided Rule: Sovereignty and Empire in French Tunisia, 1881-1938* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013). See also Lâle Can, “The Protection Question: Central Asians and Extraterritoriality in the Late Ottoman Empire,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 48, no. 4 (2016): 679-699.

of negotiation and comportment.¹¹ I survey realms of social, economic, and religious encounter, in addition to sites of military and political confrontation and cultural and literary production. Drawing from a diverse source base—including personal letters and official memoranda, novels and policy documents, travelogues and consular correspondence—enables my consideration of multiple historical vantage points. The purpose of such a wide-ranging study is to perceive in greater depth how ideas of interconnection between France and Lebanon were formed and were fractured, across ostensible boundaries of informal and formal colonialism.

Between Protectorate and Mandate

Lebanon occupies a unique position in French colonial history and historiography. Officially part of the Ottoman Empire until the end of the Great War, it did not even technically become a colony afterwards, when France obtained a mandate from the newly founded League of Nations to oversee its governance, along with that of neighboring Syria, until their eventual (but continually deferred) independence.¹² While historians have largely concurred that this regime fulfilled the criteria of a colonial relationship, they have debated the extent to which its novel international structure enabled new modes of governance, oppression, and contestation.¹³ My interest, though, is less in a comparison between forms of pre- and postwar colonialism than

¹¹ William Sewell has compellingly advocated for a historical methodology that integrates diachronic and synchronic analysis. Sewell, *Logics of History: Social Theory and Transformation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 175-196.

¹² In the language of the League of Nations, mandates—especially those of former provinces of the Ottoman Empire referred to as “Class A”—did not officially confer colonial sovereignty, but rather placed these territories under the “administrative advice and assistance by a Mandatory until such time as they are able to stand alone.” Article 22 of The Covenant of the League of Nations, Avalon Project of the Yale Law School Lillian Goldman Law Library, http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/leagcov.asp.

¹³ Antony Anghie, *Imperialism, Sovereignty, and the Making of International Law* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Susan Pedersen, “The Meaning of the Mandates System: An Argument,” *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 32 no. 4 (Oct.-Dec. 2006): 560-582; Mark Mazower, *No Enchanted Palace: The End of Empire and the Ideological Origins of the United Nations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013); Natasha Wheatley, “Mandatory Interpretation: Legal Hermeneutics and the New International Order in Arab and Jewish Petitions to the League of Nations,” *Past & Present* no. 227 (May 2015): 205-248.

in tracing the genealogy of specifically Franco-Lebanese relations and mapping their effects.¹⁴ Although an Ottoman territory, Lebanon became what the historian Albert Hourani has called an “invisible protectorate” of France after a mid-nineteenth century outbreak of sectarian violence prompted French intervention to protect beleaguered Lebanese Maronite Christians.¹⁵ The framework that resulted from the subsequent peace agreement provided Lebanon with a semi-autonomous government and an informal guarantee of security from France.¹⁶

This political arrangement both drew upon and encouraged languages of familial affection between France and Lebanon.¹⁷ Even as these discourses often praised Maronite virtue and blamed their victimhood on Muslim aggression, they also conflated a particular religious affinity with Lebanese Christians with imperial ambitions over Lebanon and the Levant. My argument posits that the particularity of Lebanon—its idealized bonds with France and the influence, affection, and protection that sustained them—came to stand in for a more expansive, ambiguous, and indeed figmentary entity imagined as *la France du Levant*.¹⁸ Just as certain attributes presumed to bind France and Lebanon—and, more precisely, Lebanese Christians—were extrapolated to the broader sectarian geography of the Near East, more generic

¹⁴ My investment in the debate of whether mandate colonialism marked a continuity or rupture with previous colonial models is thematically focused on how ideas of protection, affection, and prestige provided the ideological architecture for France’s particular imperial relationship with Lebanon.

¹⁵ Albert Hourani, Foreword to Spagnolo, *France and Ottoman Lebanon: 1861-1914* (London: Ithaca Press, 1977). See chapter one. On the 1860 violence in Mount Lebanon and subsequent French intervention, see especially Leila Fawaz, *An Occasion for War: Civil Conflict in Lebanon and Damascus in 1860* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1994); Caesar Farah, *The Politics of Interventionism in Ottoman Lebanon, 1830-1861* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2000); Davide Rodogno, *Against Massacre: Humanitarian Interventions in the Ottoman Empire, 1815-1914: The Emergence of a European Concept and International Practice* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012); Yann Bouyrat, *Devoir d’intervenir? L’expédition « humanitaire » de la France au Liban, 1860* (Paris: Vendémiaire, 2013).

¹⁶ This regime was known as the *mutasarrifiyya* and was headed by a non-Lebanese Christian governor, appointed by the Sublime Porte, but with substantial input from French and European diplomats. It also inaugurated the Lebanese system of sectarian representation. On its politics and structures of governance, see Engin Akarli, *The Long Peace: Ottoman Lebanon, 1861-1920* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993). On its creation and legacy, see Makdisi, *Culture of Sectarianism*.

¹⁷ Arsan, ““There Is, in the Heart of Asia.””

¹⁸ On the idea of *la France du Levant* in domestic French political and religious debates, see Vincent Cloarec, “La France du levant ou la spécificité impériale française au début XX^e siècle,” *Revue française d’histoire d’outre-mer*, 83, no. 313 (1996): 3-32. Cloarec, though, interprets the French Levant as real-existing realm of imperial policymaking and agendas, whereas I view this entity as an unstable field of the imperial imagination.

characteristics of a backward and inferior Orient informed conceptions of the same Lebanon that was heralded as a French “citadel” in the Levant. These discursive dynamics—between Lebanon and the Levant, and between the Orient and *la France du Levant*—informed how individual men and women navigated the uneven power relations that structured their encounters.

It is in this sense of in-betweenness, between sites of imperial contact and structures of colonial sovereignty, that I refer to the relationship between France and Lebanon as *not quite colonial*. The phrase is not meant to imply a derivative or aspirational quality to a non-colonial imperial formation.¹⁹ Rather, I aim to illustrate the ambiguity through which colonialism itself operated. Where, in effect, did “the colonial” reside? How did it inhabit different—and not even quite colonial—sites and situations? Colonial relations—and the rationalities that governed these exchanges—were not only between states and colonies, nor always clearly marked as such.²⁰ They also inhered, potent yet unstable, in encounters between individuals, in the words used to describe them, and in the fantasies in which they were imagined and idealized.²¹ An ideology of protection, I suggest—fundamentally gendered, familial, and unequal—shaped how these relations were articulated and enacted, on the ground and in the international arena.

The following chapters explore different contexts of encounter between French and Lebanese men and women as they mobilized idioms of protection and affection at sites of imperial influence: a silk factory and religious orphanage, quotidian scenes of conflict on streets

¹⁹ My use of “not-quite-colonial” consciously echoes, and loosely adapts, Homi Bhabha’s articulation of colonial mimicry as a dialectic of becoming “almost-but-not-quite” European. It differs, though, from Bhabha’s invocation, which implies an asymptotic quality of approaching, without ever attaining, a given racial status. Bhabha, “Of Mimicry and Man,” in *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*, eds. Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

²⁰ What David Scott calls the “political rationalities of colonial power” denote logics of governmentality and sovereignty at a conceptual level; I build on his insight to mount an inquiry not only into the “*targets* of colonial power...and the *field* of its operation,” but also into how imperial rationalities inhered in discursive as well as social encounters. Scott, *Refashioning Futures: Criticism after Postcoloniality* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 25.

²¹ Joan Scott has compellingly explored the function of fantasy in history as a powerful psychosocial construct. *The Fantasy of Feminist History* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).

and in homes, and through wartime desperation and postwar opportunity. Across realms of economic, social, military, and political interaction, narratives of Franco-Lebanese affinity—moral and familial, parental and filial—unraveled and were reconstituted toward diverse ends. An ideology of protection proved as enduring, I contend, as the affective ties between France and Lebanon. If *la France du Levant* could not be found on a map, but existed only in mental landscapes, then its meaning had to be negotiated across myriad sites of encounter.

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“A Mandate to Protect” makes several contributions to the overlapping fields of French, Middle Eastern, and colonial history. First, it seeks to denaturalize the affective relationship between France and Lebanon. Instead of presuming that the French mandate over Lebanon—in contrast to its contested authority over a more nationalistically recalcitrant Syria—followed naturally from a history of economic interests and cultural influence, let alone a timeless Franco-Maronite religious and political alliance, this dissertation questions the coherence of each of these concepts.<sup>22</sup> The pairing of material interests and moral influence is too readily invoked, historically and historiographically, as a barometer of informal empire.<sup>23</sup> Apprehending France’s imperial role in a not-quite-colonial situation requires deconstructing the notion of Franco-Lebanese attachment as predetermined, as easily or already attained. It was mobilized at diverse sites of production, as individuals—not just states—invoked affective ideologies. French interventions, both moral and material, had to be envisioned as well as enacted.

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<sup>22</sup> The work of Kamal Salibi and Carol Hakim has undercut the narrative that a “Franco-Maronite dream” originated in the nineteenth century, if not earlier, and persisted in determining the eventual geographical and political formation of Greater Lebanon in 1920. Salibi, *A House of Many Mansions: The History of Lebanon Reconsidered* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2005); Hakim, *The Origins of the Lebanese National Idea, 1840-1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013).

<sup>23</sup> This applies even to the most comprehensive treatments of European interwar imperialism in the Middle East. See for example Thomas, *French Empire Between the Wars*; James Gelvin, *The Modern Middle East: A History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

Second, I approach the history of connection between France and Lebanon through the vantage point of the imperial imagination. My purpose is not to deny the salience of political or economic involvement, but to view these dynamics from the perspective of fantasies of popular affection and protective ideology. A certain mental universe, I suggest, structured how ties between France and Lebanon were conceptualized as well as challenged. Just as Lebanese national identity and politics of sectarianism were objects of construction and contestation, so too was its position as an imperial entity within the imperial imagination.<sup>24</sup> The workings of a French “colonial mind,” a recent collection has argued, brought together a network of norms and assumptions that shaped imperial decision-making and behavior.<sup>25</sup> The idea of Lebanon within an idealized *France du Levant* went beyond its political, territorial, or demographic manifestations. It also enabled a fiction of French preeminence throughout the Near East.

Third, this dissertation uses the framework of the encounter—or more precisely, *encounters* in the plural—to analyze how individual French and Lebanese men and women deployed these languages of affection and logics of protection to their own ends.<sup>26</sup> My analysis proceeds on the planes of both discourse and conduct to ascertain how gendered tropes of imperial prestige—maternal benevolence and paternal discipline, parental authority and obligation, filial gratitude and responsibility, civilized reputation and respectability—were

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<sup>24</sup> Hakim, *Origins of the Lebanese National Idea*; Kais Firro, *Inventing Lebanon: Nationalism and the State under the Mandate* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2003); Asher Kaufman, *Reviving Phoenicia: The Search for Identity in Lebanon* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004); Ussama Makdisi, *The Culture of Sectarianism: Community, History, and Violence in Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Lebanon* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); Max Weiss, *In the Shadow of Sectarianism: Law, Shi‘ism, and the Making of Modern Lebanon* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010).

<sup>25</sup> Martin Thomas, ed., *The French Colonial Mind, Volume 1: Mental Maps of Empire and Colonial Encounters* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2012).

<sup>26</sup> The usefulness of “the colonial encounter,” rendered in the singular, has come into question in colonial, and especially Africanist, historiography. See Nancy Rose Hunt, *A Colonial Lexicon: Of Birth Ritual, Medicalization, and Mobility in the Congo* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), esp. 24-30, 160. I underscore the multiplicity of encounters not only to stress the social and cultural complexity of colonial situations, but also to more effectively draw on the concept’s heuristic potential, as a window into modes of conduct and negotiations of power between individuals.

repurposed to contest abuse, claim moral superiority, and navigate unequal power relations. This intervention draws on and contributes to scholarship that has established the role of gendered discourses and practices in colonial contexts.<sup>27</sup> Whether a Lebanese woman decrying abuse at the hands of her French employer or an expatriate Frenchman denouncing the hostility of his “Arab” neighbors, men and women negotiated standards of appropriate masculine and feminine behavior, in the process recalibrating the imperial formation between France and Lebanon.

Fourth, building on this analysis, “A Mandate to Protect” offers a new reading of the concept of protection, one based on imagination, ideology, and interactions rather than on law and legality. Protection signified not only, or not even chiefly, a jurisdictional delineation of sovereignty and status.<sup>28</sup> It also provided a “common language” with which to articulate, resist, and redeploy an ideology of informal empire between France and Lebanon.<sup>29</sup> The pre-war French protectorate over Lebanon signified as much, if not more, a discursive as a diplomatic regime, a legacy that informed and outlasted the shift to formal colonial authority after the Great War. Ideologically, this protective impulse prescribed an empire, informal or official, premised on a prerogative of benevolence, while discursively, it enabled diverse agents to contest its

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<sup>27</sup> This literature is too vast to list here, but for compelling examples, see Julia Clancy-Smith and Frances Gouda, eds., *Domesticating the Empire: Race, Gender, and Family Life in French and Dutch Colonialism* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 1998); Antoinette Burton, ed., *Gender, Sexuality and Colonial Modernities* (New York: Routledge, 1999); Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Clancy-Smith, “Twentieth-Century Historians and Historiography of the Middle East: Women, Gender, and Empire,” in Israel Gershoni, Amy Singer, and Y. Hakan Erdem, eds., *Middle East Historiographies: Narrating the Twentieth Century* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006); Antoinette Burton and Tony Ballantyne, eds., *Moving Subjects: Gender, Mobility, and Intimacy in an Age of Global Empire* (Urbana-Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2008).

<sup>28</sup> Even in this respect, innovative recent scholarship has established, the meaning of protection could be contorted to individual ends. See for example Jessica M. Marglin, “The Two Lives of Mas‘ud Amoyal: Pseudo-Algerians in Morocco, 1830-1912,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 44 (2012): 651-670; Sarah Abrevaya Stein, “Citizens of a Fictional Nation: Ottoman-Born Jews in France during the First World War.” *Past and Present* no. 226 (February 2015): 227-254.

<sup>29</sup> As Julia Clancy-Smith writes in the context of precolonial Tunisia, “protection functioned as a common language...for sorting, identifying, facing unfamiliar demands, and making one’s way.” Clancy-Smith, *Mediterraneans*, 243.

excesses and insufficiencies.<sup>30</sup> The resulting not-quite-colonial situation was thus marked by an underlying incoherence, in which norms of protection were both invoked and elided.

Finally, this project contributes to a richer understanding of the ambiguity of colonial situations. The “coloniality” of a given context, to repurpose a term from Latin American scholars of empire, depended not only on structures of governance or even racial oppression, though it did (and does) rely on these.<sup>31</sup> It also inhered in diverse encounters, which in turn illustrated imperial ideologies at work. My intention in applying a “not-quite-colonial” frame of analysis is precisely to open a wider range of interactions to interrogation within the European imperial imagination. I train this interpretive lens on Lebanon, in its incarnation both as “invisible protectorate” for the half-century before the First World War and as colonial mandate in its immediate aftermath, as well as on the ambiguously “French” Levant. The meaning of colonialism, I suggest, is to be found less in color-coded maps of empire than in the language and exchanges that marked a given historical relationship.

### *Between Interests, Influence, and Imagination*

Standard textbook treatments of empire in the Middle East explain France’s eventual mandate over Lebanon—if not Syria—as the product of long-standing political, strategic, and economic interests, as well as cultural and religious affinity with the Lebanese Christian, and

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<sup>30</sup> On the concept of benevolence as central to imperial authority, see Jane Samson, *Imperial Benevolence: Making British Authority in the Pacific Islands* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 1998)

<sup>31</sup> See, for example, Walter D. Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000); Mignolo, “Introduction: Coloniality of Power and De-Colonial Thinking,” *Cultural Studies* 21 nos. 2-3 (March/May 2007): 155-167; and Anibal Quijano, “Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America,” *Nepantla: Views from South* 1, no. 3 (2000): 533-580. I depart, however, from such scholars’ interpretation of coloniality predominantly as the continuation of racialized regimes of authority in the postcolonial world. Without denying the centrality of race, my focus is more on the ambiguity of colonial situations, on the contested quality of power relations, and on the imposed or assumed meanings of colonialism.

especially Maronite, population.<sup>32</sup> According to this narrative, the prevalence of French commercial and industrial enterprises, French capital to fund infrastructural development, French schools and missions, French charitable and humanitarian undertakings, and (perhaps most prominently) the French language in education and culture over the course of the long nineteenth century rendered France's assumption of mandatory supervision over Lebanon after the First World War almost a matter of course.<sup>33</sup> The political machinations and mortal consequences of wartime contributed to the interpretation that Lebanon in particular clamored for French intervention.<sup>34</sup> While negotiations between French and British diplomats and the Hashemite nobles Husayn and Faisal over the status of Syria were infamously marked by duplicity and double-dealing, postwar Lebanon—if not its precise geographic contours—was assumed to be securely within France's imperial orbit.<sup>35</sup> Even advocates of Lebanese independence generally conceded an amiable connection to France, notwithstanding tensions between various Lebanese nationalist and emigrant factions, as well as French colonial activists.<sup>36</sup> Yet given the presumption of decades, if not centuries, of mutual commitment between France and Lebanon, debates during and after the Paris Peace Conference to determine the boundaries of the postwar

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<sup>32</sup> For examples of varying quality, see David K. Fieldhouse, *Western Imperialism in the Middle East, 1914-1958* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); David Fromkin, *A Peace to End All Peace: The Fall of the Ottoman Empire and the Creation of the Modern Middle East* (New York: Henry Holt, 2009); Roger Hardy, *The Poisoned Well: Empire and its Legacy in the Middle East* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

<sup>33</sup> On French economic and cultural initiatives in the Levant, see Jacques Thobie, *Intérêts français dans l'Empire ottoman 1895-1914* (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1977); and Thobie, *Les intérêts culturels français dans l'Empire ottoman finissant: l'enseignement laïque et en partenariat* (Paris: Peeters, 2008). See also Burrows, "'Mission Civilisatrice,'" and Dueck, *Claims of Culture at Empire's End*.

<sup>34</sup> For a closer dissection of this argument, see chapter four. On the Lebanese experience during the war, see for example, Leila Fawaz, *A Land of Aching Hearts: The Middle East in the Great War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014); as well as Melanie Schulze Tanielian, "The War of Famine: Everyday Life in Wartime Beirut and Mount Lebanon (1914-1918)" (PhD diss., University of California-Berkeley, 2012).

<sup>35</sup> On these negotiations, see for example Philip Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate: The Politics of Arab Nationalism, 1920-1945* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987); Eliezer Tauber, *The Arab Movements in World War I* (London: Frank Cass, 1993); James Gelvin, *Divided Loyalties: Nationalism and Mass Politics at the Close of Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000)

<sup>36</sup> Hakim, *Origins of the Lebanese National Idea*, esp. 213-260.



Levant fixed Lebanon, as a place and as an idea, at the heart of French ambitions for influence in the Middle East.

If material interests guided the calculation that a Greater Lebanon—including the port of Beirut, Saida and Tripoli, the fertile Beqa‘a Valley, and the silk industrial heartland of Mount Lebanon—should fall under the French imperial aegis, it was also animated by an abstract conviction in Lebanese historical affinity with France. An “affective empire” took shape between France and Lebanon, through mutually flattering writings by French and Lebanese notables, intellectuals, travelers, and Orientalists.<sup>37</sup> The “mirror game” between French and Lebanese interlocutors—which owed its founding moment to a work of historical fabrication by a Lebanese Maronite bishop in 1844—claimed that the friendship between the French state and Maronite Christians dated back to the era of the Crusades.<sup>38</sup> This forged a narrative of mutual protection and alliance, wedding a protective imperative to a conviction in France’s historic prestige. The formulation of “influence,” contemporaneously as well as in scholarship on the geopolitics of empire, too neatly ties together the disparate strands of ideology and encounter with which an imperial mythology was woven together.

By questioning the meaning of concepts too often taken for granted in studies of informal empire, I aim to establish how notions of material investment and moral prestige functioned as ideological components of an imperial imagination. French journalists and commentators readily cited France’s “age-old interests” and “traditional influence” in the Levant, and in Lebanon especially. Yet ordinary men and women at the very loci of supposed interests and influence—the sites of encounter where these abstract concepts were to translate into tangible effects—appropriated these concepts to negotiate conflicts or advance claims. An account that accepts the

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<sup>37</sup> I draw here and throughout on Andrew Arsan’s concept of “affective empire,” as sketched in Arsan, “‘There Is, in the Heart of Asia...’”

<sup>38</sup> Hakim, *Origins of the Lebanese National Idea*, 42-43.

equation of informal empire—that interests and influence added up to a sum of imperial power—dehistoricizes the language through which an ideology of Franco-Lebanese attachment was constructed and deployed.<sup>39</sup> This construct was also bound to an intangible realm of fantasy, an illusory conviction that partisans of a *France du Levant* nonetheless avidly pursued.

My attention to what Martin Thomas has referred to as the “French colonial mind” offers a novel vantage point from which to assess the particular imperial history between France and Lebanon.<sup>40</sup> Historians of the French empire, international diplomacy, and Middle Eastern politics have tended to assess France’s role in Syria and Lebanon through the lens of imperial machinations, nationalist resistance, and sectarian division.<sup>41</sup> Another layer underlies these approaches, though, one that accounts for shared mentalities as well as encounters. The “webs of empire” that bound states and polities, interconnected beyond the dyad of metropole and colony, also ensnared ideas and individuals within an imperial imagination.<sup>42</sup> The Orientalism of this perspective—its racial and religious stereotypes, geopolitical presumptions, and disciplinary foundations of knowledge—also encompassed an affective notion of perceived attachment.<sup>43</sup> The power of politics and economics, colonial agendas and anti-colonial resistance, imperialism and sectarianism, was filtered through a set of shared—albeit contested—assumptions of protection

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<sup>39</sup> For a compelling critique of the logic and practices of economic development in Mandate Syria and Lebanon, see Simon Jackson, *Mandatory Development: French Colonial Empire, Global Capitalism, and the Politics of the Economy After World War One*, forthcoming.

<sup>40</sup> Thomas, *French Colonial Mind*.

<sup>41</sup> Stephen Longrigg, *Syria and Lebanon under French Mandate* (London: Oxford University Press, 1958); William Shorrock, *French Imperialism in the Middle East: The Failure of Policy in Syria and Lebanon, 1900-1914* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1976); Fieldhouse, *Western Imperialism in the Middle East*; Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate*; Gelvin, *Divided Loyalties*; Keith David Watenpaugh, *Being Modern in the Middle East: Revolution, Nationalism, Colonialism, and the Arab Middle Class* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006); Gérard Khoury, *La France et l’Orient arabe: Naissance du Liban moderne, 1914-1920* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2009).

<sup>42</sup> The phrase is Tony Ballantyne’s. Ballantyne, *Webs of Empire: Locating New Zealand’s Colonial Past* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2014). On connecting metropole and colony, see Cooper and Stoler, eds., *Tensions of Empire*.

<sup>43</sup> This analysis is of course indebted to Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978). See also Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

and affection between France and Lebanon. By seeking to disentangle a not-quite-colonial relationship, this project aims to understand how a different type of empire took shape.

*Between Affective and Protective Empire*

I approach this endeavor cautiously, conscious of Frederick Cooper's warning not to diffuse the racialized violence of colonialism and its distinct manifestations into an undifferentiated state of coloniality.<sup>44</sup> Imperial regimes, of course, were premised on varying degrees of violence and exploitation and on structures of oppression and appropriation. The existence of an "empire of love," as Matt Matsuda has explored in the context of the Pacific world, co-existed with—and indeed enabled—domination and dispossession. It extended, too, into the field of imagination, as "French fictions of empire" were written across the Levant as well as the Pacific.<sup>45</sup> The power of affective registers inhered not only in texts and representations, but also in intimate sites of contact and conflict.<sup>46</sup> What has not been fully charted is how an ideology of affection at once demarcated a realm of the imperial imagination—Lebanon and *la France du Levant*—and inflected individual encounters, which in turn repurposed the logics and languages of empire.

Studies of the legal ambiguities of protection have productively mined the context of informal empire as a rich terrain for analysis.<sup>47</sup> Yet these, too, often reproduce a framework of

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<sup>44</sup> Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 17.

<sup>45</sup> Matsuda, *Empire of Love*, 188.

<sup>46</sup> What Mrinalini Sinha has employed as a heuristic what she calls the "imperial social formation" to connect local contexts of gendered interaction to global processes of colonialism. Sinha, "Mapping the Imperial Social Formation: A Modest Proposal for Feminist History," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 25, no. 4 (2000): 1077-1082. See also Sinha, *Specters of Mother India: The Global Restructuring of an Empire* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006).

<sup>47</sup> On the question of ambiguous or "semi-sovereignty" in the Egyptian context, see especially Aimee Genell, "Empire by Law: Ottoman Sovereignty and the British Occupation of Egypt, 1882-1923" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2013). To my knowledge, a similar study has not been undertaken for Lebanon under Ottoman rule, though see also a discussion of Mount Lebanon's legal status in Aimee Genell, "Autonomous Provinces and the

interests and influence as self-explanatory modalities of imperial engagement.<sup>48</sup> Instead of accepting at face value the “traditional” basis for France’s presence in the Levant, in turn premised on “age-old” rights of protection and a stable conviction in French prestige, a critical reassessment of a not-quite-colonial situation requires querying the genealogies of each of these concepts. Attention to the affective elements of imperial ideology can help us perceive the constructedness of the discourse that sustained self-fulfilling prophecies of empire. If French interests and influence led inexorably to a colonial mandate over Lebanon, abetted by Lebanese gratitude toward France, then there is little need to explain this imperial trajectory. The narrative of protective esteem, however, needs to be disassembled at its nodes of production, in order to understand how a discourse of affection and protection took shape, and how its premises were deployed in individual as well as international encounters.

By interrogating Lebanon’s position within the fictive and not-quite-colonial *France du Levant*, I bridge both imagined and imperial realms, as well as two periods of Lebanese history that are typically treated separately: the era of the semi-autonomous *mutassarifiyya* from 1860 to 1914 and the experience of the Great War and the colonial mandate from 1914 until independence in 1946.<sup>49</sup> A recent surge of scholarly attention to the League of Nations mandate states and system has established that this new colonial form enabled new models of both control and contestation, while also building on imperial legacies and existing agendas.<sup>50</sup> Yet the

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Problem of ‘Semi-Sovereignty’ in European International Law,” *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* (2016): 1-17.

<sup>48</sup> Even the best studies of informal empire, such as JP Daughton’s pioneering “When Argentina Was ‘French,’” tend to proceed within an idiom of economic interests and cultural and/or political influence.

<sup>49</sup> See, for example, Spagnolo, *France and Ottoman Lebanon*; Akarli, *The Long Peace*; Nadine Méouchy, ed. *France, Syrie et Liban, 1918-1946: Les ambiguïtés et les dynamiques de la relation mandataire: actes des journées d’études organisées par le CERMOC et l’IFEAD, Beyrouth, 27-29 mai 1999* (Damascus: Institut français d’études arabes de Damas, 2002); as well as Cyrus Schayegh and Andrew Arsan, eds., *The Routledge Handbook of the History of the Middle East Mandates* (New York: Routledge, 2015).

<sup>50</sup> Susan Pedersen, “Back to the League of Nations,” *American Historical Review* 112, no. 4 (October 2007): 1091-1117. For an effort to compare British and French mandates, see Nadine Méouchy and Peter Sluglett, eds., *The*

rationale underlying the assumption of mandatory governance has remained relatively unquestioned: why and how—not to mention when and where—did Lebanon, “citadel” of the Levant, become “French?” I attempt to answer this question by analyzing how logics of protection, affection, and prestige informed more than just geopolitical calculations, and by querying how informal imperial dynamics shaded into formal colonial authority. Structures of colonial sovereignty did not fully determine these dynamics; they were also articulated, imagined, and negotiated between individual men and women.

Protection in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was, like the figmentary geocultural construct of the France of the Levant itself, largely an imaginary realm.<sup>51</sup> As Will Hanley acknowledges in his recent study of *protégés* in Alexandria, “in many ways, the *idea* of protection was more important than its legal actualization.”<sup>52</sup> This was a moral as much as a legal regime, and a convenient fiction as much as a coherent framework. In the French colonial mind, ties of tradition and affection were assumed to secure a protective hegemony. The public international trusteeship accorded to colonial protectorates and League of Nations mandates was not coterminous with the network of individual *protégés*, governed through private international law.<sup>53</sup> This point, though, does raise the question of connections and disjunctures between these two forms of protection. My aim is precisely to investigate the “imagined dimensions of protection” as they took shape in the ambiguous, non-legal space between states and mentalities, between individuals not as subjects or nationals, locals or foreigners, but as subjective agents within fields of imperial ideology.<sup>54</sup>

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*British and French Mandates in Comparative Perspectives / Les mandats français et anglais dans une perspective comparative* (Leiden: Brill, 2004).

<sup>51</sup> Stein, “Citizens of a Fictional Nation,” 231.

<sup>52</sup> Hanley, *Identifying with Nationality*, 199. Emphasis mine. In Julia Clancy-Smith’s analysis of nineteenth-century Tunis, “protection proved an ideal—not real—political and legal template.” Clancy-Smith, *Mediterraneans*, 208.

<sup>53</sup> Hanley, *Identifying with Nationality*, 341n37.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 202.

The idealized regime of protection between France and Lebanon, I argue, arose even before the gendered structures of the protective “colonial welfare” system that Elizabeth Thompson charts in the postwar era.<sup>55</sup> The animating principle of this unstable ideological formation was preserving a fictive notion of French prestige, a conviction in affective attachment, and an economy of abstract influence. If prestige, like protection, could function as a category of law, as Emmanuelle Saada has analyzed, it also informed the particular relationship between France and Lebanon, and between French and Lebanese.<sup>56</sup> It affected the tone as well as the tenor of protection, its content as well as its form. In written tracts and in individual instances of contact, the tropes of protection and prestige—obligation and honor, gratitude and grandeur—might fail to effectuate legal decisions or inspire political change, yet they still affected how a “Franco-Lebanese dream” was conceived and redeployed.<sup>57</sup> For the Lebanese woman insulted by a Frenchman or the exploited child laborers at a silk factory, the Lebanese volunteer for France who pleaded for wartime intervention or even the Orientalists who pontificated on Lebanon’s enduring love of France, their encounters generated a script of love and protection that was at once imperial and not quite colonial.

*From Citadel in the Levant to Mandate in Lebanon*

The five chapters of this project overlap chronologically and thematically. Each considers a different set of encounters: between writers and travelers, industrial and religious personnel, expatriates and local inhabitants, political and military officials, and French colonial administrators and Lebanese populations. By stressing the interconnectedness of these

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<sup>55</sup> Elizabeth Thompson, *Colonial Citizens: Republican Rights, Paternal Privilege, and Gender in French Syria and Lebanon* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013).

<sup>56</sup> Emmanuelle Saada, “The Empire of Law: Dignity, Prestige, and Domination in the ‘Colonial Situation,’” *French Politics, Culture and Society* 20, no. 2 (Summer 2002): 98-120.

<sup>57</sup> Hakim, *Origins of the Lebanese National Idea*, 37.

exchanges, my analysis does not privilege either side of imperial encounters, underscoring instead their dynamic plurality.

The first chapter, “Lebanon: A ‘French Citadel’ in the Levant?,” analyzes how Orientalist texts, commercial and political reports, and French and Lebanese historians crafted the discursive architecture of France’s unofficial protectorate. I trace the genealogy of this regime back to an 1860 French intervention on behalf of Lebanese Christians and its subsequent memorialization in literature, politics, and the popular imagination. Myths of Franco-Lebanese affinity, I argue, blurred historic religious and commercial privileges to craft a more expansive yet more ambiguous concept of imperial protection. This took the form of the fictive “France of the Levant,” for which Lebanon functioned at once as a base for colonial agendas and a bastion of idealized interconnection.

The central three chapters of “A Mandate to Protect” evaluate particular contexts of confrontation. A prominent Lyon silk company’s fin-de-siècle factory and orphanage complex is the focus of chapter two, “Encounters in Qrayeh: Industrial Interests and Imperial Influence at a French Silk Factory in Mount Lebanon.” Importing advanced technology to this small village, European managers also employed French nuns to oversee Lebanese child laborers, giving rise to arguments over hours of work and prayer, practices of physical abuse and moral instruction, and hierarchies of authority and affection. The dual capitalistic and charitable motivations of this enterprise revealed tensions between the “modern” economic and “traditional” religious facets of French imperial involvement in Lebanon. Logics of productivity and protection, I stress, were not mutually reinforcing, as contemporaries professed and much historical work has implied. Rather, their precarious balance exposed as well as opened fissures within the ideological edifice of affective empire.

The third chapter, “Allegations, Insults, and Honor: Sites of Contact and Conflict in Pre-Mandate Beirut and Mount Lebanon,” considers a broader landscape of pre-war encounters, surveying everyday quarrels on public streets and private homes in Beirut and nearby villages. Through letters of complaint and accusation to the French General Consulate, local inhabitants and French expatriates expressed their grievances with neighbors, employers, and officials over alleged insults, thefts, and inappropriate conduct. I show how appellants sought not only to leverage France’s presumed diplomatic and legal influence, but also to deploy underlying precepts of mutual devotion and esteem as well as gendered notions of status and respectability. The protective imperative of an inchoate imperial formation, I suggest, functioned through its invocations as well as its shortcomings.

The implications of an ideology of protection, I argue in the fourth chapter, “A Moral or Military Mandate? Allegiance, Intervention, and Martyrdom between France and Lebanon during the Great War,” shifted through the experience of the First World War. I examine how France’s failure to intervene to halt a devastating famine in Lebanon—exacerbated by a French blockade—prompted distressed appeals from Lebanese agents, Maronite religious leaders, and even French military personnel. Notions of sentimental attachment enabled French and Lebanese actors alike to convey the moral imperatives of imperial protection, even as they exposed its deficiencies amidst the geopolitical calculations of war. Tropes of Franco-Lebanese allegiance not only contributed to the Ottoman execution of Lebanese activists in 1915-16, I suggest, but also generated discourses of martyrdom through which France staked its postwar colonial claims. The notion of Lebanese martyrs to France functioned to preserve an imperial conviction in Lebanese loyalty and affection, notwithstanding their abandonment during the wartime famine.



In the final chapter, “Mandating Protection: France, Greater Lebanon, and the Politics of Affective Empire,” I interrogate how affective logics were mobilized to establish—but also to destabilize—a distinct postwar colonial regime in Lebanon. Wartime ruptures to an idealized legacy of protection had endangered myths of parental benevolence, revealing contradictions in the French imperial imagination and in Lebanon’s political status. Maintaining a particular protectorate over Lebanon alongside visions of a broader *France du Levant* became untenable after the war, when the French colonial mandate incorporated both Lebanese Christians and Syrian Muslims. To resolve these tensions, I suggest, French administrators as well as Lebanese commentators cultivated discursive and political boundaries between Lebanon and Syria: while the former was construed as more civilized and grateful for French guardianship, the latter became a terrain for violent counter-insurgency. Even as interwar anti-colonial movements mounted increasingly robust challenges to European authority, I conclude, a resurrected conviction in Lebanon as a secure bastion of French prestige sustained the fragile ideologies and contested legacies of affective empire.

#### *A Note on Terminology and Geography*

This dissertation employs the terms “Lebanon” and “Lebanese” not to indicate the contemporary state of Lebanon, nor exclusively to denote its predecessor, the Ottoman province of Mount Lebanon. While at times I will refer to these geographical entities, my use of the words is consistent with my argument that Lebanon represented a unique imagined realm of the French Levant. Even when given interlocutors did not explicitly refer to Lebanon as such, the concept itself carried meaning as a construct of the imperial imagination. The elision of Syria and Lebanon, for instance, served both to domesticate the former, according to the perceived strength

of Franco-Lebanese attachment, and to expand this affinity—and colonial ambition—to a wider sphere of influence and intervention.

Even without explicitly engaging the complex politics of religion in the Middle East, I by no means intend to convey an association of Lebanon with its Christian population, or Syria with its Muslim inhabitants. My point is precisely that this obfuscation facilitated a particular imperial view of the Levant. “Lebanese” is not a synonym for Maronite; if French engagement with Maronite Lebanon eclipsed consideration of other “minority” peoples, this further bolstered the conviction of Lebanese affection for France within an imperial mindset.<sup>58</sup> The salient variable for my inquiry is not sect or religion, but the *affective* quality imputed to *la France du Levant*. This was in turn transmitted through discourses of Lebanese particularity, a conflation of religious and commercial protection, and notions of imperial prestige. Lebanon and the Levant were invented, not only as part of an empire, but also as products of colonial fantasy and ideological aspirations.

Geographically, my focus is mostly on the territory of Mount Lebanon and the neighboring city—and eventual Lebanese capital—of Beirut. In the first and final chapters, this focus relates to the imagination and creation of Lebanon as a particular entity within Greater Syria and the Levant. The notion of Lebanon as a “citadel,” I argue in chapter one, facilitated the ideological expansion and consolidation of an imagined French Levant, whose political consequences in the formation of Greater Lebanon are traced in chapter five. Chapters two and three move from the Metn region of Mount Lebanon to streets of Beirut, with forays into other Lebanese villages, while chapter four follows circuits between Paris and Marseille, Cairo and Arwad Island, and Beirut and the Syrian border. My objective is not to delineate imperial boundaries, but to follow the ideas of empire—of prestige, affection, and protection—where they

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<sup>58</sup> On the construction of the concept of “minority” and “majority” in Syria, see Benjamin White, *The Emergence of Minorities in the Middle East: The Politics of Community in French Mandate Syria* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011).

manifested themselves. Equally central to the geographical scope of this dissertation are the sites that it examines: silk factories and neighborhood disputes, colonialist conferences and consular offices, political debates and incidents of inappropriate conduct.

**CHAPTER ONE**  
**Lebanon: A “French Citadel” in the Levant?**

At the turn of the twentieth century, the journalist and politician Etienne Lamy gave a name to a realm of the French imperial imagination. Following a two-year journey to the eastern Mediterranean—from Salonica and Smyrna to Beirut, Jerusalem, and Alexandria—Lamy compiled the essays he had written for the *Revue des deux mondes* to publish in 1900 a nearly four hundred-page book, to which he gave the title of this imagined empire: *La France du Levant*. The term staked a French claim to this expansive, but geographically ambiguous, region of the Near East [*Proche Orient*]. France, Lamy proclaimed, “more than all nations, can rediscover there its glory, its suffering, its wealth, its virtues, and its life.”<sup>1</sup> The Levant, as he envisioned it, functioned as a crucible in which France’s history and very essence had been forged—and could again be remolded.

Lamy wrote these words as a foreword to an account not simply of his travels, but of hundreds of years of contact between East and West, Orient and Occident.<sup>2</sup> The story he recounted was one of a confrontation between civilizations, between Christianity and Islam, punctuated by crosscutting alliances, interventions, and spheres of influence between European nations. While the book’s chronological scope extends from the sultans, kings, and Crusades of the Middle Ages through nineteenth-century diplomatic, educational, and confessional politics, it is grounded most immediately in Lamy’s perception of his contemporary geopolitical context.<sup>3</sup> The “current moment,” he writes, is “only a scene of a drama begun centuries ago.” He situated

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<sup>1</sup> Etienne Lamy, *La France du Levant* (Paris: Plon, 1900), 10-11.

<sup>2</sup> If not already apparent, Lamy’s text partook of and participated in the discourse of Orientalism, whereby the concept of “the West” was itself constructed by positing the existence of an inherently oppositional “Orient.” Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978). See also Henry Laurens, *Le royaume impossible. La France et la g n se du monde arabe* (Paris: Colin, 1990).

<sup>3</sup> For an analysis of Lamy’s text and the concept of *la France du Levant* with reference to contemporaneous French domestic political, religious, and imperial concerns, see Vincent Cloarec, “La France du Levant ou la sp cificit  imp riale fran aise au d but du XX<sup>e</sup> si cle,” *Revue fran aise d’histoire d’outre mer* 83 no. 313 (1996): 3-32; as well as Cloarec, *La France et la question de Syrie, 1914-1918* (Paris: CNRS Editions, 1998).

fin-de-siècle imperial tensions—as France, Britain, Germany, Russia, Italy, and others jockeyed for position in the Near East and across the globe—within a more enduring history of fundamental conflict. To “understand contemporary rivalries,” Lamy proposed, “one must first question the origins, [and] measure the crisis of civilization that was the encounter between Christianity and Islam.” For Etienne Lamy, as for many French commentators, colonial activists, government officials, and religious authorities, the question was not only how to protect “the right[s] of Christian races against the perpetuation of Muslim dominance.”<sup>4</sup> It was also how central France’s role would be in this ongoing endeavor, how essential its empire in the Levant would be to upholding its perceived responsibility, even where *la France du Levant* was situated and what it signified. To each of these questions, this chapter will contend, Lebanon presented a crucial test: as a site of sectarian conflict, as a field of French interests and influence, and as a point of origin for overlapping imperial mythologies of protection and affection.

How did this France of the Levant take shape, as an imperial abstraction and as an ambitious yet ambiguous ideology of empire? What encouraged writers like Lamy, earlier Orientalists like Gérard de Nerval and Gabriel Charmes, later partisans and politicians like Maurice Barrès and Etienne Flandin, as well as historians, journalists, and religious officials to conceive of—and stake claims to—such an amorphous terrain of imagined historic influence and traditional authority? This chapter aims to uncover how a mythology of religious protection, advanced through the notion of *la France du Levant*, shaded into imperial logics of political and cultural influence. Proponents of France’s imagined empire in the Levant articulated an expansive ideology of protection, one that conflated the term’s religious, diplomatic, legal, and familial connotations in the Ottoman context. Such a capacious understanding of protection, I argue, enabled observers to envision *la France du Levant* as an undisputed sphere of French

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<sup>4</sup> Lamy, *La France du Levant*, 11.

influence. The notion of a mandate to protect implied not only authority over European nationals and Christian populations in the Ottoman Empire; it also cast imperial ambitions in an affective disposition of benevolence and gratitude, basing political agendas on intangible—and unstable—ideological pillars of protection and prestige.<sup>5</sup>

This ideological framework, I suggest, was undergirded by a conviction in popular *affection* for France. This conviction was in turn manufactured not simply through extra-governmental initiatives like schools and factories, charitable and economic outposts, but also through the discursive production of an array of texts, ranging from travelogues and novels to official reports and historical accounts, which framed the conditions of possibility for such informally imperial efforts.<sup>6</sup> The purpose of the chapter is not necessarily to attribute the formation of the French colonial mandate in Lebanon after the First World War to the legacy of 1860 and the myth of Franco-Lebanese connection that it spawned. Rather, I seek to understand how the ideological elements of this myth—familial affection, imperial influence, and parental protection—underlay the process of forging a Middle Eastern empire out of an imagined Levant. The stakes of this inquiry are the discursive mechanisms through which a colonial relationship took shape, more than the formation of this relationship itself.

By interrogating the tensions within the fictitious imperial formation of the French Levant, this chapter will trace the genealogy of its underlying tenets of protection, influence, and affection through the second half of the nineteenth and into the twentieth century and post-World War I moment. Surveying a range of Orientalist texts and political and historical treatments—whose subjects shift tellingly between Lebanon, Syria, and the Levant—it will pursue two

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<sup>5</sup> On the concept of “affective disposition” in a different context, see Ronald Grigor Suny, *They Can Live in the Desert but Nowhere Else”: A History of the Armenian Genocide* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015).

<sup>6</sup> On economic and cultural initiatives, respectively, see especially Jacques Thobie, *Intérêts français dans l’Empire ottoman 1895–1914* (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1977); and Thobie, *Les intérêts culturels français dans l’Empire ottoman finissant: l’enseignement laïque et en partenariat* (Paris: Peeters, 2008).

principal objectives. To accomplish these, it will proceed both chronologically and thematically, as well as laterally between arguments and analysis. First, it will endeavor to understand the ambiguity through which *la France du Levant* was constructed, shedding light on overlapping projects of Orientalist fantasy and imperial ambition. Second, it will uncover how ideological vectors of protection, influence, and affection demarcated a realm of the Near East and the imperial imagination as a “fortress” or “French citadel” in the Levant, at once bounded and boundless, as a bastion for both protective retrenchment and colonial expansion. Lebanon, in this respect, represented not a proto-national state of resolute Maronite Christian allies, but an essential site for crafting a script and constructing an image of French imperial prestige.<sup>7</sup>

### *Finding France in the Levant*

Lamy’s text—his inquiry into centuries of European religious, political, and economic intervention in the Ottoman Empire—was guided by a presumption of civilizational encounter, rendered in the ahistorical singular. He was, of course, neither the first nor the last to articulate a vision of deeply ingrained confrontation between Western enlightenment and Eastern despotism.<sup>8</sup> Nor was he the only French writer to invoke “age-old traditions” to argue that France exerted moral responsibility for Christian, particularly Catholic, populations in the Levant, and in Lebanon especially.<sup>9</sup> Within the perilous lands of purported Muslim fanaticism, such reasoning posited, European support provided the sole bulwark to defend Christian vitality. In Lamy’s

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<sup>7</sup> For an outline and critique of this narrative, see Kamal Salibi, *A House of Many Mansions: The History of Lebanon Reconsidered* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2005).

<sup>8</sup> On the creation of myths of the “barbarous Turk” and “Oriental despotism,” see especially Lucette Valensi, *The Birth of the Despot: Venice and the Sublime Porte*, trans. Arthur Denner (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009).

<sup>9</sup> See especially, Nicolas Murad, *Notice historique sur l’origine de la nation maronite, et sur ses rapports avec la France, sur la nation druze, et sur les diverses populations du Mont Liban* (Paris: Le Clere, 1844), to be discussed below. Competing European powers claimed “protection” of other minority populations, such as British support for the Druzes or Russian advocacy for an Orthodox constituency. As will become clear, my point in highlighting French claims is not to ignore the scope of this geopolitical logic, but to interrogate its formation and consequences in a particular set of discourses and imperial context.

words, the delicate objective was to create “islands of Christian civilization,” which “without destroying Ottoman sovereignty” would “spare Christian populations contact with Turkish barbarity.”<sup>10</sup> By prescribing France’s continued presence in the Near East, notwithstanding its essential incompatibility with the Islamic Orient, works like Lamy’s at once expressed an imperial impulse of possession and mandated its continual performance. If the conflict between Islam and Christianity was endemic and enduring, an essential component of the Orientalist worldview, then breaching this divide was nonetheless requisite to envisioning a French Levant, which by definition implanted a notion of France itself onto hostile foreign terrain.

The drive to claim and consolidate a French protectorate extended to the very Muslim populations that theoretically posed such an existential threat to Christianity. Heralded as the natural protector of Catholics in the Levant, France also must appear—given its North African colonial possessions and persistent international rivalries—as a competent and even beneficent sovereign toward Muslims, one that could simultaneously ensure peace and wage war to uphold the virtue of its empire.<sup>11</sup> This discourse rehearsed the legacy of a benevolent Occident intimately entwined with—yet irrevocably antagonistic toward—an inherently hostile Orient. Commitment to France’s nascent Mediterranean empire here intersected with narratives of Orientalist fantasy and age-old animosities, melding geopolitical calculations with religious and civilizational concerns.<sup>12</sup> The Levant, for its very abstraction, provided the backdrop for both of these world-historical scenarios. Positioned at a mythologized crossroads of civilization, France

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<sup>10</sup> Lamy, *La France du Levant*, 60, 77.

<sup>11</sup> On the role of violence in upholding France’s Algerian empire, see especially Benjamin Brower, *A Desert Named Peace: The Violence of France’s Empire in the Algerian Sahara, 1844-1902* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).

<sup>12</sup> For a compelling collection of essays assessing France’s Mediterranean empire, see Patricia Lorcin and Todd Shepard, eds., *French Mediterraneans: Transnational and Imperial Histories* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2016).



was imagined as both *in* the Levant and *of* the Levant, its literal presence a willful projection of colonial power and its imagined role an unstable product of imperial ideology.

The notion of *la France du Levant* grounded the tensions between attachment and hostility, and between politics and imagination, within an abstract history and geography, as well as within a multivalent set of ideological principles. Where, though, was this France of—and in—the Levant? Its precise terrain was marked not by geopolitical boundaries or cartographical demarcations, but rather by the invisible bonds of traditional alliance and animosity. Its frontiers were not clearly delimited, neither in Lamy's text or travels, nor in those of his contemporaries and fellow ideologues, creating an open canvas for imperial fantasies to stretch from the Balkans and Asia Minor to Palestine and Mesopotamia, encompassing Christians and Muslims as well as various sects, ethnicities, and (eventually) nationalities.<sup>13</sup> For Lamy, such vast confines presented the opportunity for France to achieve strategic, economic, and ideological ambitions: to “transform [its] political influence, regain [its] commercial market[s], and extend [its] religious protectorate” across the region.<sup>14</sup> The Levant could signify a domain of commercial predominance—anchored through centuries of trade in the maritime posts known as *les échelles du Levant*—as well as a political entity straddling the Ottoman Eastern Mediterranean, and a realm of military strategy as well as a scene of cultural or missionary activity.<sup>15</sup> As a synonym for the Near East, though, the Levant also existed as a landscape of fantasy, a site where the meaning of the Orient could be created and remolded, more than rediscovered or deduced.

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<sup>13</sup> Among those who traveled in these regions in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, in addition to those mentioned here, were the Comte de Volney, as well as Alphonse de Lamartine and Gérard de Nerval.

<sup>14</sup> Lamy, *La France du Levant*, 239.

<sup>15</sup> On *les échelles du Levant*, see for example Paul Masson, *Histoire du commerce français dans le Levant au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris, 1911); as well as Francis Rey, *De la protection diplomatique et consulaire dans les échelles du Levant et de Barbarie* (Paris: Larose, 1899).

Beyond its vague geographic coordinates, the loose historical chronology of the French Levant enabled an even more assertive colonization of the past. France's "protectorate" over the region, Lamy wrote, represented the "slowly developed product of ten centuries of efforts, prov[ing] the continuity of our national history."<sup>16</sup> French preeminence in defending Christians and Christendom, in this formulation, dated from the era of the Crusades, continued through medieval alliances, and culminated in fin-de-siècle sectarian battles over constructing schools and orphanages in Ottoman territories.<sup>17</sup> The "contemporary rivalries" to which Lamy referred implied not only military competition; they also encompassed the activities of missionaries and merchants, scholars and schoolteachers, travelers and diplomats. These forms of influence, in his gendered idiom, functioned essentially "like women," in that "one speaks of them especially when they are compromised."<sup>18</sup> While Lamy and his confrères presented French involvement in the Levant as timeless and natural—indeed the equivalent of masculine conquest—European investment in and attention to the region was very much a nineteenth-century phenomenon.<sup>19</sup> The calculation by which various endeavors were measured and compared as indices of national prestige was likewise a recent innovation, spurred by the competition for colonies toward the turn of the century. In the currency of imperial geopolitics, cultural undertakings from churches and language institutes to theaters and irrigation projects amounted to a sum of national influence, through which European states calculated and claimed zones of informal empire. This

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<sup>16</sup> Etienne Lamy, "La politique allemande et le protectorat des missions catholiques," *Revue des deux mondes*, 149 (1 September 1898): 40-41.

<sup>17</sup> See chapter two. On education in Ottoman Syria and Mandate Lebanon, see especially Julia Hauser, Christine B. Lindner, and Esther Möller, eds., *Entangled Education: Foreign and Local Schools in Ottoman Syria and Mandate Lebanon (19-20<sup>th</sup> Centuries)* (Beirut: Orient-Institut, 2016). On the tensions raised by the practices of orphanages in the Middle East, see for example Beth Baron, *The Orphan Scandal: Christian Missionaries and the Rise of the Muslim Brotherhood* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014).

<sup>18</sup> Lamy, *La France du Levant*, 11.

<sup>19</sup> Kaufman, *Reviving Phoenicia: The Search for Identity in Lebanon* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004), 21.

narrative brought the Levant—ambiguously located and historically overdetermined—into the elastic boundaries of imperial France, along lines of ideology rather than geography.

Territorially undefined, temporally abstract, and imperially figmentary, *la France du Levant* provided fertile ground for fantasies of empire to take root. These fantasies were embedded in an ideological matrix of protection, influence, and affection, functioning as mutually reinforcing—albeit not necessarily coherent—modes of informal engagement. A conviction in France’s protective responsibilities in the Levant bolstered claims of geopolitical influence and popular affection, both of which in turn justified further moral as well as material investment in an ideology—if not concrete policies—of protection. The recursive quality of these fictive ideals, as well as the underlying ambiguity of their precise meaning and application, was central to conceptualizing a French Levant. By obscuring the semantic and literal boundaries of France’s realm of protection in the Ottoman Near East, writers and publicists like Lamy—along with his Orientalist forebears like Lamartine, Nerval, Charmes, and others—heightened the stakes of French involvement, obligation, and indeed entitlement as an imperial protector. Followed by successive journalists, novelists, politicians, and historians, from Barrès and Pierre Benoit to Flandin and François Charles-Roux, their writings sketched the discursive architecture for an ideology of protection that not only flattered sentiments of French amour-propre, but also proved remarkably durable, surviving even the ruptures of the First World War, imperial occupation, and the repression of anti-colonial revolts.<sup>20</sup> Overtones of French civilizational superiority, expansive influence, and deep-seated popularity outweighed—and even gained strength from—the essential ambiguity in the vision of an imagined *France du Levant*.

This imperial perspective positioned France as a beloved paterfamilias to those whom it deemed in need—as well as deserving—of its paternal protection and supervision. It also

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<sup>20</sup> These are the focus of chapters four and five, respectively.

entailed a complementary *maternal* investment in the well-being and sentimental attachments of the grateful subjects and beneficiaries of French guardianship. This parental model was distinct from but also predated its imperial successor, the colonial welfare state of the postwar French mandate. As Elizabeth Thompson has demonstrated, this inequitable system structured a gendered hierarchy of citizens and subjects according to familial networks of patronage and benefits, as well as implicit threats—or explicit deployment—of discipline and violence.<sup>21</sup> France’s metaphorically protected sons and daughters included, in its widest conceptualization, not only the Catholic populations and European merchants for whom the centuries-old Capitulation agreements prescribed certain religious, judicial, and commercial privileges.<sup>22</sup> The implication of *la France du Levant* was that the intangible appeal and benevolent authority of parental France extended almost indiscriminately, across boundaries of imperial sovereignty, ethnic identity, and even sectarian community. France’s Muslim subjects, after all, were meant to benefit from its civilizing influence and just colonial rule as much, if not more than, fellow Christians.<sup>23</sup> Within this idealized yet contradictory familial regime, though, certain relations enjoyed pride of place. While the notion of a French Levant may not have admitted limits to its influence, its imperial ambition derived most potently from the conviction in a particular region’s—and population’s—singularly filial ties to French protection and affection. The history of Lebanon—with its Maronite Christian inhabitants and Muslim antagonists, as well as its status as a core of French religious, economic, cultural, and political influence—reveals how a mandate

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<sup>21</sup> Thompson, *Colonial Citizens: Republican Rights, Paternal Privilege, and Gender in French Syria and Lebanon* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013).

<sup>22</sup> These included exemptions from Ottoman taxation, conscription, and legal jurisdiction. The extent of the Capitulations or the Catholic protectorate—in their application or beneficiaries—is rarely elucidated in either contemporaneous literature or subsequent historiography. Their overlapping benefits were arguably applied on more of an ad hoc than a universal basis, especially as increasing numbers of claimants sought *protégé* status within the unstable Ottoman Empire by the mid-nineteenth century.

<sup>23</sup> Alice Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize: The Republican Idea of Empire in France and West Africa* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997); Osama Abi-Mershed, *Apostles of Modernity: Saint-Simonians and the Civilizing Mission in Algeria* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010).

to protect took hold of the French imperial imagination, transforming this heart of the Levant into a fantasy of affective empire.

### **After 1860: Remembering Protection**

#### *Between Sectarian Conflict and French Protectorate*

If *la France du Levant* had not been conceived of—or at least named as such—before the turn of the century, the Levant had been present in the French collective consciousness for much longer. As Lamy's writings reveal, it represented a crossroads of Christian and Islamic civilizations, a mythologized site of contact as well as conflict between West and East over several centuries. Within this imagined landscape, Lebanon occupied a particular position, both as an exemplary scene of such cross-confessional interaction and, yet, also as an enclave for Maronite Christian populations. These two roles came together most prominently, and most violently, in the middle of the nineteenth century, when an outbreak of sectarian violence in villages across Mount Lebanon brought the region to the attention of the French reading public, as well as activists and evangelists invested in protecting persecuted Christians. The conflict, building on years of social, economic, and political tensions, pitted Maronite and Druze communities against one another; while both sides suffered casualties, the former bore the brunt, with some 6,000 people killed, 20,000 displaced, and 200 villages destroyed. Disproportionately even to these figures, though, Maronites came to be seen exclusively as victims, and their Druze antagonists solely as fanatical Muslim aggressors.

Thanks in part to popular pressure for intervention, a French-led expeditionary mission was deployed to restore peace in Mount Lebanon in the summer of 1860. Though it arrived too late to intervene directly, French forces patrolled the region in a conspicuous show of force,

lending military heft to the political agreement that followed.<sup>24</sup> In negotiations with the Ottoman Sultanate, European powers leveraged their diplomatic and financial influence over the Sublime Porte to reach an accord that Lebanon would be governed autonomously, as what was called a *mutesarriyya*, under an Ottoman-appointed (non-Lebanese) Christian governor (*mutesarraf*) and with a guarantee of security through an informal French protectorate.<sup>25</sup>

This arrangement, though—what historian Albert Hourani once called an “invisible protectorate”—conferred neither formal political nor legal authority over Lebanon to France or any European power.<sup>26</sup> Rather, its force derived from a confluence of implicit expectations, assumptions, and compromises guiding the delicate state of relations between Europe and the Ottoman Empire. In addition to geopolitical standards and great power considerations, though, a willful ambiguity over the precise meaning and limitations of French protection further deepened the conviction that Lebanon existed within an informal French imperial orbit. The function of this “invisible protectorate” was conflated with co-existing—if similarly nebulous—“traditional” French prerogatives in the Levant, deriving from the so-called “Catholic protectorate” and oft-invoked Capitulations, bilateral accords with the Sublime Porte that granted

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<sup>24</sup> Accounts of the violence and the French expedition and international negotiations that followed include: Leila Fawaz, *An Occasion for War: Civil Conflict in Lebanon and Damascus in 1860* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1994); Caesar Farah, *The Politics of Interventionism in Ottoman Lebanon, 1830-1861* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2000); Ussama Makdisi, *The Culture of Sectarianism: Community, History, and Violence in Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Lebanon* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); Davide Rodogno, *Against Massacre: Humanitarian Interventions in the Ottoman Empire, 1815-1914: The Emergence of a European Concept and International Practice* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

<sup>25</sup> On questions of Ottoman debt and the European Public Debt Authority, see Donald Blaisdell, *European Financial Control in the Ottoman Empire* (New York: AMS Press, 1966); Edhem Eldem, “Ottoman financial integration with Europe: foreign loans, the Ottoman Bank and the Ottoman public debt,” *European Review* 13, no. 3: 431–445; and Coşkun Tuncer, *Sovereign Debt and the International Financial Control: the Middle East and the Balkans, 1870-1914* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015). On the so-called *Réglement* that established Lebanon’s autonomous status, see John Spagnolo, *France and Ottoman Lebanon: 1861-1914* (London: Ithaca Press, 1977); and Engin Akarli, *The Long Peace: Ottoman Lebanon, 1861-1920* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993).

<sup>26</sup> Albert Hourani, “Foreword” to Spagnolo, *France and Ottoman Lebanon*. See also Hourani, *Syria and Lebanon: A Political Essay* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1946). John Spagnolo points out that European consuls possessed “no special authority” under the *Réglement* of 1861, as their role was limited to sending recommendations to their embassies in Istanbul, which could then contact the Sublime Porte. European governments did exert influence over the selection of *mutesarrafs* for Mount Lebanon and “were occasionally prone to claim to be acting as successors to the International Commission” that had devised the post-conflict settlement. Spagnolo, 72.

European merchants and nationals fiscal and commercial privileges. That the conditions of the agreement to ensure Lebanon's security were not drastically tested over the course of what one historian has called the "long peace" before the First World War further entrenched France's ambiguous regime of protection.<sup>27</sup> This ambiguity blurred notions of a religious, commercial, and political protectorate, crafting a fungible discourse of protection, privilege, and obligation. Though France exerted little official legal or political authority in Ottoman Lebanon—other than pressuring the Sublime Porte on matters like the selection of a *mutessarrif*—the *language* of protection, as this and subsequent chapters will demonstrate, could be deployed to obscure the logic and legitimacy of both Ottoman governance and French imperial ideology, as well as the precise delineation of Lebanon and the Levant within the "mental map" of empire.<sup>28</sup> The negotiated end of the 1860 hostilities in Mount Lebanon, meanwhile, leveraged by an eleventh-hour French military expedition, preserved this invisibly multi-layered protective regime, staking out not only (or not even) the position of Lebanese Maronites, but also (and more so) French imperial prerogatives.

The purpose of this section is not to recount the history of sectarian conflict in Lebanon or postwar negotiations, nor to catalogue international responses to the events or parse the legal nuances of the accord that followed. Rather, I am interested in exploring how a script of Lebanese vulnerability—and of salvation through French protection—was written and rehearsed through subsequent reminiscences and reconstructions, and how these discourses merged with those of both other forms of French protectorate and conceptions of *la France du Levant*. This conjoined narrative, I argue later in this chapter, was especially repurposed during and after the First World War, when France's ideological proximity to Lebanon served to ground colonial

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<sup>27</sup> Akarli, *The Long Peace*.

<sup>28</sup> Martin Thomas, *The French Colonial Mind, Volume 1: Mental Maps of Empire and Colonial Encounters* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2012).

dreams of a French Levant. In journalistic accounts, political reports, and historical memorializations, notions of protection coalesced around themes of Lebanese distress and French intervention. These affective qualities were conflated with imperial prerogatives, and their confinement to Mount Lebanon was inflated to encompass an idealized realm of influence across the Levant. Tapping into sentiments of fear and relief that accompanied episodes of sectarian violence and reassured inhabitants' safety, assessments of this traumatic period drew on an emotional vocabulary to sketch a genealogy of benevolent protection and enduring gratitude.<sup>29</sup> This protective legacy, such narratives implied, naturally shaped the politics of influence through which French colonial activists and authors envisioned—and expanded—an affective empire from Lebanon to the Levant.

The European press dramatically reported the hostilities of the summer of 1860 as massacres of Maronite Christians by bands of Druze Muslims. As Carol Hakim points out, the sectarian dimensions of later attacks on Christians in Damascus, which took place weeks after and were unrelated to the unrest in Mount Lebanon, were misleadingly applied to the earlier episodes, which were distinctly rooted in local conflicts over political authority and social status between Maronites and Druze.<sup>30</sup> This interpretation hewed to a reading of Muslim fanaticism and Maronite innocence, notwithstanding the scale of violence on both sides and the complexity of its causation. A narrative of endemic and age-old religious tensions galvanized popular support among French Catholics in particular and solidified the sense of an endangered Maronite population in need of French protection. According to Ussama Makdisi's compelling argument, the "culture of sectarianism" engendered through nineteenth-century accounts posited that

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<sup>29</sup> Andrew Arsan, "'There Is, in the Heart of Asia, . . . an Entirely French Population:'" France, Mount Lebanon, and the Workings of Affective Empire in the Mediterranean, 1830-1920," in *French Mediterraneans*, eds., Lorcin and Shepard.

<sup>30</sup> Carol Hakim, *The Origins of the Lebanese National Idea, 1840-1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 71.



religious identity and sectarian antagonism had always been—and indeed could only be—the essential lens to understand and organize Lebanese society.<sup>31</sup> The events of 1860 marked a culmination of this process of knowledge construction, entrenching a framework that pitted Christians and Muslims as inveterate opponents in past, present, and future.

This analysis presupposed the same axes of conflict that Etienne Lamy laid out in his voluminous *La France du Levant* some four decades later. The French expedition, in this narrative, had both responded to calls to defend Levantine Christians and renewed a more aggressive confrontation with Islam. It mobilized a sense of lingering resentment and mythologized remembrance of the Crusades, invoking the alliance between Franks and Maronites that had allegedly been cemented in the Middle Ages. The Crusades, after all, “were French,” in the estimation of Lamy, and he contended that even “despite their failure, they protected Europe” by keeping Muslims out of Europe.<sup>32</sup> In 1860, it was “as Christians, as adversaries of Islamism, that the Maronites...were massacred” and needed protection, penned Orientalist and future ambassador to the Sublime Porte Eugène Melchior de Vogüé; it must therefore be “as Christians” that the French would enact their vengeance.<sup>33</sup> The French soldiers of the expedition, asserted Catholic writer Baptistin Poujoulat, were “also Crusaders,” and their aim, like that of their forebears, was “to drive Islamism back into the desert.”<sup>34</sup> Another pamphlet insisted upon a “resolution to make Islam disappear from the face of the earth,”<sup>35</sup> while an account by Alfred Poissonnier referred explicitly to the 1860 undertaking as “the crowning of a legend that must be fulfilled by a last crusade.”<sup>36</sup> The commander of the French troops himself

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<sup>31</sup> Makdisi, *The Culture of Sectarianism*.

<sup>32</sup> Lamy, *La France du Levant*, 33.

<sup>33</sup> Eugène Melchior de Vogüé, *Les événements de Syrie* (Paris: C. Douniol, 1860), 22.

<sup>34</sup> Baptistin Poujoulat, *La vérité sur la Syrie et l'expédition française* (Paris: Gaume frères, 1861), 12. Cited in Hakim, 81.

<sup>35</sup> Alexandre de Saint-Albin, *L'Europe chrétienne en Orient* (Paris, 1860), 30.

<sup>36</sup> Alfred Poissonnier, *Expédition de Syrie. La nouvelle croisade* (Paris, 1860).

alluded to the “famous lands where Christianity was born” and called on them to “avenge humanity disgracefully vilified.”<sup>37</sup> They would mount, proclaimed Melchior de Vogüé, “a new crusade...a mission of reparation and revenge fulfilled by our brave army in the name of Christianity and civilization.”<sup>38</sup> Their endeavor was thus at once justified as one of peacekeeping and extolled as a mission of religious revanchism, a nascent form of humanitarian intervention as well as an older model of civilizational clash.<sup>39</sup>

This conviction in righteous crusading endured over the decades that followed; a political economist, testifying at a post-World War I conference on the French mandate in Syria, referred to France’s involvement on behalf of Maronites as its “Lebanese crusade of 1860.”<sup>40</sup> The notion of civilizational conflict that Lamy characterized as central to the history of the Levant was thus telescoped into a more modern experience of sectarian confrontation, humanitarian crisis, and quasi-imperial European supervision. France’s role, in this schema, was as both immediate guarantor of security and age-old ally of Lebanese Christians. While the informal protectorate over Ottoman Lebanon accorded to France in the wake of the violence was never formally invoked over the “long peace” of the ensuing decades, this pledge of defending Maronite Lebanon from the threat of Muslim attack deepened a certitude in the legitimacy of France’s protective legacy in the Levant. Without even exerting colonial force, then, France could fulfill a crusading role as imperial protector, one not only morally and historically justified, but also welcomed by Lebanon’s grateful Christian population itself.

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<sup>37</sup> Cited in Fawaz, *An Occasion for War*, 119.

<sup>38</sup> Vogüé, *Les événements*, 20.

<sup>39</sup> Davide Rodogno has analyzed the 1860 expedition as a humanitarian intervention *avant la lettre*, while Bruno Cabanes and Keith Watenpaugh have traced the genealogy of humanitarianism to the First World War and Armenian Genocide, respectively. Rodogno, *Against Massacre*; Cabanes, *The Great War and the Origins of Humanitarianism, 1918-1924* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Watenpaugh, *Bread from Stones: The Middle East and the Making of Modern Humanitarianism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015).

<sup>40</sup> Centre des archives diplomatiques de Nantes (hereafter CADN) 399 PAAP 58, Clerget, “La Syrie sous le mandat français,” Conférence à la Société d’Economie politique de Lyon, 26 January 1923.

The historiography of the 1860 clashes has rightly underscored the episode's political and diplomatic consequences, its position in the nineteenth-century genealogy of humanitarian intervention, and its centrality in the history and memory of Lebanese sectarianism.<sup>41</sup> The moment of French rescue, though, was also mythologized to sustain a conviction in Franco-Lebanese affinity. As Andrew Arsan has examined, French and Lebanese Maronite writers alike posited links of sentiment, friendship, and even kinship to justify France's support of Lebanon's Christian population, situating the two polities within Mediterranean circuits of an informal empire based on principles of affection and filiation.<sup>42</sup> While earlier generations of writers had professed close ties between Catholic France and Maronite Lebanon, it was the death and devastation of 1860—followed by the heroically remembered French expedition—that anchored narratives of French protection and Franco-Lebanese alliance. These built on calls for intervention from both Maronite clerics and French propagandists, which, through appeals to sentiments of familial relation and responsibility, Arsan writes, “made it possible to envision investment and intervention as the most natural of things,” as if French involvement in Lebanon was a matter of internal affairs rather than an imperial incursion on Ottoman sovereignty.<sup>43</sup> The French Levant extended this relation of consanguinity, inscribing a belief in Franco-Lebanese connection within a grander imperial vision of France's role in greater Syria, even as the summer conflicts in Mount Lebanon generated a more robust response than the even more violent uprisings in Damascus and its environs that immediately followed.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Rodogno, *Against Massacre*; Yann Bouyrat, *Devoir d'intervenir? L'expédition « humanitaire » de la France au Liban, 1860* (Paris: Vendémiaire, 2013); Makdisi, *The Culture of Sectarianism*; Farah, *The Politics of Interventionism*; Fawaz, *An Occasion for War*.

<sup>42</sup> Arsan, ““There Is, in the Heart of Asia.””

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

<sup>44</sup> Fawaz, *An Occasion for War*.

In the immediate aftermath of the 1860 outbreak and European intervention, commentators presented the events as the culmination of long simmering and increasingly volatile sectarian tensions, which could only be calmed and controlled through French oversight. A study by historian Eugène Poujade of prior decades' hostilities between Maronites and Druzes, published in the very year of the renewed disturbances, was reprinted in a third edition in 1867, with a new preface that affirmed the "success" of French policy to guarantee Lebanese security and autonomy.<sup>45</sup> Across the half-century before the Great War, French writers and travelers looked back to—and reconstructed—both Lebanon's history of sectarian conflict and France's burgeoning political, economic, and cultural role in the region. The Orientalist and diplomat Melchior de Vogüé insisted that a "vast Muslim conspiracy" had sought to achieve "the extermination of Eastern Christians," a plot abetted by the Ottoman government and which could only be opposed by "an exclusively Christian intervention."<sup>46</sup> This would have to be undertaken by France, their "recognized protector," professing "the advanced sentiment of Christendom."<sup>47</sup> In his 1876 chronicle of his journeys through the Near East, he described the "countries of the past" in which he traveled as irredeemably backward—evidenced by earlier outbreaks of violence—except for their traces of French influence.<sup>48</sup> Even as he had called for a response "as Christians" to the massacres of 1860, he implied that the imperative for such intervention consigned the region itself to a mythic past. Accounts of conflicts between Maronites and Druze presented sectarian antagonism as a holdover from a bygone age, a decidedly un-modern marker

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<sup>45</sup> Eugène Poujade, *Le Liban et la Syrie, 1845-1860* (Paris: Michel Lévy Frères, 1867).

<sup>46</sup> Melchior de Vogüé, *Les événements*, 21.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>48</sup> Eugène Melchior de Vogüé, *Syrie, Palestine, Mont Athos: Voyage aux pays du passé* (Paris: Plon, 1876). Melchior de Vogüé did opine that "Lebanon is more advanced on the path of liberty than any other country subject to the Porte." Melchior de Vogüé, *Les événements*, 26.

of inferior civilization.<sup>49</sup> The violence of 1860 was thus at once atavistic and inherent, tamed only by the modernizing force of France's benevolent protection.

Such accounts effectively collapsed two timescales: the one supposedly ancient and enduring, endemic to the land and peoples of the Orient, and the other a more recent, French-engineered product of diplomatic, commercial, and educational initiatives. Over both, though, France was imagined to exert fundamental influence; its traditional alliance with Lebanese Maronites reinforced the legitimacy of contemporary intervention in the face of religious violence, which in turn solidified the two nation's respective roles as modern savior and vulnerable object of primitive hostilities. Histories of the nineteenth-century Near East extended the parameters of French involvement and esteem from the era of the Crusades to the present, connecting France's virtuous interests and historic friendship to its contemporary intervention. A "France of the Levant" took shape, historically as well as ideologically, between narratives of moral responsibility and national renown, sectarian conflict and French protectorate. Stretched across two sets of crusades, this French Levant existed between a mythical past and an imperial present, between an unchanging Orient and a dynamic Occident, and between a protected Lebanon and an imagined realm of the Levant.

#### *Between Ottoman Lebanon and French Levant*

This historical and geographical ambiguity also blurred the lines between Lebanon and Syria, between Lebanon and the Levant, even between Lebanon and France itself. In an account of his 1880 travels, published posthumously a decade later, Gabriel Charmes begins his section on Lebanon by observing that "many French confuse the whole of *Syrie* with this little region,

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<sup>49</sup> As Ussama Makdisi has demonstrated, this interpretation predated the 1860 outbreaks, which further confirmed a narrative of ancient hatred between rival sects in Mount Lebanon. Makdisi, *The Culture of Sectarianism*. For examples of such accounts of 1860, see in addition to those mentioned in this chapter Charles Churchill, *The Druze and the Maronites under Turkish Rule from 1840 to 1860* (London: B. Quaritch, 1862).

whose history has been so often implicated in our own that we see it almost as taking part.”<sup>50</sup> Underlining the distinction between Lebanon and Syria furthered the particularity of the former as a bastion of French influence, while the obfuscation of this division implicitly extended its influence over a wider territory. When Charmes described Lebanon as a “country for which we profess such deep sentiments of friendship,” or remarked that “each of us is familiar with the heroic legends of Lebanon,” he positioned himself as a mouthpiece for the French public, affirming a mythology of intimate Franco-Lebanese connection and shared history.<sup>51</sup> Rather than elucidate a sharper delineation between the two, Charmes effectively allowed Lebanon to stand in for the greater Levant, at once a religious refuge and an imperial base. The Lebanese mountains, he writes, provided a “natural citadel” for their Christian inhabitants, who “found powerful aid in the protection of France” from their secure redoubt.<sup>52</sup> For Etienne Lamy, France’s very “power in the Levant resemble[d] a place invested with a long and skillful siege,” though its “ramparts [were] everywhere threatened” by competition.<sup>53</sup> The implication was not simply that Lebanon was isolated from the rest of the Syria; rather, it provided a vantage point from which to articulate and defend claims of French influence in the Near East.

Chronologically, geographically, and conceptually, Lebanon was embedded within an even more vaguely defined and discursively malleable Syria. The bond forged between France and Lebanon over the previous centuries seemed to transcend both history and the confines of the Lebanese mountains, endowing *la France du Levant* with a boundless meaning and a timeless legitimacy across the Syrian lands. The slippage between Syria, Lebanon, and the Levant occurs almost imperceptibly in the works of French travelers, writers, and historians like

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<sup>50</sup> Gabriel Charmes, *Voyage en Syrie: impressions et souvenirs* (Paris, C. Lévy, 1891), 231. Charmes died of tuberculosis following an official mission to Libya, Tunisia, and Morocco in 1886.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 231.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 231. The language of a “citadel” will be discussed below.

<sup>53</sup> Lamy, *La France du Levant*, 239.

Lamy and Charmes; the sheer number of works with “Syria” in their title attested to the ubiquity and ambiguity with which the territorial term was deployed.<sup>54</sup> Even as this tendency conflated Lebanon with its Christian—and more precisely Maronite—inhabitants, however, describing the particularity of France’s historic friendship with Lebanese Christians did not necessarily undercut more expansive imperial interests and agendas. On the contrary, accounts of Lebanon—its enduring affinity and gratitude toward France, from the Crusades to the intervention of 1860 and beyond—facilitated the transition between themes of virtuous protection and affective influence across a wider realm of the Levant.

If the “despotism of the Turk” could be blamed for the misrule that allowed, or even encouraged, the massacre of Maronite Christians in Mount Lebanon, then Istanbul could also be deemed incapable of governing surrounding regions and populations.<sup>55</sup> This interpretation appealed to popular notions of Turkish barbarity and encouraged sentimental attachment to their noble victims, enabling Orientalist claims of superiority to fracture the legitimacy of Ottoman sovereignty. As articulated by Charmes, the perfidy of the “barbarous Turk” had transformed peaceful Lebanon into a “source of more violent, narrower, and bloodier divisions” than in the rest of Syria, positioning it at the front lines of a battle for civilization. France’s protective aegis over Lebanon represented the sole “barrier in the Orient against the attempts of despotism or the undertakings of anarchy.”<sup>56</sup> Within this formulation, it also provided a foothold for an ideology of French influence in the irredeemably corrupt Ottoman Empire.

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<sup>54</sup> See Paul Masson, *Éléments d’une Bibliographie Française de la Syrie (Géographie, Ethnographie, Histoire, Archéologie, Langues, Littératures, Religions)* (Marseille: Barlatier, 1919); and Lenka Bokova, *Bibliographie française sur la Syrie sous le mandat: bilan des publications et des travaux de recherche, 1918-1991* (Thèse de maîtrise, École Nationale Supérieure de Bibliothécaires – Université Claude Bernard, Lyon I, 1991).

<sup>55</sup> Charmes, *Voyage en Syrie* (1891), 250.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 286, 279.

The legacy of French intervention in 1860—memorialized as both a military rescue and guarantee of protection—effectively transformed the history of Lebanon and the Maronites into a synecdoche for that of Greater Syria and its inhabitants. Even if, as one pamphleteer proclaimed, a shared “community of origins, race, religion, and memories” explicitly rendered “the Maronites the French of the Lebanon” in the eyes of those urging French assistance, a slippage between the two regions enabled the Lebanese Christian experience to eclipse that of the undefined Levant.<sup>57</sup> By including both Syria and Lebanon in their analysis of sectarian clashes, early works on the lead-up to the 1860 crisis like Poujade’s *Le Liban et la Syrie* and Baudicour’s *La France en Syrie* and *La France au Liban* brought together the two histories as defined by inherently antagonistic relations between Muslims and Christians.<sup>58</sup> These accounts of mid-century conflict in Lebanon interpreted the region’s history through a dialectic of hostility, desperation, and providential intervention, attributed respectively to Druze assailants, Maronite victims, and their French saviors. Even within the generic Orientalist tableaux sketched by well-known travelers to the Levant like Lamartine and Nerval, who depicted lands of backwardness, inferiority, and exotic allure, the Lebanese were already considered exceptional. Maronites represented, for Lamartine, “one of the finest, purest, and most bellicose people on whom France can, someday, depend to bring part of the Orient under its legitimate influence,” while Lebanon constituted a “little Europe” with “industrious” inhabitants, in Nerval’s estimation.<sup>59</sup> Not only did the events of 1860 and their aftermath contribute to the construction of modern sectarianism, as Ussama Makdisi has shown.<sup>60</sup> They also attached certain affective qualities to segments of an

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<sup>57</sup> M. de Lescure, *La nouvelle question d’Orient* (Paris: E. Dentu, 1860), cited in Arsan, ““There Is, in the Heart of Asia,”” 86.

<sup>58</sup> Poujade, *Le Liban et la Syrie* (1867); Louis de Baudicour, *La France en Syrie* (Paris: E. Dentu, 1860); Baudicour, *La France au Liban* (Paris: E. Dentu, 1879).

<sup>59</sup> Alphonse de Lamartine, *Voyage en Orient 1832-1833* (Paris: Hachette, 1835), cited in Hakim, 41; Gérard de Nerval, *Voyage en Orient* (Paris: H. Gautier, 1851), 424-425.

<sup>60</sup> Makdisi, *The Culture of Sectarianism*.



imagined French empire, viewing the Christians of Lebanon—though not their perceived Druze enemies—with particular empathy and bestowing a mantle of esteem on imperial France.

This belief in Franco-Lebanese amity had in fact been cultivated even before the eruption of sectarian violence in 1860. Amidst earlier episodes of conflict between Maronites and Druze, Lebanese leaders appealed to France, invoking a legacy of cooperation and friendship. One text in particular, the product of a Maronite archbishop named Nicolas Murad, exerted a strikingly influential historiographical half-life as evidence of the timeless depth of familial bonds between the French and Lebanese.<sup>61</sup> Murad's letter, addressed to French King Louis-Philippe in 1844, purported to reproduce an exchange between France's sainted King Louis IX and a Maronite leader during the Crusades, in which the former pledged his nation's support and protection out of gratitude for the sacrifice of Lebanese soldiers and allies alongside the French Crusaders. The Maronites, the saint-king allegedly proclaimed, were themselves "a part of the French nation," exhibiting both a "firm attachment to the Catholic religion" and a profound sentiment of friendship toward the French people.<sup>62</sup> Maronite Christians, Murad's letter stressed to the current French king, were not only committed fellow Catholics, who had for centuries "taken refuge in Lebanon" as a sanctuary for their faith.<sup>63</sup> They had also developed a close friendship and deep identification with France, as patron and protector, based on a mutually forged allegiance.

Murad's appeal, while tracing Franco-Lebanese history back to the Crusades, was a product of nineteenth-century politics. Seeking to secure French support amidst a period of Maronite-Druze tensions in Mount Lebanon, Murad invented a logic of historic obligation, dating back to the medieval era of religious confrontation in the Holy Land. As historian Youssef

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<sup>61</sup> See for example Jean 'Azar, *Les marounites* (Cambrai, 1852); Saint-Albin, *L'Europe chrétienne* ; de Lescure, *La nouvelle question d'Orient*.

<sup>62</sup> Murad, *Notice historique*, 25-26.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

Mouawad has uncovered, Murad's citation of Saint-Louis was undoubtedly a fabrication; riddled with historical errors and anachronisms, its alleged French-language original has never been found and likely never existed.<sup>64</sup> The subsequent letters of protection from Kings Louis XIV and XV that Murad also reproduced were not historically baseless, yet their inclusion functioned similarly to anchor a narrative of Franco-Lebanese friendship securely in the past and at the highest levels of royal authority. Together these sources, the former apocryphal and both rendered instrumental toward Murad's political ends, bound France and Maronite Lebanon together in history, myth, and memory. Murad used them to assert Maronites' own self-identification as a "French nation, by sentiment as well as by religion."<sup>65</sup> Anticipating Etienne Lamy's reference to the realm of *la France du Levant*, he even referred to the Maronites as the "French of the Levant."<sup>66</sup> The notion of affective attachment, deployed toward a politics of identity, informed its function as imperial logic. Before a French Levant could be envisioned as such, it needed to be populated with Levantine French. The label was as malleable—and as manufactured—as Lamy's and provided the requisite willing subjects of an imagined empire.

Murad's argument, based on an invention of sources as well as an affective rationale, also drew upon an understanding of protection that seemed at once expansive and ambiguous. Mobilized to claim the privileges of Lebanese Maronites, its precise meaning and mode of application were left unspecified. In the wording of Louis XIV's letter, France would "favor" their population and ensure that "they could freely continue their spiritual exercises and

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<sup>64</sup> Youssef Mouawad, "Aux origines d'un mythe: la lettre de St. Louis aux Maronites," in eds. Bernard Heyberger and Carsten-Michael Walbiner, *Européens vus par les libanais à l'époque ottomane* (Beirut: Ergon Verlag Würzburg, 2002).

<sup>65</sup> Murad, *Notice historique*, 44.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.* This language was later taken up by Bulus Nujaym, *La question du Liban: étude d'histoire diplomatique et de droit international* (Paris: A. Rousseau, 1908). See Marwan Buheiry, "Bulus Nujaym and the Grand Liban Ideal," in *The Formation and Perception of the Modern Arab World: Studies by Marwan Buheiry* (Princeton: The Darwin Press, 1989), ed. Lawrence I. Conrad, 585.

functions.”<sup>67</sup> However this assurance was to be guaranteed and implemented, it situated the Maronites—and by implication the French—within a structure of Christian-Muslim antagonism. Constructing and maintaining this historical formation of friendship seemed more essential to Murad’s objectives than outlining the specific modes of religious, judicial, or military protection. The notion of protection, already alluringly opaque in 1844, became even more so after the armed intervention and administrative negotiations of sixteen years later, which further enhanced both the ideological imperative and imperial opportunity to base national influence upon a protective regime. The very possibility of supporting the Maronite population in the Levant, in other words, was preserved through a fundamental ambiguity: if the stakes of protection were not acted upon or abrogated, then this structural relationship retained not only its rhetorical force, but also its centrality in a fantasy of empire based on affection rather than conquest.

The arrival of the French expedition in 1860 and the protective political structure that it inaugurated enabled visions of protection in the Levant to assume a more definitive outline, in the image of honorable French soldiers retracing the steps of medieval Crusaders to guarantee the safety of innocent Christians. Lebanon, targeted by hostile Muslims again and again, represented the “unfortunate sister of the French nation.”<sup>68</sup> The appeal for brutal vengeance and a continuation of the lost Crusades appeared as essential as protecting a beleaguered younger sibling, sounding a gendered call to preserve French family and history. In this backward-looking perspective, in which conflict between Christianity and Islam marked the fundamental division of peoples and medieval heroism figured as the acme of French defense of civilization, “without the Crusades, France would not be France.”<sup>69</sup> The question, given the intersection of

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<sup>67</sup> Murad, *Notice historique*, 28. On medieval and early modern precedents for the capitulatory and Catholic regimes of protection, see Rey, *De la protection diplomatique et consulaire*.

<sup>68</sup> Murad, *Notice historique*, 12.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

past and present, the intensity of affective investment, and the stakes of imperial interests in the Near East, is whether France would be France without Lebanon.

By the time of this second crusade of French intervention in 1860, it mattered little that the majority of violent raids had already torn through Mount Lebanon, or that attacks were still occurring kilometers away in the region of Damascus. The *ex post facto* French military presence functioned both to affirm a legacy of loyal protection and to set an important precedent of imperial intervention. For the French, it also conjured a scenario of heroism and danger, set against a foreign backdrop referred to alternately as Lebanon, Syria, and the Levant. Within this simulacrum of the Near East, vulnerable Lebanese Christians fulfilled the role as exemplary victims, caught between Turkish oppressors and French protectors, and thereby delineating opposing identities of adversary and ally. The teleology of sectarian conflict, in this narrative, wove the Lebanese experience into that of Greater Syria, as the two territories—like the two terms themselves—appeared in French eyes through the conjoined lenses of victimhood and complicity. While the 1860 massacres in Lebanon sanctified the martyrdom of French Maronites, the violence—as well as the even deadlier subsequent outbreaks in Damascus—was also seen as an almost inevitable outcome of Islamic degeneracy and Ottoman complicity. The entire episode, as a manifestation of endemic internecine strife, at once confirmed an imperative of French protection and conformed to the inviolability of Franco-Lebanese alliance.

*Between Catholic Protectorate and French Citadel*

The fruits of this relationship, propagandists and amateur historians of nineteenth-century Lebanon and the (French) Levant contended, were not confined to the informal protectorate negotiated in Mount Lebanon. Owing precisely to its ambiguous legal status—as neither a formal colonial possession nor a comprehensive extraterritorial regime, but rather an informal guarantee

of security—the latter melded with an earlier regime of protection, which France had negotiated centuries earlier with the Ottoman Sublime Porte to ensure the security and non-persecution of Catholics in the Near East. This “Catholic protectorate” in turn informed the capitulatory agreements that accorded commercial prerogatives and individual privileges for French merchants and nationals. As Vincent Cloarec has noted, the explosion of interest in these juridical and political systems over the last decade of the nineteenth century attested to the increasingly tense environment of imperial competition in which French propagandists and politicians sought to stake out spheres of colonial (or not-quite-colonial) opportunity.<sup>70</sup> The apparent extraterritoriality of these protections, though, belied the ambiguity of both their legal efficacy and limited extent. Without belaboring the history or legacy of capitulatory agreements, it suffices to note their nebulous quality for contemporaries.<sup>71</sup> Even as the numbers of so-called *protégés* expanded—often among the associates and relatives of consular dragomans—the Capitulations formed, from the European perspective, the diplomatic and ideological sinews of France’s ostensible “Catholic protectorate,” signifying the reach of informal empire even as their specific privileges were diluted.<sup>72</sup> They arguably represented less a jurisdictional intrusion upon Ottoman sovereignty—though the Sublime Porte did resent their incursions as such—than an abstract imperial logic stretched beyond its breaking point.

In the wake of 1860, the question of protection not only implicated a particular region of Ottoman sovereignty, its imperial governance, and a population to whom the threat now

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<sup>70</sup> Cloarec, “La France du Levant,” 23.

<sup>71</sup> For contemporaneous studies of the French Catholic protectorate and Capitulations, see Joseph Aubès, *Le protectorat religieux de la France en Orient* (Paris: Bloud, 1905); Pierre Ghaleb, *Le protectorat religieux de la France en Orient: étude historique et politique* (Avignon: 1920).

<sup>72</sup> Dragomans were local interpreters who worked for consular offices in a variety of capacities. According to Leila Fawaz, “by the early nineteenth century, these European protégés numbered in the thousands, among them Arab Christians who were the main beneficiaries of the growth of European influence in Syria.” Fawaz, *An Occasion for War*, 23. On dragomans in the early modern period, see E. Natalie Rothman, “Interpreting Dragomans: Boundaries and Crossings in the Early Modern Mediterranean,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 51, no. 4 (October 2009): 771-800.

appeared existential as well as ecclesiastical. It also transcended boundaries; while the post-1860 agreement was centered in Mount Lebanon, the traditional Catholic protectorate that French sovereigns had claimed throughout the medieval and early modern periods applied in theory to European Christians across the “well-protected” Ottoman domains.<sup>73</sup> As Carol Hakim has pointed out—and as even some contemporaries acknowledged—the rights and prerogatives conveyed by this protectorate were more often invoked than elucidated. They referred to support for Catholic missions and oversight of the Holy Places in Jerusalem but did not, Hakim writes, “strictly speaking, involve the protection [of] the Christian subjects of the Ottoman Empire,” nor did they necessarily imply a particular political status for Mount Lebanon.<sup>74</sup> The so-called “ancient privileges” of Lebanese Christians were, in the words of the French representative to negotiations in 1861, “almost illusory” and had “not in the least guaranteed the security” of the local population.<sup>75</sup> Inflated by sentimental language, however, the notion of a Catholic protectorate melded with post-1860 calls to protect Lebanese Christians. Notwithstanding European and Ottoman negotiators’ efforts to limit the settlement of the 1860 violence to an administrative reorganization of Mount Lebanon, the hazy filter of religious protection enabled imperial ambitions to expand beyond these circumscribed political confines. An ideology of protection grew deeper roots within Lebanon, even as its affective connotations spread more widely across the Levant.

The “influence that the Catholic protectorate gives us in Lebanon,” claimed Gabriel Charmes in an 1883 article in the *Revue politique et littéraire*, extended to France’s defense of various Christian populations across Syria—the absence of legal or even imperial jurisdiction

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<sup>73</sup> Selim Deringil, *The Well-Protected Domains: Ideology and the Legitimation of Power in the Ottoman Empire, 1876-1909* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1998).

<sup>74</sup> Hakim, 40, 276n12.

<sup>75</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*, 78.

notwithstanding.<sup>76</sup> Charmes interpreted France's protection of Catholics as coterminous with its supervisory role in Lebanon, asserting that by "defend[ing] their freedom against oppressive governments," France had "acquired in Syria a greater influence than that of all [its] rivals." Charmes sidestepped the question of how French prestige appealed to Syrian Muslims or applied to Christians beyond Lebanon by clarifying that it was the "most enlightened and at the same time most vigorous populations of this country [who were] absolutely French in their heart and soul"—and therefore merited French defense.<sup>77</sup> Within the ambiguous frontiers of "this country," affection for and identification with France signified civilizational status, which recursively confirmed a sense of loyalty to the French name and nation.

France's objective, colonial advocate and Catholic publicist Louis de Baudicour had earlier written, was to retain its "ancient protectorate over...the Levant," in order to balance a Mediterranean empire built as much on affection and allegiance as on commerce, politics, or even territorial conquest.<sup>78</sup> Such affective priorities superseded any precise geographical delineation, and the distinction between Lebanese and Syrians—and between Lebanon and the Levant—collapsed under a conviction in imperial popularity and prestige. The language of loyalty thus secured both a population and a place from which to articulate an imperial agenda and even consolidate a sense of national identity. If the putative Frenchness of Lebanese and Levantines—their Christian qualifications elided or at least unmentioned—conveyed a degree of civilization and conferred a mandate of protection, this also strengthened the French self-conception as a virtuous imperial protector.

The difference between the unofficial French protectorate in Lebanon, as the core of an imagined *France du Levant*, and an official colonial territory was not that claims of imperial

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<sup>76</sup> Charmes, "Le protectorat catholique de la France en Orient," *Revue politique et littéraire* (1883), 395.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Baudicour, *La France en Syrie*, 3.

benevolence or a *mission civilisatrice* were any stronger or more formative in one or the other. Rather, such claims functioned especially potently precisely because Lebanon was *not* a formally colonial possession, and because the French Levant was an entirely fictive construct. Algeria, to take the most extreme example of a French colonial territory, had been in name—if not in practice—an integral part of France itself since the mid-nineteenth century. The implication of *l'Algérie française*, as unstable and contested as its putative Frenchness was, contrasted with the aspirational quality of *la France du Levant*, a fantasy of empire and of filial identification.<sup>79</sup> The mission of civilizing the Levant, moreover, was at once less onerous and more compelling if the protected populations were willingly and eagerly French, if imperial responsibilities were limited to affirming this allegiance, and if the suggestion of France's influence across Syria derived from overlapping and ambiguous standards of protection. The legacies of French protection of Catholics and Maronites, merchants and Europeans, Lebanese and Syrians, and “the most enlightened and most vigorous” among these populations, coalesced in the isolated landscape and idealized imaginary of Mount Lebanon.

Lebanon, in the minds of those who envisioned its particular status or advocated for its autonomy, could provide a refuge for Christians in the Near East, functioning as “a citadel for its inhabitants” according to the political structure proposed by the commander of the 1860 French expedition.<sup>80</sup> This perspective both recapitulated and renewed the presumed function of Mount Lebanon, connecting the era of the Crusades, when Lebanese Maronites allegedly sheltered French soldiers, to the present. Thus the preface to Baptistin Poujoulat's *La vérité sur la Syrie*, an 1864 account of the expedition, insisted that “Lebanon was like a French citadel in the

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<sup>79</sup> On the role of violence and the civilizing mission in Algeria, see Brower, *A Desert Named Peace*; Jennifer Sessions, *By Sword and Plow: France and the Conquest of Algeria* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011); and Abi-Mershed, *Apostles of Modernity*.

<sup>80</sup> Archives du Ministère des Affaires Étrangères (hereafter AMAE), MD/T 148, Beaufort to Randon, 21 December 1860, cited in Hakim, 85.



Orient,” and that “the Maronite nation” specifically, as the most consistent and enduring guardian of our faith, considered itself “a little France,” long awaiting deliverance from continual Muslim and Ottoman persecution.<sup>81</sup> Poujoulat linked the “destiny of Syria’s Christians” to the “duties and honor of France,” rendering the defense of the former a condition of French patriotism and national integrity.<sup>82</sup> He slips easily from “Christian Syria, French by faith and memories” to the “Catholic and French Lebanon” for which he proclaims his love and promises protection.<sup>83</sup> The relevant question was arguably less whom to defend, or where to mount this defense, than how the act of defending—from a French citadel, in “a little France,” among imagined French allies—redounded to France’s own prestige.

The repeated reference to the Lebanese “citadel,” as word and as idea, summoned the chivalric connotations of the Crusades, while also justifying a guarantee of Lebanon’s protection. If this mountainous territory had long provided its besieged population with security, by virtue of geography and history alike, then France’s role was simply to restore this natural order, a task militarily and morally facilitated by Lebanon’s very fortress-like status. Religious and national connotations added to this military role of defending Christianity and preserving a “little France” in the Orient. Lebanon represented an “impregnable citadel” not only strategically, as the naturally defensible higher ground from which to protect friends—fellow Catholics and near-Frenchmen—and vanquish (Muslim) foes.<sup>84</sup> It also served as a secure bastion within the French imperial mindset, its connection to France a welcome certainty within an uncertain and ambiguously expansive Levant.

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<sup>81</sup> Poujoulat, *La vérité sur la Syrie*, xiv.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, v.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, xviii-xix

<sup>84</sup> Hakim, 39, 276n7.

This notion of Lebanon as national, religious, and imperial fortress in hostile terrain was compelling enough to be transmitted through generations of writers and commentators. A popular novel of the 1920s, Pierre Benoit's, *La chatelaine du Liban*, referred in its title to the “lady of the manor” of an ancient Crusaders’ stronghold, which the eponymous character—an alluring European noblewoman and femme fatale, who dressed in “Oriental” attire and idolized the nineteenth-century Orientalist traveler Hester Stanhope—used as her base of seduction, renaming it “Kalaat-et-Tahara,” or the “castle of purity.”<sup>85</sup> The implication, for the novel’s hero, a decorated French soldier turned colonial intelligence officer, was that this woman—whose dalliances included affairs with Russian, British, and even Turkish high officials—posed a danger both as a rival European and as an Orientalized temptress, appropriating the castle in the Lebanese mountains from its hallowed purpose to undermine the reach of French influence. Her corruption of the citadel’s sanctity reaffirmed its meaning and its value, as a site to be secured, from which to defend French interests from (masculine) rivals and resist the allure of the (feminized) Orient.

Politically, during the colonial mandate period, a local Lebanese leader recalled the words of French traveler and nationalist Maurice Barrès to welcome the French colonial high commissioner by describing Lebanon as a “citadel of France in the Levant.”<sup>86</sup> While the fifth chapter of this dissertation will treat in greater detail the defense of Lebanon as a bastion of French influence in the post-World War I mandate, it suffices to observe for now that the language used in this moment paralleled that of decades prior, repurposing the vocabulary of the Crusades and the Lebanese citadel to situate France as an imperial sovereign and protector. Further employing an idiom of agriculture and reproduction, this Maronite official proclaimed

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<sup>85</sup> Pierre Benoit, *La chatelaine du Liban* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1924).

<sup>86</sup> 19 March 1924, *Le Réveil*, “La réception du Haut Commissaire à Baabda – Discours prononcé par M. le Cheikh Kesrouan el Khazen Mutessarif du Mont-Liban.”

that the “French seed” flourished in Lebanese soil, bearing fruit that endured beyond passing allegiance and extended beyond the confines of the mountain.<sup>87</sup> As a site of protection, Lebanon provided both the meaning and the means to expand an imagined French sphere of influence.

These metaphors of citadel and cultivation combined to imply an almost natural progression of influence, vitally defended historically and geographically as well as militarily and politically. Over the half-century between the events of 1860 and the outbreak of the First World War, the informal French protectorate in Mount Lebanon provided a base for an empire that existed in myth and in the colonial mind. As incentives to claim colonial possessions sharpened during this period, the language and legacy of preserving a “citadel” of influence and affection enabled visions of *la France du Levant* to become even more deeply entrenched. Once the Ottoman Empire disbanded in 1918, these visions surveyed a landscape newly opened to imperial designs. The position of Lebanon within the (French) Levant, in this uncertain postwar context, was a product of discursive investment as well as historical developments. And colonial commentators would look back to 1860 and beyond to ground France’s emergent empire in the Near East, ostensibly not on the exploitative model of earlier colonies, but based on tenets of perceived popularity and genealogies of familial bonds befitting the novel imperial form inaugurated through the postwar League of Nations mandate system.<sup>88</sup>

### **After 1914: Mandating Protection**

#### *Between the Eastern Question and the First World War*

Over the course of the long nineteenth century, what contemporaries referred to as the “Eastern Question” loomed over much of the politically and financially troubled Ottoman

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> On the League of Nations mandate section, see especially Susan Pedersen, *The Guardians: The League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

Empire. As Holly Case has recently argued, the capaciousness of this “Question”—one of dozens if not hundreds posed amidst what she calls the “age of questions”—belied the assumptions and agendas implicit in its very formulation—namely, that the Empire’s imminent demise would open its possessions for European colonization.<sup>89</sup> The status of the Balkan and Middle Eastern territories of the Ottoman Near East especially—the lands of the Levant, broadly conceived—appeared increasingly tenuous.<sup>90</sup> The *Tanzimat* reforms to centralize Ottoman sovereignty were designed to modernize political, military, and judicial institutions as a means of both emulating and rebuffing European structures of influence. Among these were the capitulatory privileges that had increasingly expanded from foreign merchants and European Christians to a growing cadre of dragomans and *protégés*. To conserve territory and legitimacy, the Ottoman government sought to build up the capacity to resist potential European colonial incursions even as it also worked to demonstrate its self-sufficiency as a modern state—often measured according to standards insisted upon or implied by European powers—and its capacity to ensure its population’s security and stability. This entailed not only an effort to establish popular acceptance of Ottoman rule amongst those potentially most hostile to its dominion, but also a contestation over whether the regime could adequately safeguard the rights and livelihoods

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<sup>89</sup> Holly Case, *The Age of Questions: Or, A First Attempt at an Aggregate History of the Eastern, Social, Woman, American, Jewish, Polish, Bullion, Tuberculosis, and Many Other Questions over the Nineteenth Century, and Beyond* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018).

<sup>90</sup> By the eve of the Great War, the Sublime Porte’s Balkan provinces had attained their independence, Egypt was under effective British control, while the Kingdom of the Hedjaz recognized the authority of the Hashemite dynasty. The Empire’s most prosperous heartlands—economically, politically, demographically, and religiously—had thus already been stripped away, largely (in the Porte’s eyes) through European imperial machinations. On Ottoman history over the long nineteenth century, see for example Deringil, *The Well-Protected Domains*; Carter Findley, *Bureaucratic Reform in the Ottoman Empire: The Sublime Porte, 1789-1922* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980); Hasan Kayali, *Arabs and Young Turks: Ottomanism, Arabism, and Islamism in the Ottoman Empire, 1908-1918* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

of those who did not conform to its dominant majority: non-Muslims and non-Turks, Christians and Arabs, and the foreigners and locals alike whom European states claimed to protect.<sup>91</sup>

Lebanon, as a semi-autonomous province of the Ottoman Empire and unofficial—or “invisible”—protectorate of France, was at once at the heart of and an exception to the European territorial ambitions implied by the so-called Eastern Question. Precisely because colonial propagandists so vigorously asserted French influence in Lebanon and the familial nature of its bonds with Maronite Christians, this region of the Near East was seen as both central to an agenda of colonial expansion and yet already effectively a part of imperial France. The events in Mount Lebanon and Damascus in 1860 seemed to underscore the fragility of Ottoman governance, even as their ultimate resolution sought to prop up the authority of the Sublime Porte, lest the empire’s collapse trigger a breakdown in the delicate European balance of power.

It was with this tension in mind that editor of the *Journal des débats* Maurice Pernot, in his report following a journey to the eastern Mediterranean provinces sponsored by the *Comité des intérêts français en Orient*, warned of the tendency of “the Lebanese, like many Orientals, [to] count only on others to improve their affairs...and to make out of the least Lebanese question a European question.”<sup>92</sup> Even for this advocate of colonial expansion, who heralded France’s civilizing influence in the Levant, Lebanon’s perceived proximity to France in particular generated a degree of uncertainty.<sup>93</sup> What mattered was the directionality and hierarchy of this relation; it was for the French to address the question of Lebanon, rather than the Lebanese to impose their question on the French.

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<sup>91</sup> On relations between these groups in the Palestinian context, see Michelle Campos, *Ottoman Brothers: Muslims, Christians, and Jews in Early Twentieth-Century Palestine* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000). See also Heather Sharkey, *A History of Muslims, Christians, and Jews in the Middle East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

<sup>92</sup> Maurice Pernot, *Rapport sur un voyage d’étude à Constantinople, en Égypte et en Turquie d’Asie (janvier-août 1912)* (Paris: Firmin-Didot et Cie, [1914]), 231.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, xii.

The “Lebanese question” was not only about the place of a particular region within a potentially faltering Ottoman Empire. For French commentators like Pernot, it was also about the place of an *idea* within an imagined (European) empire. The question, in its fully imperial implications, was the extent to which the position of Lebanon shed light on the informal modes of influence, tenets of affection, and ideology of protection through which France conceptualized its relation to the Levant. With its ambiguous place in the French imperial imagination, Lebanon presented an essential test case for this ideology of protection. Notwithstanding Ottoman sovereignty over Lebanon, French interests depended on proving that the largely peaceful fifty-year pre-war period owed as much to *France’s* protective oversight as to any local dynamics or modes of governance from Istanbul. In addition to intervening in the selection of Mount Lebanon’s governor and administrative council, the politics of which chroniclers of the *mutesarriyya* period have demonstrated, this process entailed cultivating the language through which a logic of protection could be articulated and enacted.<sup>94</sup>

By the years during and immediately after the First World War, the overlapping legacies of French protection of Lebanon and influence in the Levant had taken on renewed salience. As the Ottoman Empire came apart through the ruptures of war and the rivalries of postwar politics, colonial questions loomed prominently over the Near East. French claims rested on pillars of commercial, cultural, and political interests, buttressed by a narrative of influence and affection. The rescue of Lebanon in 1860 represented in this vision the birth pangs of an imperial bond, intimately preserved over a half-century. As I have argued, the understanding of protection that derived from this response merged with traditionally asserted religious and commercial privileges for Catholics and Europeans in the Ottoman Empire. An array of activists, officials,

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<sup>94</sup> See Spagnolo, *France and Ottoman Lebanon*; Akarli, *The Long Peace*.

and commentators considered the significance of France's mid-century expedition to Lebanon in the light of expanding colonial prerogatives and opportunities across the realm of the Levant.

Even before the war, colonial pressure groups emerged to advocate for French imperial expansion in the Near East. The *Comité France-Orient*, in its founding statutes of 1913, announced as its goal that “France must retake its place in the Orient,” cultivating “its traditional prestige...into the depths of Lebanon.”<sup>95</sup> The specific mention of Lebanon, for an organization whose stated sphere of activity extended from Egypt to the Balkans, was not incidental. France's prestige, a 1914 memo from the group proclaimed, was “one of the principal assets of French policy in Syria,” which was in turn essential to strengthening its role across the Near East.<sup>96</sup> This prestige, the organization warned, though, risked eroding without significant and sustained investment. The group's objective, its president wrote to the Foreign Affairs Minister in February 1914, was to enhance France's “national radiance” and “reaffirm our traditional supremacy” in the region.<sup>97</sup> The very unspecificity of the “Orient,” though, both geographically expanded and ideologically diluted this ambition. While the organization specified the means by which it sought to “raise France's prestige in the Orient”—modes of propaganda, press articles, and publications targeting French audiences—both the meaning of this concept and the parameters of the Orient remained undefined.

For colonial advocacy groups like the *Comité France-Orient*, the notion of French prestige in Syria and Lebanon provided a compelling means to inculcate imperialist sentiment among the French public. During the Great War, colonial claims could seem extraneous to the exigency of reclaiming French territory, leading nationalist Paul Déroulède to dismiss the proverbial (and tellingly gendered) “twenty chambermaids” of empire as inadequate to replace

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<sup>95</sup> AMAE 175 CPCOM 53, France-Orient, Goals and Statutes.

<sup>96</sup> CADN 92PO/A 257, France-Orient, Mémoire 1914.

<sup>97</sup> AMAE 175 CPCOM 53, Président France-Orient to Président MAE, 6 February 1914.

the “two sisters” that France had lost in Alsace and Lorraine.<sup>98</sup> Yet as the imperative to justify the war’s destructiveness with territorial gains only increased, the possibility of obtaining colonies both consensually and cheaply presented an alluring endgame for advocates of empire. Whereas colonial advocates like the *Comité de l’Asie française* saw existing French possessions in sub-Saharan Africa and Southeast Asia as “barbarian tropical regions”—more remote, less hospitable, and less racially assimilable—the Ottoman Near East represented a potentially more amenable sphere of imperial influence. French consolidation and expansion could proceed triumphantly without invasion or administration; an abstract politics of prestige cost less, in lives and treasure, than a coherent colonial policy.

In contrast to other regions of the colonial map, the *Comité de l’Asie française* heralded the Levant as “a Mediterranean land, healthy, fully impregnated with French influence.” Colonial activists “would have only to gather the fruit of seven centuries of French efforts” in order to secure a willing addition to France’s empire.<sup>99</sup> Such gendered language implied that France had already penetrated the Levant, consensually rather than coercively, and that the passive and feminized latter was intended to absorb the influence of imperially masculine France and bear the fruit of willfully colonial offspring. The notion of impregnation, a common feature in sexualized discourses of colonialism, captured the way in which French imperial objectives targeted the Levant alongside other colonized regions.<sup>100</sup> In its etymological and metaphorical sense, this hypothetical colonization also suggested cultivating a land and harvesting its products.<sup>101</sup> The language of seeding, conception, and growth seem to render this process natural

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<sup>98</sup> Cited in Christopher Andrew and A.S.Kanya-Forstner, *The Climax of French Imperial Expansion, 1914-1924* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1981), 13.

<sup>99</sup> AMAE 1 CPCOM 870, Voeu Asie française, August 1915, p. 4.

<sup>100</sup> On sexualized discourses of colonialism, see for example Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

<sup>101</sup> On the relationship between violence and cultivation in the Algerian context, see Sessions, *By Sword and Plow*.



and irreversible, even biological. The familial fantasy of the Levant, pregnant with French influence, thus gave birth to overlapping convictions in a realm of inherent Frenchness and in the concomitant need to preserve this ostensibly natural alliance.

Even without mentioning Lebanon by name, colonial activists and pressure groups signaled a particular attachment to this unique site of interaction, protection, and ambiguous imperial status. The *Comité de l'Asie française*'s allusion to "seven centuries of French efforts" recalled the Crusades, the history of contact between East and West, and the exalted friendship of the Maronites. The post-conflict French expedition of 1860 figured prominently in this narrative; Mount Lebanon was the locus of recent protection, and the presumed source of France's most fervent affection. These themes came to inform arguments for French imperial interests not only in Lebanon, but also in the Levant more broadly. Collapsing the distinction between these two entities functioned to establish a wider realm of French influence, anchored in Lebanon yet expanding both geographically and ideologically to comprise an ambitious colonial agenda. The climate of "contemporary rivalries" between European empires that inspired Lamy's *La France du Levant*—and which only sharpened over the ensuing years of the Great War's violent dénouement—reinvigorated interest in an episode remembered as an example of French imperial benevolence. This process of remembering and reconstructing in turn required a script that achieved, in part through very ambiguity of its variables of influence and prestige, an unambiguous conviction in France's affective empire in the Levant.

#### *Between Memories of 1860 and Imperial Prestige*

Reflecting on the legacy of 1860 seemed almost reflexive for writers looking toward the Near East during the decade of the First World War. After the war especially, when the devastation of French terrain and the decimation of its soldiers created an opening for more

glorious military memories, recalling the exploits of the nineteenth-century expedition to preserve peace in Lebanon seemed both to vanquish recent distress and assign France a prominent imperial role in the postwar world. Yet even before the war had come to a close, French and Lebanese alike used the experience and aftermath of 1860 as leverage for varying visions of how to settle particular aspects of the Eastern Question. The belief in the Ottoman Empire's impending demise presented the opportunity to rewrite the map—and rework the meaning—of the Levant as a colonial entity. Drawing from the history of French intervention in Lebanon, the idealized connection between the two countries, and the notion of enduring sectarian and civilizational conflict, plans for the post-Ottoman Near East again collapsed an imagined enduring timescale into the exigencies of the current moment.

At the eve of the First World War, in the summer of 1914, the celebrated writer and nationalist Maurice Barrès traveled through the “lands of the Levant,” compiling two volumes of his observations and reflections that would be published only posthumously, in 1923.<sup>102</sup> For Barrès, like for his predecessor Eugène Melchior de Vogüé, or for that matter Gérard de Nerval or Alphonse de Lamartine, his journey was essentially one backward in time, romanticizing the Near East's fabled past even as he lamented its degraded present. Syria and Lebanon in particular, he wrote, were “rather poor,” yet he perceived a glorious history, one not incidentally tied to the “feeling of warmth toward France” that he attributed to its population.<sup>103</sup> This emotional bond, Barrès presumed, extended historically and timelessly, from at least the Crusades to current imperial rivalries. He cites the observation of a state official on an earlier expedition, who remarked upon the “sentiments that the populations of Lebanon have professed

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<sup>102</sup> Maurice Barrès, *Une enquête aux pays du Levant* (Paris: Plon-Nourrit, [1923]).

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 125, 73.

for centuries” toward the French nation.<sup>104</sup> These sentiments, Barrès implied, were as ardent in 1914 as fifty years earlier, just after the violence that marked both the sectarian landscape and memories of French assistance. Lebanon represented a citadel in a doubly historical sense: as a stronghold for two generations of French soldiers—medieval Crusaders and those of 1860—and as the site where a lineage of affection for France had been strengthened and sustained.

For Barrès, visiting the sites where this lineage had been consecrated confirmed that Lebanon was a “land of memories, fully seeded.”<sup>105</sup> If the seeds of these memories had been planted during the Crusades, they had ripened amidst the martyrdom of 1860. At the graves of French soldiers, Barrès placed flowers that he claims he had been given to him in villages across the country. The minimal loss of French lives during the expedition did not detract from their symbolic function as repositories of glory and veneration, sentiments that locals apparently expressed as genuinely as the French nationalist. Barrès was “enchant[ed]” by the welcome he received in these “little French towns, rediscovered in Lebanon” and by their expressions of “gratitude pledged to our flag.”<sup>106</sup> To local populations, he concludes, France represented the “protector of Lebanon,” now as then, and their devotion to the *tricolore* attested to the “grateful spirit of the children of Lebanon.”<sup>107</sup> History seemed to proceed directly from the mythologized alliances of the Crusades, through the exaggerated martyrdom of 1860—with the focus on French contributions, rather than Lebanese suffering—to a sentiment of enduring loyalty.

Notwithstanding the hyperbole of the scene that Barrès describes—an analog to depictions of flower-bedecked throngs that supposedly greeted the first high commissioner of France’s postwar colonial mandate six years later—his familial language depicted the Lebanese

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 129.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 70, 78.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 129.

as thankful children to a parental France. The metaphor of family was superimposed on sentimental notions of attachment; while France lacked colonies in this region of the Ottoman Empire, Barrès informed socialist politician Jean Jaurès, at a banquet given in the former's honor upon his return in 1914 by the *Comité de l'Orient*, “in these countries, it is our spirit that dominates.” “In the Orient,” thanks to French schools and language especially, instead of possessing territories, he intoned, “we possess souls.”<sup>108</sup> The transcendent value of the latter was apparent, encompassing yet also eclipsing French material interests. Within this geography of French esteem and spiritual conquest, as Barrès sketched it, Lebanon served as a “refuge, an ark of salvation for persecuted races.”<sup>109</sup> Its particularity derived from its heralded role as both object and locus of protection. Just as France was remembered for protecting Lebanon, the latter's barriers—both mountainous and religious—could shield France's Christian and Maronite allies from the threat of Muslim hostility, incarnated and ever endangered by the outbreaks of 1860. Ultimately, though, this vision of Lebanon, and of the Orient, was a fantasy of French invention: “What a beautiful book for our country,” Barrès mused, considering “the history of the imagination of Lebanon” as a part of France's own history.<sup>110</sup>

The constant, in commentaries on the Levant before, during, and after the war, remained a conviction in what writers referred to as French prestige, an intangible quotient accumulated over decades and even centuries. This quality theoretically derived from the matrix of French-led cultural, educational, and missionary institutions, supported by economic investment in schools, orphanages, hospitals, and other charitable and infrastructural initiatives.<sup>111</sup> The assumption of

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<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 2, 181.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>111</sup> While critiquing this syllogism—which equated an abstract value of national and imperial grandeur with the sum of what were in fact disparate contexts of encounter and negotiation—will be a prominent theme throughout this dissertation, suffice to focus for now on the ubiquity of an expression of prestige in accounts of the connection between France, Lebanon, and the Levant.

French prestige guided how travelers like Barrès or Lamy, Nerval or Lamartine, viewed the scenes they confronted, which they interpreted almost invariably as reflections of France’s civilizational radiance. The mythology of the Levant—land of the Crusades and religious clashes, home of Maronite friendship and Islamic antagonism—endowed every project, every site, with historically overdetermined meaning. As Asher Kaufman has investigated, this perspective looked back thousands of years and interpreted contemporary peoples and places as ancestors of ancient races and ruins, though such reflections were largely a nineteenth-century phenomenon.<sup>112</sup> Given this pedigree, the temptation to associate the splendors of the Orient with the benefits of French civilization—and to write off its shortcomings as holdovers from a bygone era of backwardness—created a bifurcated timeline of tradition and modernity, whereby both ancient glory and contemporary innovation redounded to French prestige.

“For three centuries,” wrote journalist Maurice Pernot in his 1912 report for the *Comité des intérêts français en Orient*, “France has not ceased to spread its civilizing and benevolent action” across the Near East.<sup>113</sup> Repeatedly invoking “our influence and our prestige,” the essential variable behind these values for Pernot was the French language. Endowed with an almost mystical capacity to shape minds and sentiments, it represented the connective tissue between any enterprise operated by a Frenchman, with French capital, or through French culture and the conviction in national-imperial esteem.<sup>114</sup> Together, these initiatives amounted to “the work of benevolence and civilization that France has undertaken in the Levant,” from the earliest missionaries through the “efforts patiently and generously pursued for centuries.”<sup>115</sup> Language,

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<sup>112</sup> Kaufman, *Reviving Phoenicia*, 21-26.

<sup>113</sup> Pernot, viii.

<sup>114</sup> On the role of French language education in Lebanon, see Edward Falk, “Arabs into Frenchmen: Education and Identity in Ottoman Syria” (PhD diss., University of California-San Diego, 2017); and Falk, “Lyon to Liban: Language, Nation and Faith in the Jesuit Schools of Ottoman Lebanon,” in Hauser et al., *Entangled Education*.

<sup>115</sup> Pernot, viii-xii.

significantly, was not only that which was taught to Levantine children in schools. It also suggested a way of thinking, a level of status, and the lifeblood of French civilizational prestige. More than a tool of empire, promulgation of the French language affirmed the *conception* of French empire, as an edifice constructed out of the very grandeur that it was supposed to spread.

Pernot's chronology of gradual progression of influence over centuries synched up with his early twentieth-century moment, such that his very position as a Frenchman accorded him a privileged position. For the traveler, he wrote, there was "no better guarantee and more effective recommendation" to be welcomed in the countries of the Levant "than to be French."<sup>116</sup> The glory of Frenchness—historically cumulative, and compounded in its modern incarnation—stood out sharply from the backwardness of Levantines; "never, since long ago, has the magnificent enthusiasm [*élan*] of the French for the poor, unfortunate, or ignorant Orientals cooled."<sup>117</sup> The Orientals, Pernot contended, "today have the sense that their country has not been made the most of as it should."<sup>118</sup> His implication was that French assistance would be necessary both to better exploit the country's natural resources and to further enhance France's already glowing prestige. These twinned aims amounted to an imperial justification, for the goal, his report concluded, was to "establish multiple and tangible bonds between the moral interests and material interests that France possesses in the Levant." His telling final statement revealed that this region of the world was less a distinct territory, even a potential colonial possession, than a reflection—or a figment—of France's own self-image: "All of these interests in the Orient together form the patrimony of a nation, which, all while searching to increase its power and its wealth, aspires further to spread its ideas, its spirit, and its benevolent influence, and which has never resigned

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<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, ix.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, x.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 226.

itself to work for anyone but itself.”<sup>119</sup> The Levant, literally and metaphorically, was to be for French consumption.

In an official report, undertaken early in the Great War for the *Groupe sénatorial pour la défense des intérêts français à l'étranger*, diplomat and future prime minister Etienne Flandin presented his senatorial colleague with a similarly imperial perspective on the eventual status of Syria.<sup>120</sup> He referred to France's “historic mission” in what he called—attesting to the afterlife of Etienne Lamy's formulation—the “France of the Levant.” His perspective likewise reached back decades, indeed centuries, to connect what he presented as an enduring French role as the only natural consequence of the current war. Referring to a remark allegedly by Lamartine, he calls Syria “an admirable French colony that is waiting for France,” an assessment that, as Chapter four will investigate, gained additional moral force—and imperial implications—amidst the Lebanese famine and French blockade that began in 1915. Geographically as well as historically, Flandin proclaimed, “France must be the master of the *vilayets* or *metessarifats* [sic] of Beirut and of Lebanon.” The only option for a postwar accord, he stressed, was to “continue our work of protection” and to expand France's role as “natural protector of the Christians of the Orient.”<sup>121</sup> Protection, like imperial ambition, was thus likewise geographical and historical, justified by a logic and a mythology that linked religion, prestige, and political prerogative.

#### *Between the First World War and Colonial Mandate*

Debates on the “Lebanon question” and the “Syria question” during the decade of the Great War have mostly been analyzed for their correspondence to various projects of European

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 308.

<sup>120</sup> Etienne Flandin, *Rapport sur la Syrie et la Palestine* (Paris: Société anonyme de publications périodiques, 1915).

<sup>121</sup> Etienne Flandin, *Rapport sur la Syrie et la Palestine* (Paris: Société anonyme de publications périodiques, 1915), 3-5, 14-15.

imperialism and Middle Eastern nationalism.<sup>122</sup> As such, they have been interpreted through the framework of the larger “Eastern Question,” entailing considerations of territorial boundaries, sovereignty, and political systems. Underlying these questions and considerations, though, were assumptions and understandings of history, of empire and nationhood, and—for Lebanon especially—of how variables of influence and affection shaped an ambiguous imperial formation. Given the protective French stance toward Lebanon, the dynamics of this process raised the question of what protection *meant* and what *manner* of protection was most appropriate for this small nation. My intention here is not to recapitulate disputes between, for example, supporters of a Greater Lebanon or a Greater Syria, or between proponents and skeptics of alliance with France.<sup>123</sup> Rather, I aim to elucidate how the notion of protection was itself imagined as embedded within the political and ideological questions of a new colonial arrangement. The “Lebanon question” was not only one of nation and empires.<sup>124</sup> It also implied questions of how an entity within the imperial imagination would relate to strains of French influence, affection, and protection, questions rooted in the well-worn discursive tracks of how to conceptualize France and Lebanon within the Levant.

Discourses of Franco-Lebanese connection honed in on the moment of 1860 to provide both the affective vocabulary and geopolitical justification for continual French involvement in

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<sup>122</sup> On the former, see Andrew and Kanya-Forstner, *The Climax of French Imperial Expansion*; Philip Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate: The Politics of Arab Nationalism, 1920-1945* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987). On the latter, see Kaufman, *Reviving Phoenicia*; Hakim, *The Lebanese National Idea*; Gérard Khoury, *La France et l’Orient arabe: Naissance du Liban moderne, 1914-1920* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2009); James Gelvin, *Divided Loyalties: Nationalism and Mass Politics at the Close of Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

<sup>123</sup> These writers and organizations included Georges Samné and Chekri Ganem’s *Comité central syrien*, the latter’s *Comité libanais de Paris*; Nadra Moutran; Abdallah Sfer Pacha; and Ferdinand Tyan.

<sup>124</sup> Among works to address this question explicitly were Ferdinand Tyan, *Sous les cèdres du Liban: la nationalité maronite* (La Chappelle-Montligeon, 1905); Nujaym, *La question du Liban*; Ibrahim Tabet, *La solution pratique de la question d’Orient* (Beirut: Imprimerie Catholique, 1909); Comité Libanais de Paris, *Mémoire sur la question du Liban* (Paris, 1912); K.T. Khairallah, *La question du Liban* (Paris: Plon-Nourrit, 1915); Nadra Moutran, *La Syrie de demain* (Paris: Plon-Nourrit, 1916); and Auguste Adib, *Le Liban après la guerre* (Cairo: Paul Barbey, 1919). See also Buheiry, “Bulus Nujaym and the Grand Liban Ideal;” Zamir, *The Formation of Modern Lebanon* (London: Croom Helm, 1985); Khoury, *La France et l’Orient arabe*.



Lebanon. The agreement that granted Mount Lebanon autonomous governance under informal French guarantee of security, I have argued, melded with pre-existing conceptions of the French Catholic protectorate and commercial protections in the Levant. These reference points continued to obtain in the period straddling the First World War, when writers and journalists cited this accord as a foundational point for a relationship that was nonetheless seen as timeless and enduring. A 1914 article by J. Aulneau in the *Revue politique et parlementaire* illustrates this trend not only by hearkening back to France's historic bond with the Levant, but also by situating his assessment of "the Syrian question" squarely in the present.<sup>125</sup> He distinguished Lebanon from Syria, alluding to the "important privileges" of Lebanese Maronites that dated to 1860, while characterizing this besieged population as currently "encircled in their mountains" and trapped within the devious machinations of Ottoman sovereignty.<sup>126</sup> Lebanon, unlike Syria, had undertaken an "apprenticeship in liberty for a half-century," while the whole region, he professed, was attached to France through "ten centuries of history," during which "France's moral influence had grown over the course of the centuries." It was during the Crusades that France had "embedded deeply into this land of Asia the memory of France...as a hope, as a historic right."<sup>127</sup> The very idea of France, in this imperial conceptualization, signified a promise of—and implied gratitude for—affinity and liberation.

The French "protectorate of Catholics" under the Capitulations, according to Aulneau, followed from this intervention, which he claimed came to encompass "missionaries, religious establishments and the Christians of the Empire who called for us." He tellingly linked French religious involvement to economic and political concerns, describing a network of protection "bound by an infinitude of connections to our commerce and our diplomacy in the Ottoman

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<sup>125</sup> J. Aulneau, "La question syrienne," *Revue politique et parlementaire* (1914).

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 90-93.

Empire.” Yet Aulneau acknowledged that this “protectorate of Catholics,” as comprehensive and deeply engrained as it seemed, had been “established more from usage than from texts.”<sup>128</sup> His statement is telling, as it points to the ambiguity, even obfuscation, through which French commentators often invoked the Catholic protectorate and capitulatory agreements interchangeably, casually assumed more than causally assessed. The genesis of this multi-stranded schema of protection was grounded more in custom than in law or any formal regime, providing a foundation for myth rather than a precedent for legal authority.

This narrative was further shaded by its affective aspects, which took the form of Syrian and Lebanese affinity with and admiration for France. These dynamics strengthened Aulneau’s conviction that “Syria is French by heart,” as well as his confidence to assert that “it must remain so.” France’s goals in the Levant, as Aulneau laid them out, were to “consolidate its influence in Syria” and also to “defend and protect native friends of France” in the region.<sup>129</sup> The two aims appeared mutually reinforcing; the latter, informed by the rubric of French protection, both bolstered and drew legitimacy from the former, as material interests joined with moral prestige to solidify France’s claims to Lebanon, Syria, and the Levant. The apparent absorption of Lebanon within Syria, again, should be read in this case not as forgetting or forgoing a commitment to Lebanese particularity, but—given the belief in Lebanon’s more advanced status—rather as a sort of metonymic substitution, viewing greater Syria through the lens of Mount Lebanon’s fabled nineteenth-century protection and even longer-lasting affection. The populations of both territories were largely elided, though, presumed to be grateful for both historical and contemporary French intervention.

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 99.

The themes of French imperial beneficence and Lebanese gratitude that coalesced after the 1860 expedition and were cultivated over the ensuing decades again deeply informed treatments of Lebanon's connection to France after the Great War. Even without explicitly linking the past to the present, a work such as Camille de Rochemonteix's 1921 history *Le Liban et l'expédition française en Syrie (1860-1861)* highlighted contemporaneous expectations in light of France's mid-century presence. The French expedition, Rochemonteix proposed, "left in the heart of Lebanese populations the memory of [French soldiers'] unforgettable charity and their complete devotion."<sup>130</sup> The implication is that this "unforgettable" generosity continued to resonate over a half-century later. Rochemonteix acknowledges in his history that the peacemaking endeavor had not actually entailed an active defense of vulnerable inhabitants, and that it instead functioned as a "charity campaign more than a military expedition," but he insisted that it nonetheless succeeded in "protecting the Lebanese for months." This role endeared the "Christians of Syria, and especially the Maronites," to France up to the present day, since they "have not forgotten the many benefits received from France in this expedition of 1860." From at least this moment, then, France became the undisputed "protector of Syria, its unbiased tutor."<sup>131</sup> Its objectivity assured, its responsibility appeared only natural, extending back in time from 1860 and forward to the postwar colonial moment. Protection, like gratitude, was an enduring phenomenon, one that both structured and justified continued intervention.

Even works that were not histories of 1860 recalled France's role in Lebanon as one of influence and protection, often supplanting Mount Lebanon's history—and its meaning in the French imperial imagination—for that of Greater Syria. A 1917 booklet by the colonial commentators Carl and Paul Roederer, *La Syrie et la France*, even conflated the addressee of

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<sup>130</sup> Camille de Rochemonteix, *Le Liban et l'expédition française en Syrie (1860-1861)* (Paris, 1921), 209.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 213-214, 66.

Saint-Louis's apocryphal letter to the Lebanese Maronite emir, instead claiming that he promised the "Syrian patriarch" that France would "give to you and your people protection like for the French themselves."<sup>132</sup> Its preface, by colonial administrator François Pierre-Alype, declared that the book "evokes the glowing image of this *France du Levant*...to which deep historic bonds attach us, [and] that we love with a devoted heart." The title of its very first chapter, moreover, asserts that French influence in Syria was "the fruit of a long historic tradition."<sup>133</sup> At the very outset, the reader is positioned within a field of history and affection, primed to view political questions through the lens of ahistorical sentimental connection and age-old custom.

Divided into sections on "the past" and "the future," the Roederers' book's assessment of French cultural, economic, and political involvement in Syria and Lebanon bridged centuries of encounters as well as notions of influence and interests; for its two authors, as for many writers, the history of France in the Levant led inexorably to a France *of* the Levant. "French influence," they wrote amidst a context of wartime uncertainty, was so deeply founded that it "could not be erased in a moment." On the contrary, invoking "our protectorate" during the war established the rationale for a formalized imperial presence once hostilities ended.<sup>134</sup> The final section of the Roederers' text, after listing French commercial and charitable enterprises across Syria and underscoring the debility of the Turkish government, outlined a future statute for the region. The attempt to justify "French tutelage" on the basis of historic friendship and ancient traditions, alongside more recent economic activities and ideological investment, envisioned more than it outlined a postwar French Levant.

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<sup>132</sup> Carl and Paul Roederer, *La Syrie et la France* (Paris, 1917), 118. See discussion of Murad, *Notice historique* above.

<sup>133</sup> Pierre-Alype, Préface, Carl and Paul Roederer, *La Syrie et la France*, xxii; Roederer, 3.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 29-30.

Another text published toward the war's close, René Ristelhueber's *Les traditions françaises au Liban*, likewise grounded France's role in Lebanon in an enduring history of connections, specifically with Maronite Christians, dating back to the Crusades.<sup>135</sup> Ristelhueber, a high-ranking consular official in Beirut before the war, presents the history of France and Lebanon as intertwined for centuries and as the invariable product of shared "tradition." In an earlier publication, he had extolled "the attachment of Maronites to our country" as "generally well-known in France," though without a full understanding of "how enduring it is, nor how far back its origins go." His project, then, was to demonstrate, teleologically, the historic depth of this "sort of 'France' in Syria" and the roots of its Francophilic affection.<sup>136</sup> Similarly to the Roederers' work, his divides Franco-Lebanese history into stages of this traditional bond: precursors of the tradition, founders of the tradition, consecration of the tradition, and continuers of the tradition.<sup>137</sup> A straight line linked disparate moments and "traditions," becoming the defining attribute of Lebanon's place in the French imperial mind.

Deeming Lebanon an exceptionally "brilliant foyer of Mediterranean civilization," Ristelhueber attributes this status to "the workers of French influence...our civilization and our spirit [*génie*], which have penetrated this Syrian land."<sup>138</sup> Lebanon, though, would function as the base for this "pacific penetration."<sup>139</sup> It was here, he writes, "where our influence began with its most solid foothold" and which "became [France's] citadel, from which it shined all over Syria." The French historic protectorate, Ristelhueber claimed, expanded from Maronites to other Latin rites, to Jews and even—France being a "great Islamic power"—to influence over

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<sup>135</sup> René Ristelhueber, *Les traditions françaises au Liban* (Paris: Alcan, 1918). A later text, André Bruneau's thesis *Traditions et politique de la France au Levant* (Paris: F. Alcan, 1932), approached these themes from the historical perspective of legal agreements and diplomatic relations.

<sup>136</sup> Ristelhueber, "Les Maronites," *Revue des deux mondes*, 25 (1 January 1915), 188.

<sup>137</sup> Ristelhueber, *Les traditions françaises au Liban*.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 276, 280.

<sup>139</sup> Here Ristelhueber rehabilitates a term used to obscure the violence of France's nineteenth-century conquest of Algeria, pointing to the colonial overtones of a postwar agenda of expanding influence.

Muslims. In addition to conflating Lebanon—which he considers more proximate to the French level of civilization—and the Syrian lands, Ristelhueber conceptualizes the role of “protective France” and “civilizing France” as one of both “moral and material work.”<sup>140</sup> What is significant, again, is not the particular schools and hospitals, railroads and factories, missionary and political initiatives, that he lists as evidence of French presence, but rather the connection that he makes between tangible cultural and economic activities and an intangible “spirit” of influence and protection. France’s “moral patrimony” and “material patrimony” were yoked to a notion of its “traditional prestige.” This was in turn rooted in a historical narrative that seamlessly proceeded from the Crusades and Catholic missionaries through royal proclamations—apocryphal and otherwise—and consular affiliations and up to contemporary “French rights in Lebanon” after the war.<sup>141</sup> What these implied was that the “overseas France” in Lebanon could—and indeed should—be fully realized, its influence and attachments extending across the Levant.

Unlike the ostensible peacekeeping expedition of 1860, the French intervention that followed the First World War represented a colonial occupation. This section has sought to illustrate how expressions of French influence in the Levant—and Lebanon more specifically—during the era of the Great War and the early colonial mandate period incorporated languages of affection and ideologies of protection that had been formulated over earlier decades. Once French control in Lebanon and Syria was established in the first few years after the war, a new genre of writings assessed the structures and functioning of the new mandate regime that the League of Nations accorded to France.<sup>142</sup> By 1923, for instance, with the mandate well

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 276-277.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 281.

<sup>142</sup> These included works such as Abdallah Sfer Pasha, *Le Mandat français et les traditions françaises en Syrie et au Liban* (Paris: Plon-Nourrit, 1922); Charles Burckhard, *Le mandat français en Syrie et au Liban: la politique et l'œuvre de la France au Levant* (Nîmes: Courroy, 1925); René de Feriet, *L'application d'un mandat: la France puissance mandataire en Syrie et au Liban* (Paris: Jouve et Cie, 1926); Robert de Beauplan, *Où va la Syrie? Le mandat sous les cèdres* (Paris: Talandier, 1929); H. Beranger, “Le Mandat français en Syrie et au Liban,”

entrenched, Roger de Gontaut-Biron could state in the title of his pamphlet not simply whether, but *how* France had become established in Syria.<sup>143</sup> In a work even more directly intended to explain France's colonial presence in Syria and Lebanon, Gontaut-Biron affirmed that, toward the end of the war, the "intimate ties that have attached [France] to Lebanon for centuries are becoming even tighter." There, he wrote, "lives a population French in their heart, French by spirit," almost as compatriots.<sup>144</sup> Even in his ostensibly political explanation, in a study of the establishment of administrative colonial bodies, the affective quality of Frenchness retained its explanatory force for France's presence in the Levant.

### *Between Affective Ideologies and Imperial Encounters*

The France of the Levant that Etienne Lamy imagined, that other writers and officials invoked, and that colonial administrators sought to enact in the mandate states of Lebanon and Syria was, I have argued, always already imperially figmentary, a fantasy that acquired its compelling allure through its very ambiguity and supposed timelessness. By the period of the mandates, the notion of *la France du Levant* fit only imperfectly onto the colonial entities that had taken shape through decisions in Paris and Geneva.<sup>145</sup> My point, however, is that these entities existed in the imperial consciousness as much as—if not more than—on the actual terrain of the Middle East or in statutes of the League of Nations. As such, the dream of a French Levant did not necessarily dissipate simply because the boundaries of Lebanon and Syria did not fully encompass the extent of imagined French influence, protection, and affection. Whether

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*Correspondance d'Orient* (1930): 170-179; Camille Fidel, "Les Etats du Levant sous Mandat Français," *Société d'Etudes et d'Informations*, (October 1932): 1-14; as well as memoirs by mandate officials such as Henri Gouraud, *La France en Syrie* (Corbeil: Crété, 1922); and Robert de Caix, *La France dans le Levant: la Syrie* (Paris: Plon, 1931).

<sup>143</sup> Roger de Gontaut-Biron, *Comment la France s'est installée en Syrie, 1918-1919* (Paris: Plon-Nourrit, 1922).

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>145</sup> On the political and diplomatic negotiations over the mandates, see Pederson, *The Guardians*; as well as Mark Mazower, *No Enchanted Palace: The End of Empire and the Ideological Origins of the United Nations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013).

incarnated in its oft-cited institutional forms—French-engineered schools, orphanages, factories, infrastructural and other projects—or more abstract professions of love and loyalty, gratitude and security, authority and prestige, this sphere of informal empire translated neither automatically nor coherently into a formal colonial possession. *La France du Levant* did not “decline,” because it never truly existed.<sup>146</sup> If it was not realized as such, though, this did not detract from its relevance as a concept in the French imperial mindset, an aspirational quality rather than a domain of colonial cartography.

As late as 1939, historian François Charles-Roux claimed that the “hatching of a ‘France of the Levant’” represented “a phenomenon of French colonial expansion.”<sup>147</sup> This *France du Levant*, he insisted, signified “a land reserved for legitimate French aims,” which must “not be allowed to pass into other hands.”<sup>148</sup> These aims were not only geopolitical, but also ideological. His history folded the legacy of France’s interactions and sentimental attachment with Syria, “and especially Lebanon,” into its status as a so-called mandatory power in the postwar colonial regime, which he characterized as “the continuation of its traditional role in the Orient.”<sup>149</sup> The end of the Great War and the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, Charles-Roux wrote, “provided France the opportunity to affirm its loyalty to the traditions, sympathies, and interests that it possessed” in the Levant and the Syrian lands.<sup>150</sup> Like his ideological predecessors, he conflated France’s “Catholic protectorate” with its “special role in the Orient” as “protector,” contending that the former expanded from the capitulatory basis for protecting French and foreign Catholic

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<sup>146</sup> Here I differ with the conclusion of Vincent Cloarec’s otherwise compelling article, in which he suggests that the imperial idea of a French Levant foundered because of its limited appeal in French public opinion as well as because of its geographical ambiguity and internal resistance. I do not dispute any of these points, but contend that the concept retained its relevance as a means of approaching and *apprehending*, if not colonizing, the Near East. Cloarec, “La France du Levant,” 29-31.

<sup>147</sup> François Charles-Roux, *France et les chrétiens d’Orient* (Paris: Flammarion, 1939), 16.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, 305.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 42, 309.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, 277-278.



missionaries to “French protection over Christians in general,” albeit admittedly without a textual foundation.<sup>151</sup> Custom and assertion created the vision of “enlarged and expanded” protection that Charles-Roux traced back in history—through a mythology of Crusade-era alliances—and across Near Eastern Christendom.

Yet while Oriental Christians appeared as the protagonists of this narrative, and Christianity as the principal barometer of affinity, the landscape of the Levant in imperial ideology was even more ambitious. By the First World War, while “Christian Syria truly showed a French heart,” according to Charles-Roux, French colonial aims extended beyond this religious core.<sup>152</sup> Its wartime objectives were premised on conceptual or categorical advances, rather than purely sectarian or even geopolitical achievements. The Levant was a realm of French interests and influence, enduring historically and projected forward in time; it was “this past and this future that France [would] defend on the battlefields of the Orient.”<sup>153</sup> Lebanon, considered “a little French citadel” in the Levant since time immemorial, would serve as a vital front for this campaign. This was the same Lebanon where after the 1860 expedition the French commander had allegedly proclaimed that the population had “learned to love and respect” his soldiers as Frenchmen, grateful for their “material protection” and for the “security among the Maronites” they had guaranteed.<sup>154</sup> The memory of this intervention, nearly eighty years later and on the cusp of another World War, still deeply informed how a prominent historian like Charles-Roux conceptualized France’s power and prestige in Lebanon and beyond. If Syria was “the center from which France’s influence could spread over the rest of the Orient,” this both underscored and minimized the very centrality of Christianity to a model of imperial protection. For even as

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<sup>151</sup> Ibid., 232, 247.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 280. On French colonial aims, see for example Philip Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate*; Andrew and Kanya-Forstner, *The Climax of French Imperial Expansion*.

<sup>153</sup> Charles-Roux, *France et les chrétiens d’Orient*, 285.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 55, 207-208, 198.

France was “the protector of Christians of the Orient,” Charles-Roux professed, it was also a “great Muslim power.”<sup>155</sup> It could no sooner jettison the former tradition than abandon its pretensions to a glorified Mediterranean empire from North Africa to the Near East.

When Lamy presented the history of French relations with the Levant as a civilizational encounter, however, he juxtaposed the advanced (and imperial) Christian West with the backward (and would-be colonized) Islamic East. The schema was essential to the imagined position of Lebanon within a French Levant. Its historic confrontation with Muslims—culminating in the legacy of the latter’s 1860 massacres of Maronite Christians, an interpretation that conveniently ignored the sectarian differences of their Druze assailants—seemed premised on its encirclement in the lands of Islam. Yet if Maronite Lebanon incarnated France in the Levant, then French imperial claims to a greater Syria would seem impossible if not incoherent. Through a sleight of discursive substitution, writers and commentators transferred the values of protecting beleaguered Maronite Lebanon to the conception of influence across the Levant. Crucially, this latter entity remained figmentary, allowing the geographical confines of Syria to expand beyond Lebanon without the necessity of proving Syrian attachment. The logic of universal affection—at once isolated to Maronites and somehow indiscriminate even among Muslims—followed from ambiguous assertions of protection, whereby limited religious and commercial accords encompassed entire populations and inspired sentiments of gratitude and admiration. Lamy’s formulation—and its inherent agenda—posed a fundamental tension: for France to exist in and of the Levant, relations between Occident and Orient would have to be defined by both deeply ingrained hostility and the potential for loyalty. In the imperial

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<sup>155</sup> Ibid., 306, 309. See also the proclamation of the prestigious colonial journal *Questions diplomatiques et coloniales*, 15 May 1901, 579, cited in Marwan Buheiry, “Colonial Scholarship and Muslim Revivalism in 1900,” *Arab Studies Quarterly* 4 (1982): 1-16.

imagination, Lebanon—between France and the Levant, Islam and Christianity, history and fantasy—seemed to provide the solution to this conundrum.

Lamy's civilizational encounter was rendered in the ahistorical singular. In textual treatments of France's role and responsibilities in the Levant, the not-quite-colonial encounter between France as protector and the populations under its presumed aegis likewise took the shape of a definitional and all-encompassing framework of interaction.<sup>156</sup> Its supposed nodes of influence formed a multi-sited network, however. Its tropes of affection and animosity provided a multivalent language for individuals at each of these sites to deploy and reformulate to particular ends, and its ideology of protection created a rubric in which to situate claims and complaints, as well as conceptions of a civilizing mission, its contortions and its shortcomings. Such contexts of encounter are the subjects of the following chapters.

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<sup>156</sup> It is precisely this conception of the unitary "colonial encounter" that I aspire to complicate by elucidating its inherently plural and multifaceted dynamics. For a critique of this concept in African colonial historiography, see the introduction to Nancy Rose Hunt, *A Colonial Lexicon: Of Birth Ritual, Medicalization, and Mobility in the Congo* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), esp. 24-30, 160.

**CHAPTER TWO**  
**Encounters in Qraiyeħ:**  
**Industrial Interests and Imperial Influence at a French Silk Factory in Mount Lebanon**

Visitors to the silk factory of *Veuve Guerin et Fils* (VGF) in the mountainous Lebanese village of Qraiyeħ—known as *Le Krey* in French—should not expect, according to the company’s first director, to discover a “*pays de cocagne*,” a land of plenty.<sup>1</sup> Henri Ladreyt arrived in Qraiyeħ in 1900, shortly after the prominent Lyon firm of VGF had purchased the factory site from a rival.<sup>2</sup> He quickly tired, he professed, of expectations of Oriental splendor, driven by reports from propagandists that “you will have this, you will have that,” throughout the Near Eastern region known as *la Syrie*. Rather, Ladreyt described Qraiyeħ in unsparing terms: “complete solitude, very rare distraction, [and] no company, surrounded by boulders.”<sup>3</sup> “For the love of God,” he complained to VGF head Louis Guerin, the impression that life was easy was leading new arrivals to take out their disappointment on him, accusing Ladreyt of acting as a “tyrant” amidst such trying conditions. In this seemingly peripheral village, as casual ideals of Orientalist fantasy transformed to accusations of petty tyranny, a French industrial project struggled both to maintain a profit and to uphold a mantle of prestige in the heart of what the propagandists and politicians of the previous chapter imagined as a *France du Levant*.

For three decades at the beginning of the twentieth century, VGF operated in Qraiyeħ one of the largest and most technologically advanced silk factories in the region. Its enterprise persisted through an overall downturn in the silk industry, everyday tensions with local merchants and employees, and the privations of war and its aftermath, before finally closing in

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<sup>1</sup> Archives départementales du Rhône (hereafter ADR), Charles Ladreyt to Louis Guerin, 8 April 1902.

<sup>2</sup> This was the firm Palluat et Testenoire, which as Palluat et Cie had established two silk-spinning mills in Qraiyeħ in 1862. Dominique Chevallier, *La société du Mont Liban à l’époque de la révolution industrielle en Europe* (Paris: Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1971), 217; *ibid.*, “Lyon et la Syrie en 1919. Les bases d’une intervention,” *Revue historique* 224, no. 2 (1960): 275-320, esp. 293-294. On the history of *Veuve Guerin et Fils*, see Serge Chassagne, *Veuve Guerin et fils : banque et soie : une affaire de Famille : Saint-Chamond – Lyon (1716-1932)* (Lyon: Éditions BGA Permezel, 2012).

<sup>3</sup> ADR 145J 169, Charles Ladreyt to Louis Guerin, 8 April 1902.

1931 amidst the global depression. How this process unfolded on the terrain of Qraiyeḥ, this chapter suggests, offers a revealing vantage point through which to assess not only the economic, but also the ideological and affective ties between France and Lebanon in the years leading up to the First World War and at the outset of the post-war French colonial mandate. For Qraiyeḥ was not only an industrial outpost, invested in maintaining Lyonnais silk interests in the Lebanese mountain. The village factory complex also included one of the charitable initiatives heralded as evidence of France's moral influence in the region. An adjoining orphanage—staffed by first Lebanese Maronite and then French Catholic women religious—housed, educated, and, not insignificantly, employed dozens of local young girls, who provided much of the manual labor for VGF's silk-spinning machines. By examining interactions between nuns and industrialists, European employers and Lebanese child laborers, and officials in Paris, Lyon, and Mount Lebanon, this chapter evaluates how exploitative practices co-existed with claims of benevolent influence. Its purpose is to uncover how the micro-dynamics of power in Qraiyeḥ illustrate the countervailing imperatives of production and ideals of protection that marked an ambiguously imperial relationship between France and Lebanon.

The silk factory and orphanage complex of *Veuve Guerin et Fils*, this chapter contends, cannot be viewed as simply an extension of French commercial interests and cultural influence in the Lebanese mountain, an imperial fortress upon the expansively imagined realm of *la France du Levant*. Rather than accept contemporary professions that the proliferation of French businesses and charitable endeavors in the Near East marked a triumph of regional hegemony, I approach a single site of industrial and religious intervention to complicate this narrative. The VGF complex did not function merely as a conduit for French economic or ideological objectives, nor as the enactment of an imperial vision of national grandeur. Rather, I suggest,

sites of interaction like Qraiyeḥ were precisely where concepts of material interests, imperial influence, and moral prestige acquired meaning. Assertions of France's historic prerogatives in Lebanon from writers and Orientalists, imperialists and officials, and indeed entrepreneurs and industrialists were at once grounded in and abstracted from sites of actual contact between French and Lebanese men and women. With its study of one such arena of encounters, this chapter reveals the crosscutting impulses underlying processes of imperial formation between France and Lebanon. The tensions that arose at the VGF complex in Qraiyeḥ, I argue, exposed the ideological instability of the very initiatives presumed to further national interests, extend spheres of influence, and bolster a mythology of affective alliance.

Historiographically, French economic and educational initiatives have been more often counted than critically analyzed. The works of Dominique Chevallier, Jacques Thobie, and their successors have tabulated the preponderance of French exports and investments, infrastructural projects and commercial establishments, secular schools and denominational missions across the Levant.<sup>4</sup> Without refuting the significance of this institutional density in expanding informal imperium, my purpose is to interrogate how discourses of “interests” and “influence” took shape within a given context, as formative tenets of imperial ideology and eventual bulwark for colonial claims. Their role in establishing a field of French imperial hegemony, in other words, is to be critically deconstructed within individual locales, rather than presumed or rehabilitated in the aggregate. Assessments of French undertakings in non-colonial territories must not adopt the

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<sup>4</sup> Chevallier, *La société du Mont Liban*; *ibid.*, “Lyon et la Syrie;” Jacques Thobie, *Intérêts français dans l’Empire ottoman 1895-1914*, (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1977); *ibid.*, *Les intérêts culturels français dans l’Empire ottoman finissant : l’enseignement laïque et en partenariat* (Paris: Peeters, 2008); John Spagnolo, “French Influence in Syria Prior to World War I: The Functional Weakness of Imperialism,” *Middle East Journal* 23, no. 1 (Winter, 1969): 45-62; *ibid.*, “The Definition of a Style of Imperialism: The Internal Politics of the French Educational Investment in Ottoman Beirut,” *French Historical Studies* 8, no. 4 (Autumn, 1974): 563-584; Roger Owen, “The Study of Middle Eastern Industrial History: Notes on the Interrelationship between Factories and Small-Scale Manufacturing with Special References to Lebanese Silk and Egyptian Sugar, 1900-1930,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 16 no. 4 (Nov., 1984): 475-487; Michel Seurat, “Le rôle de Lyon dans l’installation du mandat français en Syrie: intérêts économiques et culturels, luttes d’opinion (1915-1925),” *Bulletin d’études orientales* 31 (1979): 131-164.

perspective of national policymakers and activists, for whom the efforts of any edifice flying the *tricolore* naturally redounded to a politics of imperial prestige. A close evaluation of how principles of capitalist productivity functioned alongside premises of benevolent influence, at a single site of ambiguously intertwined economic interests and affective modes of influence, brings to light the conflicting attitudes and contested practices central to the French imperial imaginary.

VGF's dual silk-spinning and orphan-rearing operations in Qraiyeḥ present an ideal subject for a microhistorical study of early twentieth-century French imperial formation in Lebanon. By simultaneously pursuing economic and religious objectives, the firm cultivated traditions of both French commercial and cultural involvement in Mount Lebanon. Its managers circulated among the business, political, and colonialist elites of Lyon, a city with long-standing ties to the Levant, and the factory and orphanage in Qraiyeḥ were both frequently cited in industry publications and reports of French influence in the region. In assessing the prevailing concerns and practical obstacles of VGF's outpost in Qraiyeḥ, this chapter is intended not to depict a microcosm of French industrial, imperial, or ideological involvement in Lebanon, nor an exemplary case of capitalist or missionary initiative. It aims instead to illustrate how a range of social and cultural tensions on the ground—as recorded in the correspondence of VGF personnel and the religious sisters who supervised the orphanage, letters from orphans' relatives, and communication with French government and regional Ottoman officials—call into question contemporaneous as well as historiographical accounts of convergent “moral and material interests” that shaped Franco-Lebanese relations. These accounts, I suggest, have had the effect of naturalizing a progression from France's informal protectorate in Lebanon—undergirded by economic and charitable initiatives—to its postwar colonial mandate. Close analysis of the

conflicts and contradictions that emerged between intertwined logics of labor exploitation and civilizational uplift in Qrayeh not only uncovers discrepancies in this narrative. An approach on this scale also provides a unique vantage point through which to assess how imperial discourses functioned at an individual site of contact, outside the bounds of formal empire yet fundamentally embedded in the logics and locutions of imperial power.

*Silk and Schools between Lyon and Lebanon*

In a slim tract published less than a year into the First World War, two former presidents of the Lyon Chamber of Commerce—already foreseeing the enemy Ottoman Empire as a potential source of colonial spoils—confidently proclaimed the historic “rights of France in the Levant.”<sup>5</sup> France’s claims in the region, the prominent Lyon industrialists and politicians Auguste Isaac and Ennemond Morel asserted, were premised on a “triple base of religion, politics, and commerce.” Invoking the Crusades as well as the 1860 French intervention in Lebanon—which they described heroically as a mission “to protect Maronite Christians against Druze Muslims”—Isaac and Morel recited a narrative of France’s traditional presence in the Levant that dated back centuries. “When one crosses Lebanon,” they claimed, “one encounters at every step the evidence of French influence,” from schools and hospitals to factories and railways. The two scions of Lyon’s silk industry underscored how economic ties had strengthened religious and political connections between France and the Levant, “where business is done with [French] capital, and particularly with Lyonnais capital.”<sup>6</sup> The commercial empire of France’s second-largest city, their pamphlet made clear, had a vested interest in the colonial outcome of war in the Near East.

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<sup>5</sup> Auguste Isaac and Ennemond Morel, *Les droits de France dans le Levant, à l’issue de la guerre 1914-1915* (Lyon: A. Rey, 1915).

<sup>6</sup> Isaac and Morel, 4, 10-11.



Lyon had played a significant role in French colonial aspirations throughout the nineteenth century, including in Lebanon and the wider Levant.<sup>7</sup> Driven by the imperatives of the city's world-leading silk industry for raw material—especially after a mid-century blight wiped out mulberry cultivation within France—Lyon's often overlapping political and business elites pushed for commercial and imperial expansion into North Africa, the Near East, and especially East and Southeast Asia.<sup>8</sup> While the latter assumed an increasing proportion of Lyon silk companies' overseas investment and attention, and formal French colonial governance in Algeria offered administrative support for agricultural and industrial initiatives, the territories of the eastern Mediterranean nonetheless exerted considerable appeal for Lyonnais silk entrepreneurs. Not only did the terrain of greater Syria, and most notably Mount Lebanon, where over 50% of cultivable land was covered with mulberry trees in 1914, offer fertile ground for sericulture and silk production.<sup>9</sup> Lyon businesses also enjoyed a near monopoly in the region, which by the turn of the century sent 90% of its silk to Lyon to be woven and dyed.<sup>10</sup> This involvement was so well entrenched that a 1913 report by Gaston Ducouso, an industry expert and attaché with the French General Consulate in Beirut, observed that Lebanese sericulture had effectively been “naturalized as French.”<sup>11</sup> In addition to material considerations, moreover, the notion of a

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<sup>7</sup> John F. Laffey, “Roots of French Imperialism in the Nineteenth Century: The Case of Lyon,” *French Historical Studies* 6, no. 1 (Spring, 1969): 78-92; Jean-François Klein, “La création de l’Ecole coloniale de Lyon. Au cœur des polémiques du Parti colonial,” *Outre-mers* 94, no. 2 (2006): 147-170.

<sup>8</sup> On the latter, see the work of Jean-François Klein, *Un lyonnais en Extrême-Orient: Ulysse Pila “vice-roi de l’Indochine” (1837-1909)* (Lyon: Éditions lyonnaises d’art et d’histoire, 1995); and *ibid.*, “Réseaux d’influences et stratégie coloniale. Le cas des marchands de soie lyonnais en mer de Chine (1843-1906),” *Outre-mers* 92, no. 346 (2005): 221-256.

<sup>9</sup> Boutros Labaki, “La soie dans l’économie du Mont Liban et de son environnement arabe (1840-1914),” *Peuples méditerranéens* 7 (1979): 125-139.

<sup>10</sup> Geoffrey Schad, “Colonialists, Industrialists, and Politicians: The Political Economy of Industrialization in Syria, 1920-1954” (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2001), 82-83; Labaki, “La soie,” 84; Leila Fawaz, *Merchants and Migrants in Nineteenth-Century Beirut* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 63; Chevallier, *Lyon et la Syrie*, 286.

<sup>11</sup> Gaston Ducouso, *L’industrie de la soie en Syrie et au Liban* (Beyrouth: Imprimerie Catholique, 1913), cited in Labaki, “La soie,” 125.

historic and spiritual connection between France and Lebanon created an impetus for pursuing and preserving the Lyon silk industry's interests in this purported sphere of French influence.

Even as they continued to dominate the silk industry in the eastern Mediterranean over the late nineteenth century, French-owned silk firms in Mount Lebanon were increasingly consolidated: from 10 in 1865, producing two-fifths of Syria and Lebanon's silk, to only three within a decade of VGF's purchase of the site at Qrayieh in 1901.<sup>12</sup> According to Jacques Thobie's calculations, though, these three still represented an even larger proportion, nearly seventy percent, of the region's total capacity.<sup>13</sup> The corresponding increase in Lebanese factories, moreover, did not alter the source of investment; in economic historian Roger Owen's estimation, locally operated initiatives "remained firmly under the control of French capital" before the First World War, and five major French firms purchased two-thirds of Lebanon's silk exports.<sup>14</sup> If Lebanese silk represented only a small fraction of Lyon's total production, then, French investment and involvement in Lebanon's dominant resource disproportionately shaped the regional economy and society. French factories in Lebanon, and VGF's in particular, also utilized more advanced technology and produced what contemporaries deemed a consistently higher-quality silk.<sup>15</sup> Through both the quantity and quality of silk, VGF figured centrally within commercial circuits between Lyon and Lebanon in the decades before the Great War.

The orphanage that VGF established at Qrayieh was also part of larger wave of French religious, charitable, and educational projects that had taken root in Lebanon, Syria, and the Levant over the course of the nineteenth century. Drawing on the legal and cultural legacy of

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<sup>12</sup> Thobie, *Intérêts et impérialisme français*, 493. Seurat, 131.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, citing Ducouso. This figure relies on the number of basins used in each factory to steam and sort the silkworm cocoons.

<sup>14</sup> Roger Owen, *The Middle East in the World Economy, 1800-1914* (London: Methuen, 1981), 252.

<sup>15</sup> Thobie, *Intérêts et impérialisme français*, 493n57, citing Maurice Chéhab, *Dawr Lubnan fi tarikh al-harir* (Beyrouth: Publications de l'Université libanaise, 1968).

France's Catholic protectorate in the Ottoman Empire, missionary orders as well as secular organizations operated dozens of schools, hospitals, orphanages, and other French-language institutions and charitable endeavors in Lebanon, Syria, and the wider Levant, catered particularly toward indigenous Christian denominations. Thobie's companion volume to his study of French economic interests in the late Ottoman Empire, on French education and cultural influence, quantifies the extent of these initiatives, which enrolled some 100,000 students in over 500 schools, supported by over a million francs in government subsidies, in the years before the First World War.<sup>16</sup> The teaching of the French language, in particular, was viewed as a means of expanding and deepening France's sphere of influence. Activists hailed such endeavors as evidence of an informal French empire, propagating the virtues of French civilization while also solidifying a French presence without the attendant costs of military occupation or political administration. The religious leaders and lay personnel behind these non-governmental establishments, like the authors and Orientalists whose works the previous chapter investigated, themselves invoked France's long-standing ties to the Levant, justifying their activities as at once a continuation of tradition and a crucial advancement of French prestige and geopolitical position. Politicians in turn eagerly assumed the mantle of defending what foreign affairs minister Raymond Poincaré declared in early 1913 as France's "traditional interests in Lebanon and in Syria."<sup>17</sup> This narrative, I mean to argue, was not simply reflective of French-led cultural initiatives; it was constructed discursively, through the writings and rhetoric of its proponents, as

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<sup>16</sup> Thobie, *Les intérêts culturels*, 23, 33. On education, see also Mathew Burrows, "'Mission civilisatrice': French Cultural Policy in the Middle East, 1860-1914," *The Historical Journal* 29, no. 1 (Mar., 1986): 109-135; Ellen Fleischmann, "The Impact of American Protestant Missions in Lebanon on the Construction of Female Identity, c. 1860-1950," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 13, no. 4 (2002): 411-426; Edward A. Falk, "Lyon to Liban: Language, Nation, and Faith in the Jesuit Schools of Ottoman Lebanon," in Julia Hauser, Christine B. Lindner, and Esther Möller, eds., *Entangled Education: Foreign and Local Schools in Ottoman Syria and Mandate Lebanon (19-20<sup>th</sup> Centuries)* (Beirut: Orient-Institut, 2016).

<sup>17</sup> Chevallier, "Lyon et la Syrie," 305

well as through confrontations between preconceived ideas and on-the-ground experiences at the very sites where French influence took root.

French cultural and educational projects in the Levant, in short, were both presumed and intended to effectively promulgate ideals of national grandeur and beneficence, while also demarcating a realm of implicit hegemony within a weakened Ottoman Empire. In a book-length report on his 1912 journey through Ottoman provinces of the Near East, Maurice Pernot, the editor of the *Journal des Débats*, attested to “the surprising expansion of our language, our influence, and our prestige” from Constantinople to Egypt.<sup>18</sup> Admiring the breadth of French cultural presence, he compiled sections on organizations and institutions in dozens of cities and villages from Syria and Palestine to Asia Minor and Mesopotamia. In his list of establishments, he united under a national banner the disparate efforts of various religious orders and secular educators, alongside industrialists and archeologists, professors and schoolteachers, and a range of other activists and entrepreneurs.<sup>19</sup> The common thread, in Pernot’s eyes as well as to nearly all commentators on the French role in the Levant, was that these zones of contact and instruction inculcated affection and admiration for France. Youth in particular, Pernot forecast, would learn “respect and love for France, its ideas and its spirit.”<sup>20</sup> Among the several dozen sites of French schools, missions, and charities in Lebanon and Syria that he included in his booklet was VGF’s orphanage at Qraiyeh, with its hundred young girls as pupils and laborers.

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<sup>18</sup> This trip was organized by the recently founded Comité des intérêts français en Orient, whose mission was to “maintain and develop our moral, political, and economic situation in the Orient.” Note pour la presse, Comité des intérêts français en Orient, December 1911. Maurice Pernot, *Rapport sur un voyage d’études à Constantinople, en Égypte, et en Turquie d’Asie (janvier—août, 1912)* (Paris: Firmin-Didot et Cie, 1913), ix.

<sup>19</sup> On the tensions between missionaries and secular officials in French colonial projects, see especially JP Daughton, *Empire Divided: Religion, Republicanism, and the Making of French Colonialism, 1880-1914* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

<sup>20</sup> Pernot, *Rapport*, xii.

*“This Lost Corner of Krey”*

When Henri Ladreyt complained about the unrealistic expectations of arrivals to Qraiyeḥ, he directed his criticism at a certain Monsieur Etienne. This very likely referred to the illustrious colonial propagandist and politician Eugène Etienne, president of the Comité de l’Asie française and head of the national *parti colonial*. Even though Lebanon was not a French colonial possession, Ladreyt confronted the imperial rhetoric and Orientalist presumptions of France’s small but vocal colonialist movement. The mirage of a “land of plenty” conveyed promises of Edenic abundance and opportunity, of possession and domination, that were vital to colonial propaganda. Such speculation, Ladreyt’s impatient reaction implied, would invariably founder amidst the “complete solitude and rocky terrain” of Qraiyeḥ. Heralded as a glorified extension of France in the Levant, the region known as “la Syrie,” Ladreyt wryly observed, was “a country full of surprises.”<sup>21</sup>

As VGF struggled to turn a profit, quotidian struggles of life and work in Qraiyeḥ overshadowed the enticements of colonial ideologues. The allure of the Levant may have appealed to the likes of Eugène Etienne, but for Ladreyt and his successors in Qraiyeḥ, negotiations with village neighbors, the VGF workforce, and local authorities loomed more urgently. The frustration that Ladreyt expressed over idealized visions and inflated prospects derived from his practical difficulties as an on-site industrial manager; his responsibilities were to supervise factory employees and direct the collection of cocoons and the spinning of silk, not to pen propaganda tracts or trade in myths of imperial opportunity. An attitude abstracted from the company’s immediate challenges, in a contracting global silk market, would only complicate the “dangerous and difficult campaign” for the industry that he anticipated for the year ahead.

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<sup>21</sup> Cited in Chassagne, 256.

Prefabricated Orientalist tropes, Ladreyt's irritated rejoinder to Etienne suggests, were not so readily compatible to the pursuit of a French silk factory's bottom line.

When VGF's second director, Charles Croizat, arrived in Qraiye in 1905, he consciously sought to avoid the misperceptions and disappointment that had rankled Ladreyt among newcomers. Soon after assuming his post, he wrote to VGF headquarters in Lyon that he was still "beginning to familiarize [him]self with *Krey* and its inhabitants," and expressed optimism that they would "all get used to one another easily." He noted that he "would continue to study all the ongoing business, the customs of Syrians, their ways of conducting business, etc." He was not, of course, undertaking an ethnological survey. His responsibility, like Ladreyt's before him, was to ensure the effectiveness of VGF's industrial enterprise. To produce a higher-quality silk, he explained, he anticipated having to alter "habits [that] are so engrained" that VGF would have a hard time eradicating them.<sup>22</sup>

Unlike the impressionable neophytes urged by the likes of Eugène Etienne and scorned by Henri Ladreyt, Croizat admitted when he arrived in Lebanon that he at first had "a rather bad impression" of his workplace.<sup>23</sup> Several years later, after his wife had organized a reception for two visiting bishops, an associate underscored the complications of such undertakings in what he characterized as "this lost corner of *Krey*."<sup>24</sup> Even in this isolated locale, though, Croizat insisted from the outset of his tenure that he retain "the same benefits [in Qraiye] as in France," claiming an analogous insurance policy for his family to what he enjoyed at his previous silk factory in Mirmande.<sup>25</sup> He stressed the imperative to work quickly to improve conditions, "so as

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<sup>22</sup> ADR 145J169, Croizat to VGF Lyon, 28 January 1905.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> ADR 145J171, Berlier to Louis Guerin, 13 July 1912.

<sup>25</sup> ADR 145J169, Croizat to VGF Lyon, 9 November 1905.

not to further compromise *Krey*'s reputation."<sup>26</sup> To make its "business in *Syrie* as prosperous as possible," aimed to uphold the firm's position as a viable center of silk-reeling for VGF's global operations.<sup>27</sup> The implications of this concern extended not only vertically, along the firm's chain of production, but also laterally, toward the factory's immediate environs. Given his efforts to gain familiarity with the local population, Croizat's focus on VGF's standing seemed to acknowledge that the factory operated precariously, contingent upon its integration into the surrounding social and cultural environment. The establishment in Qraiye, then, neither enjoyed nor explicitly advanced an *ipso facto* prestige as an outpost of France's "age-old rights" in the Levant. Its status was grounded, rather, in its immediate context, and would require ideological as well as industrial work to maintain.

The dual prerogatives of production and reputation were accompanied by a simultaneous compulsion to preserve categories of distinction. Croizat warned in May 1905 that if the French firm did not institute "a little more order, economy, and direction," then "our interests [would] suffer and our patience would end by becoming Oriental." This, he somewhat superfluously added, would be a consequence that VGF "would not want."<sup>28</sup> According to this outlook, efficiency and organization were inherently European qualities, while their absence—a "patience" verging on lassitude and incompetence—marked the disturbing potential of succumbing to indigenous influence. Practices of duplicity and corruption were marked as inherently Oriental; when VGF's inspector, Raymond Théophile Berlier, accused a competing silk-spinning firm of deceit in a routine communication over cocoon purchases, he appended that "we are in the Orient and that's evident."<sup>29</sup> Not long thereafter, though, in conceding the

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<sup>26</sup> ADR 145J169, Croizat to VGF Lyon, 28 January 1905.

<sup>27</sup> ADR 145J169, Croizat to VGF Lyon, 9 November 1905.

<sup>28</sup> ADR 145J169, Croizat to VGF Lyon, 16 May 1905.

<sup>29</sup> Chassagne, 276.

necessity of issuing bribes, Berlier lamented that it was “regrettable that we are forced to adopt these native procedures, but one cannot do otherwise in this dirty country!”<sup>30</sup> It was in “this dirty country,” though, that VGF established not only its silk-spinning mill, but also the orphanage intended to house and train the Lebanese child laborers on whom it ultimately relied to uphold the company’s commercial interests.

### *Paternal Discipline and “Illusory Kindness”*

The young silk-spinners were drawn from local, mostly Maronite Christian families, who sent their daughters increasingly far from home to earn a supplementary income in the region’s dominant industry. Girls were inexpensive to employ, especially since they earned even less than women silk-reelers did in metropolitan France and were not subject to French labor regulations.<sup>31</sup> They also offered the supposedly “nimble” hands typically associated with women’s work and requisite for sorting cocoons and spinning silk. As Malek Abisaab and Akram Fouad Khater have argued, the departure of girls and young women for silk mills sharpened gendered tensions within the Lebanese social order.<sup>32</sup> Factory work carried a reputation as demeaning and dishonorable; the epithet *karkhana*, or “factory-girl,” implied a woman of loose morals and shameful status, persisting even after the demise of the silk industry by the 1930s.<sup>33</sup> A paramount concern for local families and factory owners alike was thus to ensure girls’ moral conduct in factory spaces, both to maintain a steady workforce and to minimize communal conflict.

Even before VGF established the orphanage on its premises in Qraiye in 1908, it had created a regime of patriarchal oversight over its workers. Essential to this operation was a

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<sup>30</sup> Chassagne, 277.

<sup>31</sup> Chevallier, *La société du Mont Liban*, 219.

<sup>32</sup> Akram Fouad Khater, *Inventing Home: Emigration, Gender, and the Middle Class in Lebanon, 1870-1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 21-31; Malek Abisaab, *Militant Women of a Fragile Nation* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2010), 9-12. Abisaab and Khater disagree somewhat on the extent of the rupture in gender relations, mobility, and agency prompted by work in silk factories.

<sup>33</sup> Khater, 31-38.



strictly maintained hierarchy between European and “native” employees, as well as the requisite disciplinary violence to enforce these standards. The indigenous Lebanese men who served as intermediary factory supervisors, Berlier stressed, could only “render the greatest service *under the orders* of a European.” To “entrust a spinning mill to a native,” he concluded, “is a utopia.”<sup>34</sup> Another VGF manager urged of one particular employee that “we must not rely too much on M. Fouad who is a native.”<sup>35</sup> Berlier had expressed surprise when this same Fouad—who would continue working for VGF in Qraiyeḥ through the course of the war—had signed letters without Croizat’s approval, which seemingly “allow[ed] Fouad to take the role of one of the European directors.”<sup>36</sup> He sought to halt indigenous “employees’ incessant demands” for increased salaries by obtaining refusals directly from Lyon, which would further distinguish European and “Syrian” personnel, whom Berlier considered overly “prideful.” Their persistent “bad spirit,” he conjectured, derived not from inadequate management, but from sources “outside the factory.”<sup>37</sup>

Because the company did rely on “native” supervisors on the factory floor, though, the necessity of maintaining what a visiting silk industry expert described as a “continual... [and] active supervision” over its workers was an integral component of VGF’s operations.<sup>38</sup> Berlier assured Guerin that “the personnel was *constantly* monitored closely” and that “from the moment when accounts go through the hands of *indigènes*, everyone knows what they contain, to the exact cent.”<sup>39</sup> The disciplinary mechanisms deployed by VGF at its factory in Qraiyeḥ included both corporeal and ideological forms of violence. The company’s head and namesake, Charles Guerin, embraced the violence that he wielded as industrial patriarch. “The danger in this

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<sup>34</sup> ADR 145J169, Berlier to VGF Lyon, 18 October 1911.

<sup>35</sup> ADR 145J169, Roncaglio to VGF Lyon, 23 December 1911.

<sup>36</sup> ADR 145J169, Berlier to VGF Lyon, 22 August 1910.

<sup>37</sup> ADR 145J169, Berlier to VGF Lyon, 9 October 1910.

<sup>38</sup> Ducouso, 155.

<sup>39</sup> ADR 145J169, Berlier to VGF Lyon, 3 May 1911; *ibid.*, Berlier to VGF Lyon, 17 October 1910.

country,” he posited during a visit to Qraiye in 1907, “is for the timid and the cowardly, and I am not one of them...I have treated everyone with great blows of the whip.” Cathartic violence, for Guerin, functioned as a means of preserving his “moral and physical health” while abroad, as well as to establish obedience among his subordinates and supposed inferiors. He recounted how after his “blows of the whip,” a “recalcitrant” local official “came to kiss [his] hand two minutes later and beg forgiveness.” “It’s enough for me to appear so that everyone shuts up,” Guerin boasted. “There is no other way to be considered, and I am the Father who hits his children hard because he loves them.”<sup>40</sup> His sadistic impulse for violence and aggressive paternalism both found expression in Qraiye’s exploitative yet familial order, combining logics of industrial interests and benevolent influence even as it exposed their contradictions.

In light of his superior’s eager recourse to violence, VGF director Charles Croizat couched his attempts to improve factory organization as requisite to enhance production, rather than as needlessly sentimental concessions. In January 1905, he proposed reforms to address a shortage of dormitories that was causing complaints and impeding recruitment efforts and recommended the benefit of treating workers more “humanely.” Without improved labor conditions, Croizat argued, their “well-being” suffered, which in turn harmed the factory’s reputation. Given the already fraught calculus by which families in the region decided to send their daughters to earn a few piasters a day in the silk factory, retaining a local workforce was an already delicate imperative for VGF. From Lyon, Guerin, responded with a blunt margin note, rejecting Croizat’s suggestion as an “illusory kindness” and stressing instead the continued need for “strict authority.”<sup>41</sup> To the recommendation of augmenting workers’ pay, he appended that there was “insufficient production for the moment,” a stark clarification of the company’s

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<sup>40</sup> ADR 145J168. See also Chassagne, 272-274

<sup>41</sup> ADR 145J169, Croizat to Guerin, 20 March 1905.

resources and priorities. And in response to a letter from the son of a deceased former VGF employee, who appealed to Guerin's "benevolence and spirit of kindness" for compensation, he penciled succinctly, "without interest."<sup>42</sup>

Croizat assured his employer that he was not treating workers with undue "kindness," but rather was acting out of a rationale of economic efficiency. He pledged that he would not seek to increase wages until he obtained "stronger and better production" from his workforce, acknowledging that they were "far from providing the sum of work that we can expect."<sup>43</sup> By providing additional minor concessions, Croizat argued, the firm could demand even "more and especially better work" from its silk-spinners. He appealed to Guerin to raise the factory's temperature, which he presented not as an indulgence, but as an urgent practical measure. With a "third of the places empty as a consequence of workers' illnesses," he reported, those still on the silk-sorting floor were "blowing on their fingers [to stay warm] instead of sorting" because temperatures had fallen to 5-6°C (41-43°F) inside. The "work suffered" as a consequence, he pointedly remarked to Guerin, who tersely acceded to "increase [the] heat." Croizat explained further that improving workers' housing conditions would prevent them "from sleeping on all sides of the boilers, in the cocoon rooms, etc."<sup>44</sup> If the image of child-laborers huddling around the warmth of a factory boiler was poignant enough to sway their employers and supposed guardians' conscience, little trace of such sentiment appeared in their correspondence. And if such a scene seems to recall the attendant deprivation of mid-century European industrial practices, then perhaps this was precisely the other side of the "truly modern operation" that an

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<sup>42</sup> ADR 145J169, Elie Craïssati to VGF Lyon, 28 April 1906.

<sup>43</sup> ADR 145J168. See also Chassagne, 260n737.

<sup>44</sup> ADR 145J169, Croizat to VGF Lyon, 20 March 1905.

official industry report of 1913 heralded that French firms—led by VGF and its advanced machinery—had introduced to greater Syria.<sup>45</sup>

*Camels, Chiesas, and Colonial Modernity*

For French silk producers in Lebanon, the use of technology was what set their efforts apart from the smaller but more numerous indigenous operations. VGF's silk-spinning mills in Qraiyeḥ constituted the "principal industrial enterprise" in all of Greater Syria and the most technologically advanced of the three large French filatures in Mount Lebanon at the turn of the nineteenth century.<sup>46</sup> This assessment, contrasting European industrial prowess with Lebanese inferiority, surfaced again after the Great War, when reinvigorating silk production in Mount Lebanon became an important component of demonstrating the region's "worth" under French colonial mandate.<sup>47</sup> Already when VGF installed its factory in Qraiyeḥ, though, French officials viewed silk interests in the Near East as confounded by local conditions. "The silk-reeling industry," a commercial report from the French consulate in Beirut observed in 1904, shortly after VGF began operations in Le Krey, "remains very backward."<sup>48</sup> This was an unsurprising conclusion, the report continued, since "industry in large workshops, a very complicated affair, only exists in countries that have reached a high degree of civilization."<sup>49</sup> According to French observers, the technique known as "Arab spinning [*filature à l'arabe*]" undertaken in Lebanese households rendered a substandard product, adequate only for indigenous consumption. Silk for European markets, though, was expected to attain a higher level of quality, and thus required

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<sup>45</sup> Ducouso, 123.

<sup>46</sup> Chevallier, "Lyon et la Syrie," 293.

<sup>47</sup> Paul Huvelin, "Que vaut la Syrie?" *L'Asie française*, no. 197 (1921), 30. See also Simon Jackson, *Mandatory Development: French Colonial Empire, Global Capitalism, and the Politics of the Economy After World War One*, forthcoming.

<sup>48</sup> Archives du Ministère des Affaires Etrangères (hereafter AMAE), 206 CPCOM 476, Rapport Commercial de Beyrouth, 16 June 1904.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

more advanced technological means of production. Equating civilizational status with mechanisms of production, French economic evaluations interpreted indigenous labor practices not just as producing an inferior quality silk, but as signifying a lower position in a hierarchy of social development, implicitly in comparison with advanced European industrial methods.

From its first years in Qrayieh, VGF invested in modernizing its equipment and supplying its factory with the latest machinery. Before even arriving in Lebanon, VGF's director for Qrayieh, Charles Croizat, had arranged the purchase and delivery of several of the most recent type of oven for heating and drying cocoons, known as Chiesa, for its Italian manufacturer. To transport these 25,000-kg mechanical behemoths to the factory, Croizat noted, each would "require the use of 6 or 7 camels."<sup>50</sup> A road and a railway connecting Beirut to Damascus, with Qrayieh en route, had been constructed with French capital and under French concession in the late nineteenth century, but the company nonetheless relied on camels, traditional symbols of Oriental exoticism, to reproduce a modern industrial system in the Lebanese mountains. After renovations, the factory complex included four buildings and 558 basins to steam and sort cocoons and generated a greater quantity as well as a higher quality of silk than either its European or indigenous competitors in Lebanon.<sup>51</sup>

The type of ovens and number of basins at its factory notwithstanding, VGF's machinery and infrastructure were not just neutral mechanisms of production, to be distinguished by an objective gauge of technological capacity. Nor was what another early-century report called French mills' "superior reputation in terms of quality" solely a disinterested assessment of the more uniform silk produced by machine than spun by hand, in the fashion tellingly denigrated by

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<sup>50</sup> ADR 145J169, Charles Croizat to VGF Lyon, 21 November 1904.

<sup>51</sup> Chevallier, "Lyon et la Syrie," 293.

European contemporaries as *à l'arabe*.<sup>52</sup> This delineation of modern and traditional modes of production and standards of quality also crafted an implicitly imperial hierarchy, premised on mutually constitutive figurations of advancement and inferiority. When the 1904 report on “backward” indigenous silk-reeling operations asserted that their practitioners did “nothing to improve their methods,” this assessment situated the Lebanese or Syrian on a distinct temporal plane of civilization as well as silk production.<sup>53</sup> Even twenty years later, after a destructively mechanized world war, the French colonial administration stressed in 1925 the imperative for “the silk-spinners of Lebanon [to] improve their spinning methods,” since so-called “Arab silk” was “lost for modern industry.”<sup>54</sup> French industrial efficiency was thus juxtaposed to a naturalized inability of the *indigène* to improve his backward methods and mentality.

It was, however, the First World War that was most responsible for the persistent struggles of the Lebanese silk industry. The massive destruction of mulberry trees for military supplies and firewood, along with the conscription of Lebanese men into the Ottoman army and a famine that killed roughly a third of Mount Lebanon’s population, resulted in a near total collapse of an industry that had already been struggling for several decades. For silk industrialists, as well as the French colonial regime, conviction in the transformative power of modern technology persisted into the post-war period, alongside corresponding presumptions of indigenous inadequacy. As early as November 1918, a civil engineering report recommended in general the “use of modern methods and machines” in Lebanon and Syria. The “resources of modern technique,” the report went on, “will contribute to the development [*mise en valeur*]” of the territory. This would in turn secure a “predominant, unrivaled” position for French influence

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<sup>52</sup> AMAE 206CPCOM 476, 1902 rapport annuel de Beyrouth.

<sup>53</sup> AMAE 206 CPCOM 476, Rapport commercial de Beyrouth, 16 June 1904.

<sup>54</sup> Archives de la Chambre de Commerce et d’Industrie de Lyon (hereafter ACCL) REL 014 Dossier 03, Haut-Commissariat Services Economiques et Agricoles to Président de la Chambre de Commerce de Lyon, 4 February 1925.

from both a “material and moral point of view.”<sup>55</sup> The tools of modernity, when organized under French supervision, could enhance both the productive capacities and and personal qualities of Syrian and Lebanese. As an agricultural advisor to French mandate authorities suggested, the silk industry across Syria could “overcome workers’ [*ouvrières*] lack of skill by employing the more perfected machines currently in use in France...[where] the role of the worker is no more than a role of machine supervision.”<sup>56</sup> A 1924 memo to the Lyon Chamber of Commerce similarly concluded that reopened silk-reeling factories would have to adopt the “most modern procedures” to revive the territory’s production. Only these would produce the “quality silks [to]...feed the needs of the *fabrique lyonnaise*.”<sup>57</sup> It was in dedication to this historic silk manufacturing sector in Lyon that, before the war, an industry expert and French consular representative in 1913 had proclaimed Lebanon the “younger sister” of France.<sup>58</sup> This familial mythology persisted alongside an ideology of modern technology, not simply as layers of imperial justification, but as co-constitutive logics of imagination and exploitation.

The modernization of Lebanon’s silk industry, the memo to the Lyon Chamber of Commerce further noted, could most effectively occur under “the protection of the French Administration.”<sup>59</sup> This rubric of protection implied not only a benevolent paterfamilias and political guardian, but also an efficient manager of industrial as well as colonial modernity. Under the League of Nations mandate granted after the First World War, France was accorded a “sacred trust of civilization” to oversee populations deemed “not yet able to stand by themselves

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<sup>55</sup> AMAE, 50 CPCOM 61, Bulletin Nov.-Dec. 1918, Mémoires et comptes-rendus des travaux de la Société des ingénieurs civils de la France (Paris 1918), “La Syrie et l’ingénieur” by M. Honoré, 600, 639.

<sup>56</sup> ACCL, REL 014 Dossier 02, Rapport M. Florimond, 12 October 1920, 28.

<sup>57</sup> ACCL, SOI 015 Dossier 03, Commission de la Sériciculture et Colonisation, séance 22 May 1924.

<sup>58</sup> Ducouso, iii.

<sup>59</sup> ACCL, REL 014 Dossier 04, “Quelques notes à présenter à la Commission de Colonisation,” undated.

under the strenuous conditions of the modern world.”<sup>60</sup> If this civilizational responsibility included reconstructing the silk industry through an imperial discourse of modernity, then it also entailed “strenuous conditions” for the young girls working 10-12 hour days sorting and steaming silkworm cocoons. To oversee this industrial labor as well as the civilizing imperative of its orphanage, VGF turned to religious sisters, who were meant to provide a maternal presence and gendered responsibility in the factory.

*From Mariamettes to Sisters of Charity*

The first nuns arrived in Qraiye in the summer of 1908. To solve the problem of where to house VGF’s young workers, Charles Guerin had consented to constructing what he called an “orphanage,” suggesting that it would welcome the children of victims of sectarian violence, to be looked after by first Lebanese, and then French, women religious. As an initiative to protect Christians from Muslim aggression, while also enhancing silk production, the orphanage-factory complex in Qraiye seemed to encapsulate the narrative of historic French religious protection and economic interests in Mount Lebanon routinely invoked by turn-of-the-century colonial propagandists and commercial elites alike.<sup>61</sup> Tensions between economic imperatives and benevolent initiatives, however, arose through disputes among nuns and industrial managers over matters such as hours of work and prayer, appropriate disciplinary practices, and even proper religious attire in the factory.

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<sup>60</sup> The Covenant of the League of Nations, Article 22. Accessed through The Avalon Project: Documents in Law, History and Diplomacy, Yale Law School Lillian Goldman Law Library, [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th\\_century/leagcov.asp#art22](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/leagcov.asp#art22).

<sup>61</sup> See for example Etienne Lamy, *La France du Levant* (Paris: Plon, 1900); Isaac and Morel, *Les droits de la France*; Maurice Barrès, *Une enquête aux pays du Levant* (Paris: Plon, 1923); René Ristelhueber, *Les traditions françaises au Liban* (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1925).



The establishment at Qraiyeh, as at least one VGF manager acknowledged, could not quite properly be termed an “orphanage.”<sup>62</sup> Children were accepted under contract for a set period of time and were obliged to pay off the debt for their lodging through meagre earnings. Parents and relatives frequently sought to withdraw their daughters, whom VGF often refused to relinquish. The incentive for local Lebanese families was not to shield their children from sectarian violence, but to earn a small sum to contribute to household incomes. VGF even seemed indifferent to supposed outbreaks of religious hostilities. When Charles Croizat casually reported a recent spate of “massacres” in the area, for instance, it was not to lament Christian persecution, but to account for the orphanage’s expansion.<sup>63</sup> Even a rumor that the Lebanese Christian population was turning to the Italian consul for protection “because France [didn’t] seem to want to take care of them” did not seem to perturb Croizat’s predecessor, Ladreyt. They were mistaken to do so, he observed, but he characterized the situation more as a foolish episode that would assuredly come “at someone’s expense” than as a credible threat to the prestige of France’s protectorate.<sup>64</sup> He was preoccupied, at any rate, with transporting cocoons between Beirut and Qraiyeh, for which he employed a Muslim muleteer to ensure the caravan’s safety.

Through Jesuit intermediaries, VGF first recruited indigenous Lebanese nuns, members of a local Maronite order known as the Mariamettes. These were initially deemed “capable” of their tasks, which included overseeing the girls in the dormitories, classroom, and chapel as well as in the cocoon-sorting and silk-spinning rooms of the factory. Their role was to be both practical and ideological, spiritual and material, and they were expected to ensure moral behavior from their young charges. If the women religious were imagined to offer a maternal, more beneficent form of oversight, though, they were also fundamentally imbricated in VGF’s

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<sup>62</sup> ADR 145J169, Berlier to VGF Lyon, 23 May 1910.

<sup>63</sup> ADR 145J169, Berlier to VGF Lyon, 28 May 1909.

<sup>64</sup> ADR 145J169, Ladreyt to VGF Lyon, 10 September 1903. See also Chassagne, 257.

industrial structure. Ideals of Franco-Lebanese history and harmony did not necessarily alter abusive practices, including Charles Guerin's penchant for physical discipline. When the Mariamette sisters pleaded with Guerin to temper his violence by invoking "the memory of the hundred thousand Maronites who perished for the French in the time of the Crusades," Guerin rejected their overture. Instead, he baldly proclaimed, he "hit even harder under their eyes" until the "leather of [his] stick was worn out from it."<sup>65</sup> A legacy of affection and martyrdom did not diminish his paternal prerogative, as "the Father who hits his children hard" within the industrial, quasi-imperial fiefdom of Qraiyeh.

If Guerin's inordinate brutality was considered excessive even by colleagues—a company inspector eventually concluded that "order [and] discipline [were] perhaps a little severe"—his disdain for the Lebanese nuns was more uniformly shared.<sup>66</sup> Factory director Charles Croizat determined that the "native" sisters were "not commanding enough" in supervising the children, lacked authority, and did not implement adequate discipline. The inspector, Raymond Théophile Berlier, considered the Mariamettes "unintelligent...dirty and unmistakably lazy," and prone to "'Arab' wastefulness."<sup>67</sup> This perception not only channeled Orientalist prejudices of indolence and backwardness; it did so within a framework that situated "modern" industrial production alongside the "traditional" benevolence of a religious orphanage. Despite the Maronite sisters' shared Christian heritage—and historic alliance with the French Catholic protectorate in the Levant—their naturalized indigenous practices rendered them suspect in the eyes of factory managers.

When Croizat campaigned to replace the Mariamettes in early 1910, he complained that they were too "frequently absent...under the pretext of their religious exercises." He explicitly

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<sup>65</sup> ADR 145J168. See also Chassagne, 272-274

<sup>66</sup> ADR 145J171, Berlier to VGF Lyon, 3 June 1913.

<sup>67</sup> ADR 145J169, Berlier to VGF Lyon, 13 July 1910.

subordinated their devotional practices to industrial priorities, expressing frustration that the women religious evaded the demands of hierarchy and did “what they want and not what we want.” Croizat did not, however, diagnose a contradiction between missionary and material objectives. Instead, the firm focused on replacing the “feather-brained” and “troublemaking” Mariamettes whom it identified as “the cause of almost everything bad.”<sup>68</sup> VGF parried accusations that it was using its religious orphanage to exploit local children’s labor by shifting blame onto the Lebanese nuns’ supposed deficiencies. When a nearby bishop alleged that VGF was corrupting what he had presumed was “a work of benevolence for the poor daughters of the peasants of Lebanon,” Croizat responded testily that VGF’s only mistake had been “requesting the Sisters to work.” Against the bishop’s charge that the company was using the children’s meager salaries to pay for factory operations, he retorted that he “would be delighted if the children were able to pay for all that.”<sup>69</sup> The company’s reliance on women religious at once enabled and undermined the system of profiting from orphans’ labor; to reconcile its “work of benevolence” with factory discipline, the French managers transformed this apparent contradiction into a product of Oriental inferiority.

The tensions between “moral and material” interests in Qraiye, though, were not so easily untangled by privileging an economic rationale, nor by naturalizing indigenous flaws. Once Croizat determined that “native sisters c[ould] not lead the orphanage,” he recommended importing “French women religious who would not be afraid to work.”<sup>70</sup> Later in 1910, VGF thus turned to the Besançon Sisters of Charity, who eagerly embraced the company’s “eminently

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<sup>68</sup> ADR 145J169 Berlier to VGF Lyon, 15 May 1910. See also Chassagne, 281.

<sup>69</sup> ADR 145J169, Croizat to van de Put, 14 March 1910.

<sup>70</sup> ADR 145J169, Croizat to VGF Lyon, 8 November 1910.

civilizing and Christian work.”<sup>71</sup> For the religious order, a private enterprise could thus partake of the Christian “civilizing mission,” an ideological endeavor typically ascribed to uneasy alliances between missionaries and state agents.<sup>72</sup> The aim of cultural or spiritual influence in this arrangement was less “assimilationist” than exploitative, even as both VGF and the Sisters of Charity proclaimed their moral and educational investment in the young Maronite girls’ upbringing. The language of civilization was thus harnessed to demands of production and the rigors of discipline. VGF managers sought to avoid any confusion of the sisters’ responsibilities, emphasizing their role as “*supervisors* for the orphans in the silk-spinning mill.”<sup>73</sup>

Friction between industrial and religious obligations, however, continued to arise after the arrival of the Besançon sisters. The inspector, Berlier, complained that “too many prayers and masses” still impeded productivity.<sup>74</sup> He even questioned the nuns’ attire, recommending that they replace their traditional headgear—the *cornette*, or wimple—because it was “not very convenient” when the women were stationed as supervisors in the factory. In the same letter to the sisters’ Mother Superior, he pledged not to interfere in the order’s internal affairs—so long as the work proceeded apace and the children remained in Qraiyeḥ.<sup>75</sup> Charles Croizat, the factory director, noted in late 1912 that Silk-Spinning Mill C, staffed by children from the orphanage

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<sup>71</sup> Archives des Sœurs de la Charité de Besançon (hereafter ASCB), Dossier Moyen-Orient/Liban-Le Krey. Mère Supérieure de Besançon to Louis Guerin, 13 July 1912.

<sup>72</sup> On the fraught but vital relations between French Catholic missionaries and colonial officials, see especially Daughton, *Empire Divided*; Sarah Curtis, *Civilizing Habits: Women Missionaries and the Revival of French Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Elizabeth Foster, *Faith in Empire: Religion, Politics, and Colonial Rule in French Senegal, 1880-1940* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013); Daughton and Owen White, eds., *In God’s Empire: French Missionaries and the Modern World* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2012). On French missionaries in Greater Syria, see Jérôme Bocquet, *Missionnaires français en terre d’islam: Damas 1860-1914* (Paris: Les Indes savantes, 2005); and Curtis, “Charity Begins Abroad: The Filles de la Charité in the Ottoman Empire,” in *In God’s Empire*, eds. Daughton and White.

<sup>73</sup> ADR 145J169, Berlier to VGF Lyon, 18 May 1911.

<sup>74</sup> ADR 145J171, Berlier to Louis Guerin, 3 June 1913.

<sup>75</sup> ASCB, Berlier to Mère Supérieure de Besançon, 6 December 1912.

and managed by the Besançon sisters, was generating particularly unsatisfying results. He blamed the nuns' "inexperience" and vowed to "try to train them quickly."<sup>76</sup>

Upon her arrival in Qraiyeh in June 1910, one Sister Ferdinand anticipated that the Besançon nuns' expected responsibilities with the children were "not above what they can and know how to do."<sup>77</sup> They faced constraints, however, from VGF personnel, who insisted on the everyday rigors of a factory schedule. Two years into their tenure, the order's Mother Superior protested to Charles Guerin's brother Louis that one manager in particular—an Italian director named Roncaglio, who features prominently in an incident described below—was treating the sisters too much like "simple hired employees and *not like women religious*." She also urged him to allow the girls to "leave the silk-reeling facility at seven o'clock in the evening," rather than later, in order to have time for catechism lessons.<sup>78</sup> Even as priority was accorded to industrial over devotional labor, this negotiation nonetheless figured at the ambiguous intersection of French economic interests, missionary influence, and quotidian authority.

The factory owners in Qraiyeh, meanwhile, were still being accused by religious officials—including Rome's own representative in Lebanon—of acting like "exploiters" and taking advantage of the "young age and weakness of the girls" whom it employed.<sup>79</sup> Family members continued to attempt—not always successfully—to withdraw their daughters, often resorting to clandestine means to evade VGF's vigilant supervision.<sup>80</sup> Berlier—whom a nun had described as "charming" and "courteous" as well as a "good Christian"—concurred that work hours were "too long for children under nine." He argued, though, that even after eleven hours in the silk-spinning mill, followed by two hours of classes in Arabic, sewing, and catechism, the

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<sup>76</sup> ADR 145J169, Croizat to VGF Lyon, 3 December 1912.

<sup>77</sup> ASCB Dossier Moyen-Orient/Liban-Le Krey, Sœur Ferdinand to Mère Supérieure de Besançon, 5 June 1910.

<sup>78</sup> ADR 145J171, Marie Anna Groffe to Louis Guerin, 13 July 1912.

<sup>79</sup> ASCB Dossier Moyen-Orient/Liban-Le Krey. Sœur Sosthènes to Mère Supérieure de Besançon, 28 April 1910.

<sup>80</sup> ASCB Dossier Moyen-Orient/Liban-Le Krey. Sœur Sosthènes to Mère Supérieure de Besançon, 10 July 1910.

girls “already [did] not do very much work, if we reduced the hours, they would do almost none.”<sup>81</sup> Charity was evidently subordinated to production; yet the effect of either on France’s prestige and position in Lebanon was arguably minimal compared to the consequences for local families who had sought material support, and then moral succor, from the factory that employed and confined their daughters.

Rather than simply an imposition of industrial authority, this explicit avowal of exploitation also marks evidence of fractures within a broader ideological regime.<sup>82</sup> The factory inspector’s dissatisfaction—expressed in the context of persistent negotiations with religious officials and the company’s own personnel—exposed the inconsistencies of a model that combined regimented labor with a project of educating and civilizing the “poor young girls of Lebanon.”<sup>83</sup> The rationale of economic interests, in this dispute over hours of work and devotion, was at once conflated and conflicted with a familial order in which religious sisters taught, trained, and monitored young Christian daughters under corporate paternal authority. The effect of idealized principles of affection was not wholly obscured, however. Even amidst practices of punitive violence and exploitation, a regime of moral beneficence was expected to prevail, in the factory as in the orphanage, as in the wider realm of the French imperial imagination from Mount Lebanon to the Levant.

*“A Corner of France that We Love”*

While Berlier was satisfied with the “order and cleanliness” that the French sisters had brought to the factory, he remained disappointed by a persistent lack of what he called the “kind

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<sup>81</sup> ASCB Dossier Moyen-Orient/Liban-Le Krey, Sœur Sosthènes to Mère Supérieure de Besançon, 5 June 1910.

<sup>82</sup> Beneath this statement, the author of an institutional history of *Veuve Guerin et Fils* appends a self-evident “*Sans commentaire*”—no comment necessary. Chassagne, 282.

<sup>83</sup> ASCB Correspondance Moyen-Orient/Liban-Le Krey, Sœur Sosthènes to Mère Supérieure de Besançon, 28 April 1910.

atmosphere that would be necessary in a project of this kind.” He emphasized—whether earnestly or disingenuously—that its “moral work” with the children would enable the firm to “win their hearts.”<sup>84</sup> An investment in forging sentimental bonds seemed to redound to the factory’s benefit. One of the Sisters observed in 1913 that with additional kindness from their supervisors, the children showed themselves “more disciplined, more serious, even more cheerful; in the spinning mill more applied and more careful of their work.”<sup>85</sup> Affective logics were thus joined to VGF’s goals of material productivity. The girls’ “more disciplined” labor, facilitated through maternal love, simultaneously bolstered VGF’s industrial efficiency and validated the nuns’ “civilizing work.”

The Besançon nuns further justified their role in overseeing child labor as a means of adhering to the “customs of the region,” which allegedly mandated that children work to support their families. They also claimed to be sparing the young workers from more violent practices of discipline reputedly prevalent at other establishments. The initiative at Qraiyeḥ, by contrast, was “truly a work of benevolence,” protecting children from the imagined “brutal assistant armed with a stick too often raised, alas!” against the young workers.<sup>86</sup> The children’s activity in Qraiyeḥ, under the Sisters’ of Charity supervision, was imagined to inculcate norms of proper behavior and industriousness central to the civilizing mission. According to a postwar report, the girls’ factory labor was designed “not as a commercial ends, but [as] the means to give them the habit of working.”<sup>87</sup> The nuns’ task, as designated in conjunction with VGF, was to ensure that the “moral and intellectual education of these children proceeded evenly, as much as possible, with the amount of work to be provided, and that this work was directed profitably, carefully

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<sup>84</sup> ASCB Correspondance Moyen-Orient/Liban-Le Krey, Berlier to Mère Supérieure de Besançon, 22 May 1914.

<sup>85</sup> ADR 145J171, Sœur Ferdinand to Louis Guerin, 1 June 1913.

<sup>86</sup> ASCB Dossier Général, Moyen-Orient/Liban, Œuvres d’avant guerre, 1914.

<sup>87</sup> ASCB Dossier Général, Moyen-Orient/Liban, N. Aboussouan, 1930, “Œuvre de Mère Marie-Anna Groffe.”

regulated, [and] softened, helped maternally.”<sup>88</sup> If Charles Guerin envisioned himself as the paramount paternal authority in Qraiyeh, with the arrogated prerogative to administer violence, then the women religious fulfilled a gendered mandate of affection, a linked project of care and coercion that both rehearsed and obscured power dynamics of colonial contact.

For the Besançon Sisters of Charity, instilling a love of hard work in the children provided a means through which to inculcate religious as well as patriotic sentiment.<sup>89</sup> In the factory of Qraiyeh, the sisters sought to teach respect for their supervisors alongside devotion to their savior. VGF’s founder himself even became an object of reverence. Less than a year after their arrival, one of the sisters reported to Guerin that “our little orphans will make a duty of praying for you, their generous benefactor, and for your dear family,” as their sole means to “prove their gratitude.”<sup>90</sup> Years later, an ornately illustrated poem, dated 8 September 1926, professed the admiration of “the silk-spinners of Qraiyeh” on a visit from the “renowned Saint-Louis,” whom they imagined wearing the “precious symbol” of a skein of silk (Figure one). The poem to this “sovereign” refers to the Catholic saint and French King Louis IX, to whom a Maronite emir allegedly proclaimed the love of Lebanon for France in the era of the Crusades, in a letter that gave birth to the legend of enduring Franco-Lebanese affinity.<sup>91</sup> Yet the name also, of course, invokes that of Louis Guerin, the industrial patriarch that Qraiyeh “sent” to the children. The devoted young silk-reelers, in this imagined conflation of divine and immanent fatherly authority, “sang at their work” in praise of both “our Mother” and their Lord. The thread

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<sup>88</sup> ASCB Dossier Général, Moyen-Orient/Liban, Œuvres d’avant guerre, 1914.

<sup>89</sup> This emphasis on the value of work—and its imperial connection to both God and *patrie*—further nuances JP Daughton’s argument that turn-of-the-century religious missions in colonial territories often articulated their evangelical aims through languages of French republican nationalism. Daughton, *Empire Divided*.

<sup>90</sup> ADR 145J169, Sœur Ferdinand to VGF Lyon, 23 July 1911.

<sup>91</sup> As Youssef Mouawad has shown, the apocryphal letter from the French Saint Louis to a Maronite emir on which much of this mythology rested was likely forged in 1844, by a Maronite bishop named Nicolas Murad. Mouawad, “Aux origines d’un mythe: la lettre de St. Louis aux “Maronites,” in Bernard Heyberger and Carsten-Michael Walbiner, eds., *Européens vus par les libanais à l’époque ottomane* (Beirut: Ergon Verlag Würzburg, 2002).





a “great scandal among the Arabs...surprised at their attachment for us.”<sup>93</sup> These images of intimacy were to be replaced by scenes of death and starvation, as the women religious bore witness to “women and children dying in the street” and themselves struggled to survive over the course of the war.<sup>94</sup> Wartime letters from a Sister Thérésa to her fellow Sister Aurélie—written from Lebanese mountain towns after most French and religious personnel either had been expelled from Ottoman territory or were treated as “hostages,” unable to depart—attest to the daily preoccupations of health and sustenance, even as she pledged her enduring affection for her order and their efforts. From Qraiye in September 1916, Thérésa recounted pleasant afternoons with Madame Marret, the wife of the sole remaining European VGF employee, who reported that she was “happy with the little ones who work very well.”<sup>95</sup> While silk operations in Qraiye had ground to a halt, quotidian rituals continued, punctuated by masses and requiems along with the harrowing experiences of illness and uncertainty. Sister Thérésa described the “terrible convulsions” and bedside death of one young silk worker, to whom, with no priest readily available, she administered the last sacraments and remained with the child until her “last

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<sup>93</sup> ASCB Dossier Général, Moyen Orient–Liban. “Aperçu, un mois après coup, des évènements d’Orient intéressant plus particulièrement les Sœurs de Besançon (de la fin d’Août 1914 au commencement de janvier 1915).”

<sup>94</sup> ACSB, Correspondance Région Orient, Sous-Dossier Liban, Dr. Pierre to M. Brest, 10 October 1918. Recent studies of the famine have underscored its disastrous social, political, cultural, and environmental consequences. Linda Schatkowski Schilcher, “The Famine of 1915-1918 in Greater Syria,” in *Problems of the Modern Middle East in Historical Perspective*, ed. John P. Spagnolo (London: Ithaca Press, 1992); Elizabeth Thompson, *Colonial Citizens: Republican Rights, Paternal Privilege, and Gender in French Syria and Lebanon* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013); Najwa al-Qattan, “When Mothers Ate Their Children: Wartime Memory and the Language of Food in Syria and Lebanon,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 46 (2014): 719-736; Melanie Tanielian, “The War of Famine: Everyday Life in Wartime Beirut and Mount Lebanon (1914-1918)” (PhD diss., University of California-Berkeley, 2012); Tanielian, “Feeding the City: The Beirut Municipality and the Politics of Food During World War I,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 46, no. 4 (2014): 737-758; Graham Auman Pitts, “Fallow Fields: Famine and the Making of Lebanon” (PhD diss., Georgetown University, 2016). Wartime letters from Sœur Thérésa attest to the daily preoccupations of food and health, as well as her concern for her fellow sisters in Beirut and Lebanon.

<sup>95</sup> ACSB, Correspondance Région Orient, Sous-Dossier Liban, Sœur Thérésa to Sœur Aurélie, 13 September 1916.

breath.”<sup>96</sup> A little over a year later, Thérèse herself would succumb to disease, dying of fever in nearby Broumana.<sup>97</sup>

Despite the death, destruction, and dislocations wrought by war, VGF as well as the Sisters of Charity nonetheless aspired to resume their charitable endeavor. Even with “very few children” still in Qraiyeh in 1916, Sister Thérèse avowed that “little by little the work will progress.”<sup>98</sup> VGF’s director Albert Marret wrote to the Besançon sisters’ Mother Superior in the midst of the war to voice his hope that “our poor orphanage will rise out of its ashes,” envisioning a miraculous “resurrection” of their benevolent work. He pledged to reestablish a “crèche” that would take in the “poor workers [*ouvrières*]” to operate the silk-reeling mills, and in which they would receive “lessons in morals...catechism, etc.” These latter activities, Marret specified, would take place “outside of work hours and on Sunday.”<sup>99</sup> Couched in the language of religious rebirth, Marret’s project imagined the renewal of VGF’s silk production, notwithstanding the drastic decline in both mulberry trees and the Lebanese population, to be supplemented by the moral investment expected from the Sisters of Charity.

The orphanage and the factory in Qraiyeh did both resume operations after the war. Despite the nascent French mandate government’s support for Lebanese silk production, however, a combination of artificial silk on the global market, the impact of the war, and the onset of the Great Depression by the late 1920s combined to effectively doom the industry by 1931, when VGF officially shuttered its factory. Yet even in these last days, in December 1929, Albert Marret reported from what he called the “little colony of Qraiyeh” that the “orphanage goes well now: our devoted Sisters obtain good results from the young pupils, [their] spirit is

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<sup>96</sup> ACSB, Correspondance Région Orient, Sous-Dossier Liban, Sœur Thérèse to Sœur Aurélie, 25 September 1916.

<sup>97</sup> ACSB, Correspondance Région Orient, Sous-Dossier Liban, Mère Supérieure de Besançon to Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, 21 November 1917.

<sup>98</sup> ACSB, Correspondance Région Orient, Sous-Dossier Liban, Sœur Thérèse to Sœur Aurélie, 13 September 1916.

<sup>99</sup> ACSB Correspondance, Moyen-Orient/Liban-Le Krey, Marret to Mère Supérieure de Besançon, 24 July 1916.

very good with our little workers, [and] everyone seems content.”<sup>100</sup> The Mother Superior of Besançon had concurred some four years earlier, when she praised “the prosperity of our work and our missionaries’ richness of devotion.” She acknowledged the political tempestuousness of the times and the region—in summer 1925, a French colonial counter-insurgency campaign was underway to quash the Great Syrian Revolt—yet she affirmed her conviction in their moral opportunity: “Yes, in these countries of the Orient, despite the bad wind that blows in government spheres, we still do a lot of good.”<sup>101</sup>



Figure Two: Painting from Qraiye, anonymous Sister, 1926.

<sup>100</sup> ASCB Dossier Général, Moyen-Orient/Liban-Le Krey, Marret to Mère Supérieure de Besançon, 15 December 1929.

<sup>101</sup> ASCB Correspondance Région Orient. Sœur Marie Anna Groffe (Beyrouth) to Seigneur Humbrecht, 6 June 1925. On the Syrian revolt, see especially Michael Provence, *The Great Syrian Revolt and the Rise of Arab Nationalism* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005); as well as Martin Thomas, “French Intelligence-Gathering in the Syrian Mandate, 1920-40,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 38, no. 1 (Jan. 2002): 1-32.

For these women religious, the “good” was ambitiously yet ambiguously bound to their evangelical and industrial duties. Their accomplishment, an obituary published decades later recalled, was in “organizing and supervising the work of the young silk workers and teaching them to love God, France, and work.”<sup>102</sup> In the “little community of *Krey*,” as Charles Croizat’s wife had described Qraiyeḥ to the Besançon sisters’ Mother Superior before the war, industrial and religious personnel alike had discovered—or at least imagined—“a corner of France that we love.”<sup>103</sup> While objects of religious, national, and industrial affection in this idealized site may not have neatly overlapped—nor did the projects of civilizing and silk-spinning through which they were to be attained—the Sisters’ of Charity embrace of Qraiyeḥ’s model of imperial benevolence attests to the intertwined objectives of their mission: their dedication to their Mother Superior, obedience to VGF paternal authority, and affection for the children in whom they sought to instill spiritual and patriotic allegiance as well as industrial discipline. Yet the conflicts and controversies that arose at this single site of interaction also point to the ideological work necessary to negotiate disputes over violent practices and myths of protection, physical discipline and moral affection, and values of production and piety.

*Imperial Rivalry and Colonial Politics: The View from Qraiyeḥ*

If the the Great War interrupted both VGF’s industrial activities and the Sisters’ of Charity affective ministrations, this was not the only instance of wider imperial politics encroaching upon the micro-dynamics of power in Qraiyeḥ. The patriarchal sovereignty of Guerin’s factory was not absolute, neither unaffected by Ottoman authority before the war nor untouched by the geopolitical posturing of postwar colonial pressures.<sup>104</sup> This final section will

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<sup>102</sup> ACSB Dossier Général, Région Orient – Liban. Nécrologie Sœur Ferdinand André, 1955.

<sup>103</sup> ACSB Moyen-Orient/Liban-Le Krey, Mme Croizat to Mère Supérieure de Besançon, 7 October 1912.

<sup>104</sup> On the geopolitical negotiations of the immediate postwar period, see Susan Pedersen, *The Guardians: The*

explore two incidents in which the micro-site of Qraiyeh—and its volatile admixture of material interests, disciplinary violence, and charitable influence—was ensnared within the unstable imperial formations of both the late Ottoman Empire and the nascent French colonial mandate. The strategies through which VGF approached these moments of imperial entailment reveal the contingent implications of ideological legacies, linking the Mediterranean politics of war and colonialism to the ambiguous agendas of VGF’s factory-orphanage complex in Mount Lebanon.

The first incident involved the irascible VGF director Alessandro Roncaglio, an Italian who had been employed in Qraiyeh since 1903. Roncaglio, Charles Croizat reported to Guerin in October 1911, did not “always [get] along well with the Sisters and with the families of the children” in the orphanage and the factory.<sup>105</sup> It was his undeferential conduct with the women religious of Besançon that had prompted the complaint that the latter were treated too much like “simple hired employees.” Roncaglio also aspired to greater authority as a factory manager, though, which provoked the sensitivities of his fellow Europeans. In January 1912, Croizat wrote to company headquarters in Lyon that he “feared giving too much authority to M. Roncaglio, who easily takes more than he is given.” He “isn’t afraid to act according to his feelings,” Croizat added, “which are not always bad, but also are not always good.”<sup>106</sup> Yet VGF’s management philosophy mandated according its European operatives with what Charles Guerin qualified as “the absolute authority that they needed.” He had promised in 1906 to “get rid in one

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*League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015). For ways that indigenous populations challenged imperial sovereignty, see Andrew Arsan, “‘This Is the Age of Associations’: Committees, Petitions, and the Roots of Interwar Middle Eastern Internationalism,” *Journal of Global History* 7 (2012): 166-188; Susan Pedersen, “Samoa on the World Stage: Petitions and Peoples before the Mandates Commission of the League of Nations,” *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 40 no. 2 (June 2012): 231-261; and Natasha Wheatley, “Mandatory Interpretation: Legal Hermeneutics and the New International Order in Arab and Jewish Petitions to the League of Nations,” *Past and Present* no. 227 (May 2015); as well the essays in *The Routledge Handbook of the History of the Middle East Mandates*, Cyrus Schayegh and Andrew Arsan, eds. (New York: Routledge, 2015).

<sup>105</sup> ADR 145J169, Croizat to VGF Lyon, 6 October 1911.

<sup>106</sup> ADR 145J171, Croizat to VGF Lyon, 29 March 1912.

fell swoop all those who never wanted to bend to their orders.”<sup>107</sup> A 1911 proposal by Croizat to lower Roncaglio’s role to one of a “simple supervisor” was deemed “not at all practical” by the company’s inspector, Berlier, not least because it would have scrambled the hierarchy that situated Europeans manifestly above native employees. Croizat, then, just two days before expressing his worries about Roncaglio’s power-grabbing tendencies, consented to “leave him *all abilities* to run his spinning mills as best as possible.”<sup>108</sup>

Roncaglio’s flaw was in jeopardizing the tenuous industrial-ideological system through which VGF organized—and justified—child labor under female religious supervision. Berlier assured his superior that as long as Roncaglio remained focused on his own domain of the silk-spinning mills, then he did not envision “what difficulties could emerge between M. Roncaglio and the Sisters.”<sup>109</sup> Yet as Berlier cautiously acknowledged, in the overseas industrial crucible of Qraiye, the “whole question of the organization of the European personnel is very delicate.”<sup>110</sup> This fragility was exacerbated by the incommensurable structures of legitimacy—capitalistic and spiritual—on which factory managers and women religious based their claims to authority. When Roncaglio treated the Sisters of Charity more like factory employees, he exposed the structural tensions between intersecting economic and affective logics of labor.

In addition to his overreaching ambition and strained relations with the VGF workforce and Besançon nuns, Roncaglio’s disruption of the company’s “delicate” configuration of authority likely also derived from anxieties of gender and class. He perceived both his and his wife’s positions within VGF’s industrial organization as intolerable insults to his status. In an aggrieved letter to Louis Guerin, Roncaglio expressed resentment that his wife had been put to

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<sup>107</sup> ADR 145J168, Charles Guerin to VGF Lyon, 10 July 1906.

<sup>108</sup> ADR 145J171, Croizat to VGF Lyon, 2 January 1912.

<sup>109</sup> ADR 145J169, Berlier to VGF Lyon, 18 October 1911.

<sup>110</sup> ADR 145J169, Berlier to VGF Lyon, 18 October 1911.

work supervising the silk chamber. This arrangement, which other VGF managers had earlier debated—the company’s first director in 1903 countered the proposition of employing managers’ wives by claiming that “women here have no authority”—struck Roncaglio as a deep affront to his prerogative as a male breadwinner.<sup>111</sup> “I consider myself alone capable to easily feed my family,” he asserted, rebuking the VGF managers for assuming that his “wife is not a respectable lady, she is a *worker*...and one can well get away with anything with her.” He held the bitter impression that “the other wives in Krey, *those who don’t work*” earned greater respect, even in the eyes of “the Arabs...[who] don’t trust a woman who goes to work.” He voiced further incredulity that his family had not been provided with a guard, leaving his wife and two children “abandoned at night!”<sup>112</sup> Roncaglio’s perspective reveals not only his own racialized biases, but also a precarious imperative to uphold gendered standards of respectability, security, and prestige amidst VGF’s daily operations.

The stress that Roncaglio’s sensitivities placed on VGF’s already fragile edifice of male European authority and the Sisters’ religious endeavor eventually erupted in March 1912, when, as Charles Croizat reported, “what was bound to happen inevitably occurred.” Roncaglio, ambitious to exert his authority over the process of sorting cocoons in addition to his role as director of spinning mills, began going directly to the cocoon-sorting supervisor and giving his own directives, bypassing the proper channels of his fellow European managers. After one such incursion, an indigenous sorting supervisor questioned his orders, enraging Roncaglio. The girl-workers in the room, “already agitated against him, left their work immediately,” whereupon Roncaglio began furiously insulting and lashing out at them.<sup>113</sup> The Mother Superior of

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<sup>111</sup> ADR 145J169, Ladreyt to Louis Guerin, 5 April 1903.

<sup>112</sup> ADR 145J171, Roncaglio to Louis Guerin, 10 July 1912.

<sup>113</sup> ADR 145J171, Croizat to VGF Lyon, 29 March 1912.



Besançon reported that he had “more than once hit the children,” and Croizat acknowledged that “such events are not exceptions, and have taken place many other times.”<sup>114</sup>

Roncaglio, however, had chosen a rather unpropitious moment for his violent demonstration in the cocoon-sorting room. In 1912, Italy was at war with the Ottoman Empire, over the former’s invasion of Libya. Roncaglio was already in a tenuous position, as most Italians had been expelled from Ottoman lands following Italian ships’ bombing of Beirut in February. The Lebanese sorting supervisor who had responded to Roncaglio’s critique was able to take his revenge by complaining to the local Ottoman governor and mentioning Roncaglio’s identity as an Italian subject. VGF was caught in the bind of defending its intemperate director or surrendering control over a member of its European personnel to Ottoman authorities. After soldiers arrived at Roncaglio’s home with orders for his expulsion, Croizat appealed to the Ottoman governor of Lebanon, who allowed Roncaglio to remain in Qraiyeh, but only until his pregnant wife delivered.<sup>115</sup> Moreover, the governor made clear, he granted this temporary clemency only as “a favor...to the firm of Veuve Guerin et Fils.” Croizat’s inquiry into assigning Roncaglio French “protected” status proved futile, as this privilege only applied to Ottoman subjects; the dictum that “Europeans c[ould] not change their nationality” ironically entrapped Roncaglio as an Italian, severed from his French protectors.<sup>116</sup> Even the French consulate, which Croizat visited twice, recommended sacrificing Roncaglio. An exasperated Croizat, after recounting the humiliating display of “kowtowing” to Ottoman officials that he had been obliged to perform, concluded that it would be “very annoying” if Roncaglio were forced to leave Lebanon under military escort.<sup>117</sup> Yet he also acknowledged his frustration with “how much one

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<sup>114</sup> ADR 145J171, Mère Supérieure to Louis Guerin, 13 July 1912.

<sup>115</sup> ADR 145J171, Roncaglio to Louis Guerin, 26 March 1912.

<sup>116</sup> ADR 145J171, Croizat to VGF Lyon, 1 April 1912.

<sup>117</sup> ADR 145J171, Croizat to VGF Lyon, 29 March 1912.

must sometimes have patience to tolerate the character of M. Roncaglio and often repair his blunders.” Berlier concurred that Roncaglio had acted “too brusque[ly] towards the personnel” and had been “completely wrong” and “irresponsible” in his encounter with the native supervisor. As for his wife, since she had begun to “completely neglect her duty,” Berlier recommended replacing her with one of the Besançon sisters.<sup>118</sup>

Even as VGF’s silk industrialists sought to defend their Italian director, French warships frequently patrolled Lebanese waters, precisely to give the impression of defending the coast from *Italian* invasion, and thereby cultivate deeper sentimental attachment among local populations.<sup>119</sup> The employment of an Italian by a French company, as well as France’s own crosscutting economic, ideological, and political relations with the Ottoman Empire, was entwined in the trans-imperial politics of the Ottoman-Italian conflict. The struggle over Roncaglio’s individual status within this web of power dynamics illustrates the contingent interactions through which an influential French silk company negotiated its position in an ambiguous imperial context. Yet in its own domain of sovereignty, VGF still exerted full hegemony; it summarily dismissed the indigenous supervisor who had denounced Roncaglio as an Italian. And when he was expelled in April 1912, VGF immediately sought a European replacement, since “Krey [could] *not* remain with only *one* European at its head.”<sup>120</sup>

While company officials regretted that Roncaglio’s conduct had compromised their standing within the Ottoman Empire, Veuve Guerin et Fils sought to present a more idealized narrative of its collaboration with the Besancon Sisters of Charity to agents of French imperial politics. After the Great War, the dissolution of Ottoman authority beyond Anatolia allowed

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<sup>118</sup> ADR 145J171 Berlier to Louis Guerin, 16 June 1912.

<sup>119</sup> Italian ships had already bombarded Beirut earlier in the year. See ADR 145J171, Croizat to VGF Lyon, 19 November 1912.

<sup>120</sup> ADR 145J171, Berlier to Louis Guerin, 4 June 1912.

European imperial architects to pursue a wider range of explicitly colonial projects that had previously fallen under the sovereignty of the Sublime Porte. Many of these, of course, had their roots in the economic and cultural enterprises that had proliferated over the previous half-century. Traditions of commercial, educational, and religious investment acquired renewed political urgency in the context of debates—in national parliaments and colonial propaganda as well as at the League of Nations and in the former Ottoman territories themselves—over how to ascertain and allocate zones of European hegemony in the Middle East. The legacy of French companies, charities, entrepreneurs, and academics in the lands of *la Syrie*, and Mount Lebanon most prominently, became a potent discursive instrument to advance—as well as naturalize—professions of France’s “age-old rights” in the region.<sup>121</sup> As an emblem of both “material and moral interests,” VGF’s factory in Qraiyeḥ—even before its postwar industrial and religious “resurrection”—was in a position to at once benefit from and influence this imperial process. The malleable political conditions of 1918 and colonial allure of the Levant enabled VGF to present both its commercial and charitable undertakings as vital to an enduring French presence in Mount Lebanon. If the Sisters’ of Charity orphanage represented bonds of beneficence, then French government support for VGF’s silk production appealed to one of the foremost economic engines for a potential colonial regime.

Not long after the November armistice, diverse stakeholders in France’s colonial agenda in Syria and Lebanon arranged a conference at which to discuss the multiple facets of French involvement in the region: economic; archeological, historical, geographic, and ethnographic;

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<sup>121</sup> Chapter five will pick up the previous chapter’s analysis of such claims in literary and political texts by considering how they were redeployed to consolidate—yet also undercut—mandate authority through the proclamation of Greater Lebanon in 1920.

educational; and medical and hygienic.<sup>122</sup> The Congrès français de Syrie, to be held at Marseille's Chamber of Commerce in early January 1919, represented a culmination of academic and economic fact-finding missions, as well as political meetings and journalistic expeditions, undertaken through the late nineteenth century. It also brought together various initiatives that French as well as Syrian and Lebanese activists had pursued over the course of the war, from particular intellectual or institutional projects to broader frameworks for governmental organization. As Simon Jackson has recently argued, the expedition of academic, commercial, and religious "experts" to Syria that followed the 1919 gathering in Marseille, functioned to construct and consolidate premises of economic development, as competing imperial political agendas were rendered in an idiom of productivity and resource maximization.<sup>123</sup> The "primacy of the economic" that these discourses engendered, articulated in an objective language of scientific expertise, was nevertheless joined to affective rationales for a natural and enduring French presence in Lebanon especially. The "moral reconciliation" that the mission's report forecasted as a consequence of "economic cooperation" was not an ancillary component of French imperial politics, but a crucial ideological tenet.<sup>124</sup>

Veuve Guerin was well positioned to mobilize both the commercial and cultural rationales for colonial intervention. To this end, VGF brass in Lyon sent an urgent request to the Mother Superior of Besançon in December 1918, just weeks before the planned congress in Marseille, to provide "the most documents possible of interest to the congregations teaching in *Syrie*." The aim, VGF clarified, was to "fight against English influence, [and] to put together

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<sup>122</sup> These topics corresponded to the four "sections" into which the Congrès was divided. Archives de la Chambre de Commerce et d'Industrie de Lyon, Fonds Relations Étrangères, REL 014 03, Congrès Français de la Syrie, Programme provisoire, 3-5 January 1919.

<sup>123</sup> Simon Jackson, "'What is Syria Worth?' The Huvelin Mission, Economic Expertise and the French Project in the Eastern Mediterranean, 1918-1922," *Monde(s)* 2, no. 4 (2013): 83-103.

<sup>124</sup> Huvelin, 50.

complete dossiers of French interests to defend” in advance of the upcoming Paris peace talks.<sup>125</sup> Information on the Sisters’ projects, including the orphanage in Qraiyeh, was to be tabulated statistically, presented as objective and incontrovertible evidence of French cultural, educational, and affective influence in the region. The efforts of a private company and missionary organization were thus compiled into a geopolitical lexicon of empire, intended to influence the postwar delineation of colonial regimes.

In collecting and contributing this information, VGF both echoed and enabled the rhetorical strategies of colonial activists who invoked France’s economic interests alongside its moral influence. Its conception of “French interests,” moreover, at once overlapped with and obscured its own more parochial preoccupations on the ground in Qraiyeh. Only after the rupture of the Great War was the ideological potency of VGF’s and the Sisters’ of Charity endeavor explicitly mobilized to support a colonial agenda. If the expulsion of Roncaglio by Ottoman fiat exposed VGF’s limited maneuvering room within a broader politics of imperial rivalry, then the opportunity of a new colonial order following the war conveyed the potential to deploy the linkages that it had forged with traditions of French industrial and ideological involvement in Mount Lebanon.

The concept of “moral and material interests” that company officials had invoked in establishing its factory and orphanage proved to be a malleable formation, demonstrating a discursive capacity to discipline workers and negotiate personnel conflicts as well as to press for imperial advantage. The model of national influence that VGF presented to the Congrès français de Syrie consisted not simply of sums of silk produced and students trained. Its statistical table also represented one facet of the ideological prism through which imperial power dynamics were reflected in Qraiyeh, revealing the constitutive instabilities of colonial encounters even outside

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<sup>125</sup> ASCB, 13 December 1918, VGF Lyon to Mère Supérieure de Besançon.

the realm of colonial sovereignty. The factory and orphanage in Qraiyeħ were situated at the intersection of particular industrial practices, ideological premises, and a potent imperial imaginary. The implications of Franco-Lebanese encounters, though, extended beyond the village of Qraiyeħ, shaping a complex and multisited process of imperial formation.

**CHAPTER THREE**  
**Allegations, Insults, and Honor:**  
**Sites of Contact and Conflict in Pre-Mandate Beirut and Mount Lebanon**

Certain conflicts between French and Lebanese, however, circled back to Qraiye. As a symbol of French economic interests and cultural influence, the site of the silk factory and orphanage was meant to be an engine of productivity and benevolence. Yet, as the last chapter has shown, not only did VGF's exploitative practices undercut its charitable endeavors; the very logics that animated each facet of its operation were intertwined within a multivalent ideology of protection and imperial power. Its contestation was inherent as well as external, generating tension both within the factory complex—the focus of the previous chapter—and beyond its environs, which is where this chapter begins.

In the summer of 1910, several parents in Mount Lebanon wrote to France's General Consul in Beirut with complaints that a major French silk firm in the region had overworked, abused, and refused to return their young daughters. The widow of Elias Aramouni had confided her nine- and thirteen-year-old daughters to Jesuit nuns who operated the orphanage at VGF's silk-spinning factory complex. When she visited her daughters after six months, though, Aramouni found them in a "deplorable state," forced to work 12-14 hour days of strenuous labor, manually separating silk from cocoons. Appalled that France, which she deemed "the most constitutional Republic in the world," had permitted "the worst barbarism," she wrote to the French consul, Aramouni accused the French company and its religious supervisors of perpetrating a "white slave trade... in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century."<sup>1</sup>

With her invocation of the "white slave trade," Aramouni not only indicted VGF's abusive labor practices; she also contested the ideology of industrial benevolence that had

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<sup>1</sup> Centre des Archives Diplomatiques de Nantes (hereafter CADN) 92 PO/A 258. 1 June 1910, Veuve Elias Aramouni to Consul Général de France (hereafter CGF) Beyrouth.

brought French women religious to work with the French silk industry in Lebanon.<sup>2</sup> By contacting France's own consular representative, Aramouni articulated her grievance through the very channel of Franco-Lebanese connection—routed through the intermediary of the consulate—that discourses of mutual affinity and allegiance had opened under France's informal protectorate over Mount Lebanon.<sup>3</sup> Finally, her juxtaposition of France's "constitutional" virtue with VGF's "barbarism"—exemplified by the Orientalist specter of the "white slave trade," signifying racialized sexual depravity and the exploitation of European women—reworked the ideological tenets of French protection and prestige that undergirded the Franco-Lebanese relationship. Beyond exposing the hypocrisies of a supposedly beneficent undertaking, the intervention of this widowed mother replotted the moral, racial, and affective coordinates of French imperial ideology. She was not, this chapter will reveal, the only one to do so.

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Letters to France's consulate in Beirut came not only from French expatriates, officials, and employees of the many French-operated commercial, religious, and educational ventures that had been established over the preceding half-century.⁴ As in the cases examined in this chapter, a wide range of French as well as Syrian and Lebanese men and women turned to the French consul to air grievances, request favors, or appeal to moral notions of justice and benevolence. They did so not necessarily within a formal political or juridical structure of French sovereignty, but by drawing on a legacy of French influence in the Levant, particularly among Lebanese Christian populations. Petitioners wrote to the consul not only for "protection" from religious

² See chapter two.

³ This protectorate system was established after France's intervention in 1860 to defend Lebanese Maronite Christians from sectarian violence. Mount Lebanon became an autonomous province under direct rule of the Ottoman Empire, but with a guarantee of French protection of its Christian population. See chapter one on the affective and ideological relationship cultivated between France and Lebanon after 1860.

⁴ On French economic and cultural initiatives in the Levant, see respectively Jacques Thobie, *Intérêts français dans l'Empire ottoman 1895-1914*, (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1977); and Thobie, *Les intérêts culturels français dans l'Empire ottoman finissant : l'enseignement laïque et en partenariat* (Paris: Peeters, 2008)

persecution or commercial impositions, but also for particular advantages or parochial complaints: requests for scholarships, appeals for financial support, or accusations against a neighbor, competitor, or aggressor. If foreign consular officials acted, as Leila Fawaz has observed, as “spokesmen of European imperialism in the Middle East,” then the French consulate also occupied a more ambiguous position as the site of such discursive interventions and as a perceived locus of historic influence.⁵

Tensions within the narrative of amity and alliance that underpinned France’s informal protectorate over Ottoman Lebanon emerged, as in formally colonial contexts, through conflicts and contradictions on the ground, exposing the unstable bonds of affective empire. By closely investigating several sets of confrontations between French and Lebanese men and women, this chapter contends that intimate sites of contact in a not-quite-colonial context—allegations of abuse, insult, and misbehavior—were nonetheless shaped through imperial frameworks of gender, morality, and prestige.⁶ How women like Aramouni presented their disputes with French authorities illustrates both the transgressive potential and underlying fractures of the Franco-Lebanese imperial formation. Gendered languages and practices of colonial power, I argue, transcended the political boundaries of empire, as they were formed and mediated at sites of individual encounter.

This chapter begins with Aramouni’s and others’ confrontations with VGF’s Qraiye silk factory operations, before surveying other sites of encounter and altercation between French and Lebanese men and women in the years before the Great War. By examining an array of

⁵ Leila Tarazi Fawaz, *Merchants and Migrants in Nineteenth-Century Beirut* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), 75.

⁶ The notion of prestige in a colonial context not only informed the legal construction and contestation of racialized citizenship, as Emmanuelle Saada has argued, but also functioned as a discursive trope of informal empire, subject to on-the-ground negotiation. Saada, “The Empire of Law: Dignity, Prestige, and Domination in the ‘Colonial Situation,’” *French Politics, Culture & Society* 20, no. 2 (Summer 2002): 98-120. On my use of “not-quite-colonial,” see the introduction to this dissertation.

accusations that reached the French General Consul in Beirut, the chapter broadens the dissertation's scale of analysis from the micro-site of Qraiyeḥ to the range of everyday incidents and indictments that arose between individuals in the region. These disputes, the chapter shows, reveal contradictions in the politics of protection between France and Lebanon, demonstrating how petitioners to French consular authority redeployed tropes of benevolent protection and civilizational modernity to negotiate contextual circumstances and reframe imperial ideology. Lebanese men and women like Aramouni drew from such multivalent notions to contest instances of exploitation, injustice, and insult. French complainants, on the other hand, appealed to Orientalist presumptions of European honor, prestige, and superiority to manage perceived outbreaks of danger, hostility, or disrespect by local populations. The driving imperative of this chapter is to examine how appellants to France's diplomatic representative—French employers, travelers, administrators, and expatriates, as well as Lebanese parents and peasants, workers and notables, accused criminals and esteemed clergymen—rerouted the imperial logics and affective discourses of the Franco-Lebanese protectorate to navigate sites of quotidian conflict.

The three main thematic sections of the chapter assess an array of encounters, which together underscore the salience—as well as multivalence—of contested notions of honor, status, and civilization to an ideology of French imperial protection in Lebanon. The first explores confrontations over physical violence and abuse. It begins by interpreting Aramouni's and other parents' allegations against VGF, evaluating disputes over working conditions and exploitation, and tracking challenges to French employers' authority and morality. It then transitions to a French expatriate's act of abusive discipline in his own home, which also entailed his perceptions of community hostility and his antagonist's contestation of his very Frenchness. The second section moves to conflicts over managing not labor relations, but individual reputation.

Zeroing in on several exchanges of petty insults and instances of inappropriate behavior, analysis of these experiences uncovers how notions of respectability filtered perceptions of slander and offensive comportment through imperial logics of French civilizational preeminence. The final section analyzes how gendered discourses of French imperial protection constrained Frenchwomen's mobility and conduct in sites of supposed sexual danger and immorality in the urban context of Beirut. By attending to the complexities and contradictions underlying historical professions—and historiographical presumptions—of Franco-Lebanese allegiance, this chapter brings into relief the sites of quotidian contact through which ideologies of French protection were asserted, contested, and reformulated.

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The chapter focuses geographically on the city of Beirut and its hinterland of Mount Lebanon, where French intervention in 1860 created an informal protectorate over the autonomous Lebanese *mutassarifiyya*.<sup>7</sup> Beirut at the turn of the century was a growing and increasingly cosmopolitan port city, with a mixed population of Muslims, Christians, and Jews, locals and foreigners.<sup>8</sup> Its urban landscape featured burgeoning industrial and infrastructural projects, schools and universities, and commercial markets and cultural institutions.<sup>9</sup> The newly

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<sup>7</sup> The *mutassarifiyya*, an autonomous administrative division of Mount Lebanon within the Ottoman Empire and under French protective guarantee, did not include the *vilayet* of Beirut; because it was both the site of the French General Consul and the eventual capital of the state of Greater Lebanon proclaimed in 1920 under French Mandate, however, I include the city in my analysis of pre-Mandate encounters. On Mount Lebanon, see especially Engin Akarli, *The Long Peace: Ottoman Lebanon, 1861-1920*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993; and on Beirut, see Jens Hanssen, *Fin de Siècle Beirut: The Making of an Ottoman Provincial Capital* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

<sup>8</sup> According to Leila Fawaz, by 1912, Beirut's population of roughly 120,000 inhabitants was approximately 54% Christian (including about 25% Maronite) and 34% Muslim. Decades of migration had increased the proportion of Christians over the previous half-century. Fawaz, *Merchants and Migrants*, 48-53. The myth of "cosmopolitanism," however, can also communicate an overly nostalgic—and inaccurate—sense of social harmony, mostly restricted to elite classes. See Will Hanley, "Grieving Cosmopolitanism in Middle East Studies," *History Compass* 6, no. 5 (2008): 1346-1367.

<sup>9</sup> Foreign missions and European schools in the Near East have recently received significant scholarly attention, with particular emphasis on cross-cultural encounters and "entanglement" between local and imperial actors. See Julia Hauser, "From Transformation to Negotiation: A Female Mission in a 'City of Schools,'" *Journal of World History*

designated capital of an Ottoman administrative district along the eastern Mediterranean coast, Beirut's economic and historic hinterland nonetheless remained the neighboring province of Mount Lebanon.<sup>10</sup> Ideologically, as this dissertation's first chapter has explored, the notion of a French quasi-protectorate in Lebanon mobilized overlapping political, religious, and affective discourses of privilege and protection. This potent yet ambiguous semantic field also furnished the language with which individual men and women navigated both their immediate circumstances and the gendered structures of imperial power relations.

The chronology of the chapter's study—roughly from the turn of the century to the eve of the Great War—evaluates encounters in the years preceding France's formal Mandate administration of Lebanon under League of Nations authority. The purpose of this chapter is not to chart a teleological prehistory of French postwar colonialism, but to interpret the seemingly commonplace confrontations through which French and Lebanese men and women engaged with one another through discourses of protection, prestige, and affection. It does so by treating encounters as neither representative nor anomalous; rather, they illustrate how individuals turned to these discourses to navigate their social circumstances, as well as how an uneven process of ideological formation took shape across distinct nodes within an imperial formation.

Across a range of such encounters, the chapter inquires into how sentimental languages of allegiance and esteem—as well as their imperial contradictions—inflected on-the-ground

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27, no. 3 (Sept. 2016): 473-496; Julia Hauser, Christine Lindner, and Esther Möller, eds., *Entangled Education: Foreign and Local Schools in Ottoman Syria and Mandate Lebanon (19th–20th Centuries)* (Würzburg: Ergon, 2015); and Eleanor Tejirian and Reeva Spector Simon, eds., *Altruism and Imperialism: Western Cultural and Religious Missions in the Middle East* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

<sup>10</sup> In 1861, Mount Lebanon was separated from Beirut and reorganized into an autonomous province of the Ottoman Empire known as the *mutessarrifiyya*. Jens Hanssen, adapting C.L.R. James's characterization of the Caribbean as “in the West but not of it,” has described fin-de-siècle Beirut as “of the West but not in it.” Hanssen, *Fin de Siècle Beirut*, 14. On the administrative structures of Ottoman Lebanon, see Akarli, *A Long Peace*. On the economic and intellectual relations between Beirut and Mount Lebanon, see Albert Hourani, “Ideologies of the Mountain and the City: Reflections on the Lebanese Civil War,” in Hourani, *The Emergence of the Modern Middle East* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981).

exchanges between French and Lebanese and were in turn redeployed toward particular ends. How did ideologies of parental benevolence and filial gratitude shape interactions over the most intimately mundane of matters, from stolen laundry to the pulling of a priest's beard? How were such confrontations negotiated through both imperial and affective idioms, expanding and contracting between the immediate and the ideological, as well as in contextual struggles over individual privilege and reputation? How did these discourses furnish tools for contesting both their immediate circumstances and the very imperial power dynamics that they sustained?

Notions of French protection and prestige, the chapter argues, were articulated in everyday encounters to affirm, resist, and reconfigure traditional narratives of French influence and mutual affection in Lebanon. Idealized conceptions of French justice and beneficence simultaneously generated and were inscribed within conditions of imperial contact, in which the category of European could both signify an abstract ideology of modernity and civilization and demarcate the asymmetrical politics of confrontation. Sites of engagement between French and Lebanese men and women were shaped by proximate debates over status, honor, and individual conduct as much as by ideological precepts of European imperialism. The multivalent discourse of imperial protection emerged in contexts of quotidian conflict—whether over a daughter's employment, an incident of violent or offensive behavior, or alleged misconduct toward a vulnerable Frenchwoman—in which the logics and locutions of French influence were at once established and destabilized.

### **Abusive Encounters**

If the French presence in Lebanon was meant to provide protection, according to the dual forms of religious and political protectorate traced in chapter one, then shortcomings in this model complicated the narrative through which France justified its particular not-quite-colonial

relationship. The fact that individuals implicated in these scenarios had recourse to certain languages enabled them not only to contest abuse, but also to articulate different facets of an ideology of protection and prestige. The former mandated care and humane treatment, while the latter rested upon a hierarchy of status, to be maintained—or questioned—based upon standards of reasonable and respectable conduct, as well as notions of civilized justice. The ways in which complainants invoked these tropes, I propose, inflected the meaning of protection itself, how the relationship between France and Lebanon was instantiated and ultimately took shape.

*The “Most Constitutional Republic” and the “Worst Barbarism”*

When the widow Aramouni wrote to the French General Consul in June 1910 to complain of the “barbarian” practices at VGF’s silk factory, she pleaded to France’s diplomatic representative “to help a poor mother to see her children again.”<sup>11</sup> Other parents alleged similar deception, and issued a similar plea; when VGF refused to return the overworked daughters of a Ibrahim Abboud, he asserted the “very legitimate right of the father over his children.”<sup>12</sup> He had heard that “his poor little girls were sick,” and when he arrived at Qraiye, Abboud discovered that they were “truly exhausted.” They had been given work “well beyond their strength,” separating silk from cocoons in hot water from four in the morning until nightfall. He immediately sought out Berlier, the factory director, to express his “formal wish...to withdraw his daughters.”<sup>13</sup> When Berlier stalled in response, Abboud threatened to contact the French

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<sup>11</sup> CADN 92 PO/A 258. 1 June 1910, Veuve Elias Aramouni to CGF Beyrouth.

<sup>12</sup> CADN 92 PO/A 258. 6 August 1910, Ibrahim Abboud to CGF Damas. In addition to those discussed in this section, at least two other parents wrote the French consul in August 1910 accusing VGF of not returning their daughters, and of employing them “under conditions that the firm of Krayé [sic] has not maintained.” CADN 92 PO/A 258, 5 August 1910, Habib Assâad to CGF Beyrouth; 10 August 1910, P. Atat Samaha to CGF Beyrouth. While the number of parental complaints—or at least those preserved in French consular archives—may not be considered representative, given the hundred-plus girls and women employed by VGF at the time, the accounts analyzed here reveal the discourses through which such challenges were articulated.

<sup>13</sup> CADN 92 PO/A 258. 6 August 1910, Ibrahim Abboud to CGF Damas.

consul if they “did not arrive in the next three days.”<sup>14</sup> With this claim, Abboud—a self-described “poor worker” who had sent his daughters over a hundred kilometers away to provide a modicum of financial support—challenged both the economic and political prerogatives of VGF’s managers, as supervisors and as subjects of French diplomatic protection. By denouncing exploitative labor practices to the French consul in Beirut, moreover, Abboud’s intervention exposed the inherent tensions through which a narrative of French prestige was crafted.

Three weeks after Abboud was promised their return, Berlier responded “that it would be truly unfortunate to withdraw [his] daughters just at the moment when they were going to earn something.”<sup>15</sup> Reasserting his company’s authority over its workforce, Berlier bluntly informed Abboud that he “would only send [his] daughters when he did not need them anymore.” Abboud nonetheless persisted in contacting the French consul, requesting that its officials “take the necessary steps...to the sole end that [his] daughters were immediately returned.”<sup>16</sup> Abboud’s appeal not only staked a claim to his legitimacy under French diplomatic authority; by referencing his Maronite status, his signature also explicitly situated himself within the religious community that French governments had since 1860 pledged to protect. Perhaps even more compellingly, Abboud framed his plea on paternal principles, the “very legitimate right of the father over his children.”<sup>17</sup> This assertion of his fatherhood evidently trumped VGF’s ersatz parental authority, as the Beirut consul twice contacted VGF’s manager Charles Croizat requesting an explanation, in late August and early September. Croizat then communicated to Abboud through the Beirut consul, conceding VGF’s willingness to return his daughters—albeit when he either came to get them or sent 65 piasters for their train ticket.

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

Croizat's caveat notwithstanding, VGF's eventual acquiescence in releasing two of its child laborers points to fissures in the fraught process of negotiation through which the major silk firm employed and housed local girls under ostensibly benevolent conditions. The paternalist discourses of moral uplift and religious benevolence in which VGF grounded its industrial operations—as explored in chapter two—opened the very channels of contestation through which Abboud was able to appeal to the French consul to challenge VGF's exploitative practices and corrupt authority. Abboud, buffeted by the capitalist market forces that drove a “simple worker” to send his children to work in a remote silk-spinning factory, drew upon the idiom of paternalism and prestige that structured France's fragile Lebanese edifice of interests and ideology to reroute French consular authority and reclaim his parental prerogatives.

Like Abboud, Aramouni had been promised that, at the orphanage in Qraiye, her daughters would be fed and provided for, learn to read and write, and work 2-3 hours per day on modern silk-spinning machines, to earn savings at a daily wage of 4-8 piastres. Instead, Aramouni wrote, after the two years they had been there, her daughters rather *owed* 800 piastres, even though she continually had to send them their provisions herself. Unable to raise the requisite sum demanded by VGF to release them, Aramouni directed her sentiment of maternal affection to France's consul, rebuking the French company's inadequate paternalist authority and appealing to the justice of France's “most constitutional Republic.”

Aramouni's allegation targeted the VGF factory-orphanage complex's claims of modernity and morality, as she indicted the “citizens of this same Republic” for exploiting and abusing her daughters through a “white slave trade.”<sup>18</sup> By invoking a notion of French republican civilization, Aramouni deployed a central tenet of France's political self-construction to denounce the treasonous violation of these principles by deviant French industrialists in Mount

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<sup>18</sup> CADN 92 PO/A 258. 1 June 1910, Veuve Elias Aramouni to CGF Beyrouth.



Lebanon.<sup>19</sup> Such a juxtaposition, though, did not simply serve to flatter her French consular addressee or bolster her credibility as a petitioner, nor only to condemn hypocrisies in the French republican model. Rather, by casting VGF's interventions in a framework of modern civilizational benevolence, Aramouni reversed the structure of French imperial ideology, while still framing her disillusionment around an idealized notion of French justice and modernity. Drawing from ideological premises of French protection and prestige to contest the actions of French industrial agents, Aramouni crafted opportunity out of the disjuncture between the politics and practices of informal imperial intervention.

Aramouni's reference to the "white slave trade" made a forceful accusation that prominent French industrialists and women religious were complicit in the enslavement of young girls. The term, moreover, carried racialized connotations of forced prostitution.<sup>20</sup> This accusation had indeed reached the French consul in Beirut before. In November 1903, another widowed mother, Nassif Abou-Akar, having confided her then-eight-year-old daughter Marie to the orphanage of St. Charles when her husband died, charged the order's Mother Superior with attempting to "transform the orphanage into a slave house [*Négrerie*] to practice the [white] slave trade" when they refused to return Marie after seven years. Like Aramouni, though, Abou-Akar nonetheless recalled the historic civilizing virtue of "France, which knew to abolish this odious trade almost a century ago on the coast of Africa, [and] is still there, to protect my daughter

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<sup>19</sup> On the centrality of republicanism in the French republican imagination, see for example Maurice Agulhon, *Marianne au pouvoir. L'imagerie et la symbolique républicaine de 1880 à 1914* (Paris: Flammarion, 1989); and Philip Nord, *The Republican Moment: Struggles for Democracy in Nineteenth-Century France* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995). On republicanism in French imperial contexts, see Alice Conklin, *Mission to Civilize: The Republican Idea of Empire in France and West Africa* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997).

<sup>20</sup> A prominent theme in nineteenth-century European debates over supposed global prostitution, "Oriental" sexual depravity and exploitation, and the dangers faced by white women traveling alone, the *traite blanche* was purportedly the province of Arab and African male slave-traders, as abductors and sexual predators of innocent white women and girls. See, for example, Robert C. Davis, *Christian Slaves, Muslim Masters: White Slavery in the Mediterranean, the Barbary Coast and Italy, 1500-1800* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); and Gillian Weiss, *Captives and Corsairs: France and Slavery in the Early Modern Mediterranean* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011).

against all injustice.”<sup>21</sup> To both women, the industrial managers and Jesuit Sisters who refused to relinquish their daughters had forsaken what they imagined as the responsibilities of French justice, civilization, and protection. In response, Aramouni and Abou-Akar both invoked the epithet of the white slave trade to contest their adversaries’ corrupt standards of moral conduct and unjust labor practices. With this allegation, the two Lebanese widows leveraged the moral ignominy—and insinuations of sexual abuse—conjured by the specter of the white slave trade against France’s own industrial and religious representatives. By reworking Orientalist tropes of sexual immorality to denounce traitors to supposed French abolitionist virtue, the two Lebanese mothers contested the hierarchies of European imperialism, even while drawing from its registers of moral and civilizational status.

Aramouni and Abou-Akar’s appeals underscored both the force and the fragility of French interventions in early twentieth-century Mount Lebanon. French silk firms and religious organizations exerted economic and religious pressures to draw young girls from the countryside to operate silk mills and populate French Catholic orphanages, with promises of economic and educational opportunities.<sup>22</sup> Yet, as argued in chapter two, the countervailing imperatives of these interventions—capitalist logics of productivity and profit joined to civilizational responsibilities of moral uplift and beneficence—exposed the contradictions not only between VGF’s industrial and charitable endeavors in Qraiyeḥ, but also within a French imperial ideology of protection. Local claimants like Aramouni and Abou-Akar engaged these contradictions to forge a discourse of contestation, articulating paeans to French historic justice as a means of

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<sup>21</sup> CADN 92 PO/A 194. 11 November 1903, Anissa Veuve Nassif Abou-Akar née Naccache (Beyrouth) to CGF Beyrouth.

<sup>22</sup> On the social and familial anxieties of sending girls and young women to work in gender-mixed factories outside of the patriarchal home, see Akram Fouad Khater, *Inventing Home: Emigration, Gender, and the Middle Class in Lebanon, 1870-1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); and Malek Abisaab, *Militant Women of a Fragile Nation* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2010).

denouncing the exploitative practices of a French company and French nuns. Their appeals at once expressed grievances over proximate local injustices and renegotiated the ideological premises of French authority, morality, and modernity in Mount Lebanon.

*“Devious Enemies of Europeans” and an “Undeserving” Frenchman*

Confrontations over managing local employment in early twentieth-century Lebanon were routed through the French consul not only to denounce factory conditions and exploitative orphanages, but also to contest abuses in more intimate domestic scenes of life and labor. In July 1903, a woman named Marie El Khoury wrote to the French General Consul in Beirut, accusing a Frenchman named Paul Bouziat of beating and threatening her and an acquaintance in his home. El Khoury had brought a young girl named Marie Ayoub to work as a maid for Bouziat, but Ayoub left after two weeks, apologizing to El Khoury that “she was not happy in that house.” Just a few hours after Ayoub’s departure, El Khoury reported to the consul, Bouziat summoned both to his home. When they arrived, he closed the doors and suddenly began beating them with a cane, until they were “almost faint from suffering.” He then allegedly pulled out a revolver and threatened the two women. Marie Ayoub was able to escape, and ran around the house opening doors and crying out for help. A passing neighbor heard the cries and came to pull Bouziat away, even as the latter continued to hit El Khoury “even harder.”<sup>23</sup>

In her appeal to the French consul, Marie El Khoury not only incriminated Bouziat’s violent abuse. Her letter also deployed a particular discursive tactic that functioned both to legitimize her own status—as a credible appellant and an honorable victim—and to call that of the Frenchman into question. Even as she denounced Bouziat’s individual conduct, she hailed the historic virtue of French civilization, praising the role of “the French who so contributed to

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<sup>23</sup> CADN 92 PO/A 194. 14 July 1903, Marie el Koury [sic] to CGF Beyrouth.

distancing slavery.” Her appeal for justice represented more than a desperate plea for retribution from an aggrieved victim, and her reference to a historic French role in combating slavery operated not simply as rhetorical flattery. After invoking this national pedigree, she declared Bouziat “unworthy to carry that glorious name” of Frenchman, rejecting his very Frenchness in a letter to his own French representative.<sup>24</sup> His abusive and uncivilized behavior, her assertion implied, betrayed standards of French moral comportment—standards for which El Khoury herself implicitly assumed the role of arbiter.

My purpose in describing the 1903 confrontation between Marie El Khoury and Paul Bouziat is not merely to reveal the evident fissures in the imperial mythology of *la France du Levant*, as a narrative of beloved and benevolent French protection of grateful Lebanese Christians. The incident also shows how this narrative—and the precepts of comportment undergirding a fictive notion of Frenchness—was at once contested, reaffirmed, and remolded in an intimate context of interaction. The idealized bonds between France and Lebanon were indeed forged through the pronouncements of diplomats, politicians, and Orientalists, heralding mythic ties of allegiance and staking claims to imperial prerogatives. But the implications of this ideological construct were worked out in everyday encounters like Bouziat and El Khoury’s over proximate concerns of insult and offensive conduct. Their confrontation functioned as a micro-site of Franco-Lebanese contact, through which imperial anxieties were both instantiated and enacted. A quarrel between a Frenchman and his maid became a dispute over the meaning of French protection and prestige, as well as Lebanese affection, premised on standards of appropriate conduct.

Paul Bouziat reported his altercation with Marie El Khoury and Marie Ayoub to the French consul only *after* learning of El Khoury’s complaint, and in response to the “scandal” she

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid. Incidentally, she sent her missive on July 14, the French national holiday.

had supposedly incited among the local population. In his version of events, the incident reflected not his own lack of control and indecent comportment, but El Khoury's. This reversal did not simply mark a retaliatory counter-claim.<sup>25</sup> In rejecting El Khoury's accusations, Bouziate also proposed his own account of her inappropriate behavior. He linked her actions and attitude, moreover, to a general anti-European bias and popular antagonism that he perceived as levied against him. His schema of social interaction thus destabilized presumptions of Franco-Lebanese harmony, framing the tensions of imperial ideology within a site of quotidian conflict.

As Bouziate recounted to the consul, his encounter with Marie El Khoury and Marie Ayoub began not with his own precipitate violence, but with his restrained response to an alleged theft. Rather than fleeing from mistreatment, Ayoub only left Bouziate's service, in this narrative, after he discovered that she had stolen "several items of clothing" and other objects. Bouziate stressed his merciful response, explaining to the consul that "out of pure benevolence," he at first did not even file a complaint, satisfied to retain a half-month of Ayoub's wages.<sup>26</sup> He did charge El Khoury with complicity in the theft, though, and with damaging his reputation. She had deceived him by guaranteeing his maid's integrity, and she had frequently stayed with Ayoub in his home for long periods of time, including in the laundry room, from whence the clothing had disappeared. Suspecting El Khoury of hiding the stolen objects, Bouziate sought to enlist the Ottoman police to search her home; their refusal to do so fueled another of Bouziate's grievances, his conviction of local anti-European hostility. El Khoury reacted aggressively to his accusation,

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<sup>25</sup> Nor am I here attempting to uncover or adjudicate the facts of the case. Whether or not these events occurred as Bouziate—or El Khoury—recounted them is beside the point; it is not to arbitrate truth that I am assessing their claims and language. Nor is my analysis dependent on the outcome of this case—which is neither recorded in the archive, nor an entirely apt description, for the dueling complaints were not statements for a consular legal court, but appeals to a more abstract notion of protection. How each framed their encounter points to foundational assumptions shaping their negotiation of difference and conflict.

<sup>26</sup> CADN 92 PO/A 194, 21 July 1903, Bouziate to CGF Beyrouth.

Bouziat claims, coming to insult him and his wife. He insists, though, that they responded “politely” to her outburst.<sup>27</sup>

More than the theft, which Bouziat professed to the consul was “little important in itself”—even as he noted the 40-franc value of the clothing and insisted upon its return—he objected to the “scandal” that El Khoury had incited in his neighborhood over the incident. This agitation threatened to fan popular “hostility,” he feared, and endangered both him and his wife. Bouziat bristled at being “accused of the worst things,” in the street and even at the consulate, notwithstanding his stated indifference to whether “one speaks ill” of him. Confident that both French consular and Ottoman authority would reject the complaint against him—and that the court of public opinion would also condemn Ayoub as a thief—Bouziat nonetheless opted to take up his own complaint against El Khoury and Ayoub, to serve as a “much deserved lesson” for their scandal-mongering.<sup>28</sup> Abetting the plot to tarnish his reputation, he asserted, were the “disreputable people” of the local population, whom he referred to disparagingly as the “*fellahs*” of the neighborhood.” These backward peasants, supported by corrupt Ottoman police officers, Bouziat warned the French consul, should be considered the “devious enemies of Europeans.”<sup>29</sup>

Even as he maligned the “inferior people of the neighborhood,” Paul Bouziat insisted that he wanted simply “to live quietly” in his *quartier*. The “hostility” that he faced was “real, but inexplicable,” he professed, given his avowed disinterest in the petty “what will one say?” of social relations. Before the incident with Marie Ayoub, he had not even pursued “the multiple little thefts” to which he claimed that “all Europeans” were victimized, at the hands of “native servants or shopkeepers.”<sup>30</sup> Nor could the Ottoman police be trusted to protect Europeans’

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> CADN 92 PO/A 194. 22 July 1903, Bouziat to CGF Beyrouth; 21 July, Bouziat to CGF Beyrouth.

<sup>29</sup> CADN 92 PO/A 194. 21 July 1903, Bouziat to CGF Beyrouth.

<sup>30</sup> CADN 92 PO/A 194. 22 July 1903, Bouziat to CGF Beyrouth.

interests. He issued a formal complaint against one officer, whom he accused of intimidating a witness in his favor and of “taking the side of the Arab against the Frenchman every time.”<sup>31</sup> Bouziate presented himself as a representative European, beleaguered by indigenous duplicity and resentment. He concluded that “this evident hostility” of his non-European neighbors was not only directed toward himself, but targeted “the European, the Frenchman who, for all those people, is the enemy.”<sup>32</sup>

Like Marie El Khoury’s appeal to the consul, then, Bouziate also deployed a notion of French prestige and protection to situate himself within a field of hostile encounters. Whereas El Khoury challenged Bouziate’s corruption of France’s historic virtue, Bouziate invoked his French status defensively, as fortification against the threat of non-European Others. He appealed explicitly to the French consul to guarantee “our security” and “assure our protection,” staking his claim to legitimate status as a Frenchman.<sup>33</sup> Bouziate’s delineation of dichotomous categories of Arabs and Frenchmen, natives and Europeans, moreover, closely tracked with classic colonial mechanisms of racialized knowledge and classification.<sup>34</sup> In his schema, an overwhelmed European minority struggled to maintain authority over a deviant and dangerous indigenous population. Even an individual troublemaker like El Khoury threatened to disrupt the structural hierarchy in which Bouziate firmly embedded his conception of French identity. His call to teach El Khoury a “lesson,” and to address the Ottoman police officer’s supposed anti-European bias, rehearsed the paternalistic disciplinary mechanism with which colonial regimes secured control and compliance. In the context of Lebanon, though, as the heart of the purported *France du*

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<sup>31</sup> CADN 92 PO/A 194. 21 July 1903, Bouziate to Premier Drogman, CGF Beyrouth.

<sup>32</sup> CADN 92 PO/A 194. 22 July 1903, Bouziate to CGF Beyrouth.

<sup>33</sup> CADN 92 PO/A 194. 21 July 1903, Bouziate to Premier Drogman, CGF Beyrouth.

<sup>34</sup> On the construction of colonial categories, see especially Ann Laura Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995); and Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002)

*Levant*, the reactionary logic with which Bouziate perceived local hostility exposed particular slippages between an ideology of benevolent influence and an imperial impetus of domination. Bouziate's encounter with El Khoury enacted this dialectic at a micro-level, through a quotidian contestation over individual conduct and its regulation.

In his report of their exchange, Bouziate underscored the deviance of Marie El Khoury's behavior from gendered norms of civilized comportment. He asserts that the sudden outburst of abuse that her arrival at his home with Marie Ayoub was not his own, but El Khoury's, who began "grossly insulting" him and his wife "without provocation." When he ordered her to leave, she refused, and continued to let out the "veritable cries of a wild beast."<sup>35</sup> Once she was outside, El Khoury continued screaming and even "began to disrobe without modesty" and throw stones at Bouziate, his wife, and their neighbors.<sup>36</sup> Bouziate aligned El Khoury's irrational and aggressive conduct with the hostility of the "disreputable" local population, positioning himself as both honorable victim and demonstrable superior. Depicting El Khoury as an insolent and hysterical intruder, he dehumanized her behavior and underscored her transgressions of feminine respectability and civilized comportment. Coupled with her complicity in Marie Ayoub's alleged theft, the "odious scene" that she caused in his home established for Bouziate El Khoury's violation of both property and propriety. Bouziate thus contrasted his own upstanding social behavior with these two crucial standards of respectable conduct.

From his accusation of his maid's theft, to his reaction to Marie El Khoury's scandalmongering and supposed misbehavior—overlaid with his perception of ubiquitous anti-French sentiment—Paul Bouziate situated himself both within and against the narrative of French influence and affection in Lebanon. Marie El Khoury's questioning of Bouziate's very

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<sup>35</sup> CADN 92 PO/A 194. 21 July 1903, Bouziate to CGF Beyrouth.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*



Frenchness, though, demonstrated the potential to redeploy the discursive tropes of French virtue and Franco-Lebanese connection to remold these ties and assert her own individual dignity. Through her intervention, the question of appropriate conduct in a quotidian confrontation between employee, employer, and neighbors—routed through France’s own consular authority—became a central site of contesting imperial ideology. Her interposition in the politics of French identity restructured both a racialized hierarchy and its malleable boundaries, exposing the category of European as at once overdetermined and unstable.<sup>37</sup> Even as an instrumental and idealized notion of Frenchness conveyed standards of morality, comportment, and civilization, the margins of this amorphous concept were subject to revision, whether through a perceived invasive threat from indigenous “enemies,” according to Bouziat, or by El Khoury’s assertion that even a putative Frenchman could prove himself “unworthy” of the name.

### **Insulted Encounters**

#### *Monsieur Culty’s Honor*

In August 1902, the inhabitants of the village of Broummana presented a petition to the French General Consul in Beirut, alleging that a local French silk industrialist named Silvestre Culty had repeatedly insulted the local clergy and Sisters of Charity, stolen from his merchants and workers, and even perpetrated “immoral actions” on the young girls who worked in his silk-spinning factory. The villagers were “ashamed to enumerate” Culty’s acts of misconduct, and alleged that such unspeakable behavior—with insinuations of sexual abuse—jeopardized the “conservation of his honor.” Without any legal mechanism of enforcement, the petition requested that the consulate expel Culty from the town. It even asserted that Culty’s “lack of humanitarian

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<sup>37</sup> Ann Laura Stoler has richly explored this dynamic in the context of the colonial Dutch East Indies. Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge*.

sentiments, lack of honor, and habits of theft...belie[d] that he is French by origin.”<sup>38</sup> Similarly to consular appellants like Marie El Khoury and the widows Aramouni and Abou-Akar, the Broummana petitioners deployed an idealized notion of French identity to indict a supposed Frenchman’s very ability to maintain this status.

The Broumana villagers’ conflict with Culty—as well as his counter-allegations of the petitioners’ hostility—represents another site of confrontation over French industrial and ideological interventions in early twentieth-century Lebanon. With the petition’s accusations, the townspeople of Broumana reformulated the premises of esteem, respectability, and virtue undergirding French imperial ideology in the Levant. The Frenchman Culty’s indignant response, on the other hand, sought to defend his own honor, status, and position of influence from the villagers’ slander. Highlighting such quotidian disputes over insulted reputations and offensive conduct reveals contradictions within an idealized narrative of French prestige and protection and illustrates how French and Lebanese men and women revised these ideological registers to negotiate immediate concerns of individual interest and reputation.

To defend his honor, Culty responded to the petitioners’ accusations by identifying their alleged instigators as two disgruntled former employment-seekers, who now sought vengeance by damaging Culty’s reputation. One he referred to as a village sheikh, whose services Culty had turned down because of his “misbehavior” in previous work, and who now supposedly “recounted to whomever will listen that he will get rid of [Culty].”<sup>39</sup> The other, Culty suspected, was a man named Sémian, for whom Culty had rescinded a work of silk-spinning. Sémian then attempted “by his intrigues” to prevent someone else from doing the work, and then appeared at Culty’s factory, whereupon Culty professes that he sent him away “without any violence on my

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<sup>38</sup> CADN 92 PO/A 183. 6 August 1902, Inhabitants Broummana to CGF Beyrouth.

<sup>39</sup> CADN 92 PO/A 183. Undated, S. Culty to CGF Beyrouth.

part!”—stressing his restraint in responding to his antagonist’s improper conduct. After another connivance “to do [him] wrong” went awry, Culty claimed, Sémian then colluded with the Broummana sheikh to collect signatures against him. He dismissed the petition as a forgery and their accusations as frivolous, under the presumption that “it was the same with this intrigue as all those that take place in this country every day.”<sup>40</sup> By insinuating that such frivolous complaints were habitual for local populations, Culty naturalized the behavior of his two conniving adversaries as regular practices, at odds with his European standards of management and comportment.

Even as he bemoaned the insults and “intrigues” against him, Silvestre Culty insisted that he enjoyed a solid reputation in the community. He claimed that two local notables had offered to collect a counter-petition on his behalf, and he stressed his factory’s regional popularity, stating that his workers “prefer to work with [him], more than to go to the filatures close to the villages where their families are.”<sup>41</sup> His factory, he implied, provided a benevolent paternalist authority that assuaged even the anxieties of local families who sent their daughters to work outside of the home. In underscoring his reputable position as a factory manager, Culty sought not only to discredit the petition’s specific allegations, but also to defend his local status and moral honor, and thereby uphold tenets of French prestige in the region.

Notwithstanding his rejection of the petitioners’ “plot” against him, Culty recognized the stakes of the accusation for France’s ideological investment in Mount Lebanon. In his letter to the consul, he acknowledged his position “in a country where France has very great interests by the protection that it accords the clergy and hence the Christian population.” In contrast to the petition’s denunciation of his unworthy Frenchness, Culty pointedly affirmed “his duty as a

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

Frenchman to follow the policy of my Government,” directly linking his own conduct and reputation to an ideology of French protection. He avows that “never, ever would [he] commit by either word or deed anything that would be contrary” to French political imperatives, and assured the consul that he “respect[s] the clergy and the populations in the middle of which [he] live[s].”<sup>42</sup> As a loyal Frenchman, he in turn appealed to the consul’s “powerful and benevolent protection,” in its responsibility to “preserve in all times and places the life and honor of French subjects.”<sup>43</sup> Culty thus situated himself as an agent—as well as an object—of French prestige, protection, and economic intervention in Lebanon, reasserting his Frenchness against indigenous claims that targeted his national identity, social standing, and individual morality. Yet Culty’s conduct arguably derived less from adherence to coherent French “interests” than from the more proximate politics of status and dignity through which he confronted the insults and accusations of his antagonists.<sup>44</sup>

Culty’s professed “respect” for the local population did not extend to those he held responsible for circulating such “odious calumnies” against him. He demanded that over a hundred “peasants of Broummana” be “severely punished” for supporting the petition’s accusations.<sup>45</sup> In response to the “great prejudice, as much material as moral...on [his] honor” that such “lies and injustices” had wreaked, Culty insisted that the guilty parties be imprisoned and each pay him 500 francs in “personal damage interests.”<sup>46</sup> By quantifying the supposed harm

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> On the gendered and political significance of insults in the context of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Bolivia, see Laura Gotkowitz, “Trading Insults: Honor, Violence, and the Gendered Culture of Commerce in Cochabamba, Bolivia, 1870s–1950s” *Hispanic American Historical Review* 83, no. 1, (February 2003): 83–118. See also “Cosmopolitan Cursing in Late Nineteenth-Century Alexandria,” in *Cosmopolitanisms in Muslim Contexts: Perspectives from the Past*, eds. Derryl N. MacLean and Sikeena Karmali Ahmed (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012).

<sup>45</sup> Culty claims that at the head of the petition was the village priest, a certain Youssef Abou-Karam, with whom, as we will see below, both Culty and the Consul were already familiar.

<sup>46</sup> CADN 92 PO/A 183. 18 September 1902, S. Culty to CGF Beyrouth.

to his honor, Culty staked his material interests to his moral reputation in negotiations to rebut his accusers' aspersions and preserve his reputation. Sensitive to violations of propriety and prestige as well as threats to his profit and productivity, Culty deployed languages of both amity and insult to navigate the tensions of quotidian confrontations and "triumph over all these infamies" cast by the Broummana villagers.<sup>47</sup>

The petition against Culty—whether as retribution to spurned employment or an indictment of an employer's abusive behavior—exposed tensions over honor and reputation at the heart of French imperial protection and ideologies of mutual affection in Lebanon. For Culty, maintaining his status—in Broummana, as a silk factory manager, and as a Frenchman—was not only essential for his industry's economic viability, but also a political, ideological, and indeed personal imperative. By denouncing his commercial and sexual rectitude, on the other hand, the Broummana petitioners called Culty's very morality—let alone his privileged Frenchness—into question, scrambling codes of moral comportment central to notions of European status, authority, and modernity.<sup>48</sup> The confrontation over Culty's alleged misconduct, intersected by his dispute of local animadversions, represented not simply a microcosm of imperial politics, nor merely a parochial clash over spiteful allegations and an aggrieved European's amour-propre. The altercation brought together two realms of interconnection—ideological and local, imperial and interpersonal—that engendered contested negotiations over morality and the meaning of French and Lebanese contact. In the not-quite-colonial context of pre-war Mount Lebanon, Culty proclaimed both his amiable relations with local inhabitants—notables and workers alike—and his commitment to France's economic and geopolitical interests in the region. Tenuously binding

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<sup>47</sup> CADN 92 PO/A 183. 19 December 1902, Culty to CGF Beyrouth.

<sup>48</sup> The question of "modernity" in the Middle East has been the subject of a rich literature. See especially Keith David Watenpaugh, *Being Modern in the Middle East: Revolution, Nationalism, Colonialism, and the Arab Middle Class*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006.

these imperatives of affection and intervention were the symbolic stakes and unstable standards of comportment and respectability.

*Louis Abi Karame's Beard*

Silvestre Culty witnessed another incident involving an injured reputation and endangered esteem the previous year, in the course of which the narrative of France's protective allegiance to Lebanese Maronites suffered a literal provocation by the pulling of a priest's beard. The Maronite priest, Louis Abi Karame, was leaving a visit to Culty's house in Broummana when, he alleged to the French consul in October 1901, a Frenchman named Duc-Quercy and his wife suddenly came upon him and "hit [him] with several blows."<sup>49</sup> The ultimate indignity during the assault occurred when Mme Duc-Quercy violently pulled the priest's beard during the attack, "in plain view and to the grand scandal of the indignant passersby." The Maronite Patriarch deemed the incident serious enough to contact the French consul, declaring that the attack represented "the first time, at least to my knowledge, that a Maronite priest was thus treated by a Frenchman." Its consequences, the Patriarch averred, went beyond the mistreatment of Abi Karame himself, as "such an incident [was] unworthy, regrettable, and detrimental to the French influence in our country." He not only acknowledged this influence, but also still proclaimed the "devoted support" of the Maronite clergy.<sup>50</sup> A dispute over insulted honor again exposed tensions between imperatives to uphold French protection and prestige in Lebanon.

Blanchon, the French consular official sent to investigate the scene in Broummana, concentrated only on the aspects of the incident that threatened its French participants, mandated to "assure for our nationals the protection that they were urgently calling for" and to "protect Frenchmen from any act of violence against their persons." This responsibility required gauging

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<sup>49</sup> CADN 92 PO/A 199. 21 October 1901, Louis Abi Karame to Président de la République.

<sup>50</sup> CADN 92 PO/A 199. Elias Pierre Hoyek to Consul, 8 October 1901.

local sentiment and behavior, as the Duc-Quercys faced a “still furious crowd, ready to throw stones” after the event. Another Frenchman at the scene, M. Olivier, was also “assailed by stone throws,” in response to which he “fired one or two rifle shots, which made the aggressors flee.” Local hostility had not abated the following day, when an angry crowd again threatened the Frenchmen. Olivier drew his gun, “threatening to fire at the first projectile,” and Culty wielded a revolver to “keep the people at bay.”<sup>51</sup> The potentially violent scene signaled to Blanchon the imperative to maintain order in Broummana and seemed to contravene narratives of amity and esteem supposedly guiding principles of French-Maronite relations.

Pending consular intervention, the threatened Frenchmen pledged to take any means necessary to “protect themselves.”<sup>52</sup> Negotiating the politics of protection between French expatriates and Maronite Lebanese, Blanchon invoked not France’s traditional Catholic protectorate, but the practical exigencies of preserving Frenchmen’s status and safety. He urged Duc-Quercy to “avoid any attitude that could offend people who were overexcited, and not to uselessly extend his stay in this village,” but also insisted that the district governor ensure that “Frenchmen are in no way disturbed in their comings and goings.”<sup>53</sup> Circuits of mobility and standards of conduct, Blanchon’s instruction implied, operated for Frenchmen and Lebanese according to distinct logics and asymmetrical power dynamics, as well as contradictory imperatives of protection.

If for Blanchon the incident underscored the dangers of an “overexcited” indigenous population, Louis Abi Karame perceived the episode as an affront to his local reputation as well as to his elite status in relations with the French. The Duc-Quercys’ conduct presented what the

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<sup>51</sup> Archives du Ministère des affaires étrangères (hereafter MAE) 206 CPCOM 427. 8 Oct 1901, A. Blanchon (Beyrouth) to CGF Beyrouth. See also CADN 92 PO/A 199. 8 October 1901, Olivier to CGF Beyrouth.

<sup>52</sup> CADN 92 PO/A 199. 7 October 1901 S. Culty and Duc-Quercy (Broummana) to CGF Beyrouth.

<sup>53</sup> MAE 206 CPCOM 427. 8 October 1901, Blanchon (Beyrouth) to CGF Beyrouth.

Maronite Patriarch described as “a bad example given to our populations accustomed to respect and veneration for the priest,” endangering hierarchies based on deference and proper comportment. The Duc-Quercys had allegedly violated these tenets even before the beard-pulling incident; when Abi Karame had hosted the Duc-Quercys in his home for nearly a month and a half, the latter allegedly “spew[ed] blasphemy” and insulted the Pope and his bishops.<sup>54</sup> Abi Karame described how the Duc-Quercys demeaned not only his religious affiliation, but even his “love for the Republic,” the ultimate offense in a litany of disrespectful remarks.<sup>55</sup>

To prove his “attachment to France,” Abi Karame appended a poem in his letter to the French consul, in which he pledged “love, honor, and glory” to France and its soldiers. He had already sent the poem to the French president, hopefully expecting recognition for his “numerous years of free service in France and Lebanon.” Calling himself “a valiant soldier of France,” Abi Karame juxtaposed the outsider status of Duc-Quercy, whom he qualified as a “French tourist, Jewish by race and anarchist by confession.” Bracketing Abi Karame’s evident anti-Semitism, he branded the Duc-Quercys’ Frenchness as superficial and religiously, racially, and politically subversive. In so doing, he sought to reinforce his own self-proclaimed status as “the great Frenchman in the area,” where he claimed that “the name of Abi Karame has become a synonym of a Frenchman.”<sup>56</sup> He professed his “immortal attachment” to France, out of the “pure sentiment of [his] heart,” deploying a vocabulary of emotion and piety to avow “all his sympathy” and his “sincerity to serve France,” notwithstanding the harm to his personal integrity. The previous year, he had requested French “special protection” from the Foreign Ministry, referring to France

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<sup>54</sup> CADN 92 PO/A 199. 7 Oct. 1901, l’Abbé Louis Abi Karamé to Vice-Consul [Beyrouth]; 7 October 1901, N. Selouan Archevêche Maronite de Chypre (Résidence au Mont Liban) to MAE.

<sup>55</sup> CADN 92 PO/A 199. 21 October 1901. Louis Abi Karame to Président de la République.

<sup>56</sup> CADN 92 PO/A 199, 21 October 1901. Louis Abi Karame to Président de la République; 27 October 1901, Abbé Louis Abi Karame (Broummana) to CGF Beyrouth. A regional Ottoman official even requested—possibly at Abi Karame’s initiative—that the French Consul obtain documentation from Duc-Quercy proving his French identity. 92 PO/A 199, Rechid Caïmacam du Caza du Meten to CGF Beyrouth, 9 October 1901.



as “that tender mother in our countries of the Orient.”<sup>57</sup> While Abi Karame’s language of filial loyalty may have been intended to flatter his French interlocutor, his promises of affective allegiance, respectable conduct, and local prestige also sought to redraw the boundaries of Frenchness in order to bolster his own status and reaffirm France’s protective obligations.

Even as Abi Karame assured the French consul that the altercation with the Duc-Quercys, would not “tarnish [Maronites’] attachment and...love for the noble nation of the Franks,” and indeed would “only increase our esteem and rekindle more and more our zeal for the service of the French cause in our country,” he simultaneously heralded the danger that popular hostility posed to Maronite support of France.<sup>58</sup> Warning of the “indignation...at the heart of the whole population” and their “mortal mistrust for the name ‘Frangi’ European,” he tapped into a prominent undercurrent of imperial anxiety over French prestige.<sup>59</sup> The Frenchmen threatened by angered crowds concurred, as Olivier reported shouts of “Damned be France!” which, worse, had been uttered by those “who pretended to be friends of France.”<sup>60</sup> Abi Karame, by juxtaposing the specter of hostility toward the French with his own unwavering devotion, seemed to position himself as an intermediary between French political elites and Maronite masses. With a hint of bitter sarcasm, he wrote again to the French president, referencing his earlier spurned reward and asking whether after such a “monstrous attack,” he “has not deserved his prize this time.”<sup>61</sup> Through his role as elite intermediary within a fragile ideological edifice of French prestige and protection, Abi Karame conveyed the severity of the attack on his honor, while still identifying himself with the status of Frenchman.

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<sup>57</sup> MAE 206 CPCOM 427. 11 Sept 1900, Abbé Louis Abi Karame (Alep) to President MAE.

<sup>58</sup> CADN 92 PO/A 199. 27 October 1901, Abbé Louis Abi Karam (Broummana) to CGF Beyrouth.

<sup>59</sup> “Frangi” or “farangi” indicated a European, a term dating from the arrival of Frankish Crusaders.

<sup>60</sup> CADN 92 PO/A 199. 8 October 1901 Olivier (Beyrouth) to CGF Beyrouth.

<sup>61</sup> CADN 92 PO/A 199. 21 October 1901. Louis Abi Karame to Président de la République.

*Charles Guerin's Ultimatum*

Louis Abi Karame was not the only prominent figure in early twentieth-century Lebanon to be threatened with a beard-related insult. In the course of a 1907 dispute with local Ottoman officials in Qraiyeḥ over water rights, the owner of *Veuve Guerin et Fils*, Charles Guerin—along with his beard—was the target of local heckles and hostility. Guerin's employee, Youssif Bellama, had been collecting signatures to protest the appropriation of water that VGF used for its factory, when several individuals shouted “very gross insults” and death threats directed toward both him and his employer. These “very serious and intolerable insults” evidently included an epithet by which Bellama's antagonists “damn[ed] the beard of [his] master.”<sup>62</sup> Upon learning of this curse, Guerin was “told that this is a serious insult,” and therefore duly considered the comment an “insult to [his] honor, of which it seems that the beard is an emblem here.” Even though Guerin seemed not to comprehend the precise significance of the insult, he nonetheless reacted brusquely to its perceived offensiveness. He immediately issued an ultimatum: unless the guilty individuals were punished within fifteen days, he would shut his factory down, take his operations out of the country, and cut off credit to local merchants and silk-spinners, thereby putting “about a thousand people on the pavement and [causing] the ruin of about a dozen silk-spinners.”<sup>63</sup>

Tactical bluster aside, Guerin's readiness to hold the town's economic vitality hostage and threaten “an entire population [with] misery” provides insight into the interplay of honor and the politics of confrontation in Qraiyeḥ.<sup>64</sup> Guerin's threat seems even more impetuous given his unfamiliarity with the curse. This incomprehension, though, may have only aggravated Guerin's

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<sup>62</sup> CADN 92 PO/A 301. 4 June 1907, VGF to Emir Moussa (Mudir de Hammana); 5 June 1907, Habitants de quelques villages du Metten El Ala et voisins du village du Krey; 5 June 1907, Charles Guerin (Krey) to CGF Beyrouth.

<sup>63</sup> CADN 92 PO/A 301. 5 June 1907, Charles Guerin (Krey) to CGF Beyrouth.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

sense of affront; like Orwell shooting the elephant, Guerin was not willing to risk losing face to a potentially hostile local population, even—or especially—in unintelligible cultural circumstances. Maintaining an untarnished and unassailable status as a European was essential to upholding the fictitious structures of superiority that ostensibly separated him from the local population. Guerin’s aggressive paternalism—as “the Father who hits his children hard because he loves them” in the factory—would not permit a context in which “those people could believe that [he] fear[ed] them,” which would undercut and indeed reverse the power dynamics by which Guerin maintained his reputation and authority.<sup>65</sup> Instead, VGF demanded a full inquiry and punishment of “the perpetrators of disorder, in order to reestablish order and preserve our honor” in Qraiyeḥ.<sup>66</sup> The emphasis on order recalls the anxious arrangement of colonial contexts according to hierarchies of European civilization and untamed indigeneity, while the preoccupation with honor resonates with notions of imperial prestige. The imperative of inviolable esteem tensely co-existed with the coercive pressure that Guerin deployed upon the native townspeople of Qraiyeḥ.

Guerin’s appeal for the “protection of the French government” heralded his company’s role in revitalizing France’s faltering—or formerly—profitable interests in the region’s silk economy, championing his factory as “a model filature in this country for the renovation of this industry which is highly in need of it!”<sup>67</sup> To contest attempts to target VGF as “foreigners in the country,” Guerin leveraged the tool of potential village impoverishment and submitted a petition from the “terrorized inhabitants of Qraiyeḥ” themselves, pleading that a cessation of VGF’s operations would cause “about a thousand workers who are our children and our relatives [to] be

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<sup>65</sup> Cited in Serge Chassagne, *Veuve Guérin et fils, banque et soie. Une affaire de famille (1716-1932)* (Lyon: BGA Permezel), 274.

<sup>66</sup> CADN 92 PO/A 301. 4 June 1907, VGF to Emir Moussa (Mudir de Hammana); 5 June 1907, Charles Guerin (Krey) to CGF Beyrouth.

<sup>67</sup> CADN 92 PO/A 301. 10 June 1907, Charles Guerin to CGF Beyrouth.

deprived of their daily bread.”<sup>68</sup> Underscoring his company’s purported indispensability to the local as well as the French economy, Guerin grafted the micro-politics of water rights in Qraiyeḥ—and the offense to his individual honor and authority—onto the ideology of French interests and influence in Lebanon.

*Duabis Murr on the Dockside*

Ten years later, another incident of insult reached the French General Consul, involving slander not from allegedly hostile Lebanese, but from another French consular official. The dispute arose when a Lebanese lawyer named Duaibis Murr, bidding farewell to a friend departing on a crowded steamer in Beirut’s harbor in December 1912, inadvertently bumped into a man and a woman attempting to disembark. The man, Murr speculates, assumed that he was obstructing the woman’s passage, so “this Monsieur then permitted himself to insult [him] and say outrageous words to [him], such as: Dirty Arab – Pig – Banabac.”<sup>69</sup> Though he did not know the identity of his aggressor at the time, Murr was further piqued when he learned that “this *gentlemen* [sic]...was none other than the Honorable P. de Fournestreaux Vice-Consul of France in Beirut,” just arriving in the city to assume his post. “Boldly insulted and deeply offended” by de Fournestreaux’s epithets, Murr issued a formal complaint to the latter’s consular superior, insisting that the “Honorable de Fournestreaux...isn’t permitted to so easily insult everyone.”<sup>70</sup>

Typewritten on professional stationery, with a signature specifying his law degree from Paris, Murr’s complaint to the consul sought to establish the credentials of his own bourgeois—and culturally European—respectability. The shaming at the port, he suggests, was particularly

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<sup>68</sup> CADN 92 PO/A 301. 5 June 1907, Charles Guerin (Krey) to CGF Beyrouth; 5 June 1907, Habitants de quelques villages du Metten El Ala et voisins du village du Krey.

<sup>69</sup> “Banabac” was derived roughly from a Turkish expression for “look at me,” and functioned in French as a pejorative term for Near Eastern *indigènes*, or natives.

<sup>70</sup> CADN 92 PO/A 258, 29 December 1912, Duaibis Murr to CGF Beyrouth.

acute given its public nature, in front of a reputable crowd of “honorable merchants of the city” who witnessed de Fournestreaux’s act of disrespect. To demonstrate his own reputable status, Murr listed the honors and recognitions he had received from European governments, recommending that “it would be advisable that the Honorable P. de Fournestreaux know that he whom he called ‘Banabac’ is placed officially by the French Government amidst the legal profession; [and] that he whom the Honorable P. de Fournestreaux called ‘dirty Arab’ was admitted to the bar of the Supreme Court of His British Majesty.” In response to the “audacity” of the insult, Murr demanded that de Fournestreaux “recognize himself at fault and immediately give [him] full satisfaction.”<sup>71</sup> Murr’s formulation even seemed to resemble bourgeois European dueling culture, in its tendency to elevate a minor assault on one’s character to a dire matter of personal honor and social esteem.<sup>72</sup>

In addition to citing his European professional qualifications, Murr’s letter also extolled an abstract ideal of “noble France...that beautiful country of Justice, of Virtue, and of Honor.”<sup>73</sup> Murr contrasted his own reputable standing and earned accolades—and even his own enactment of French standards of civilization—with de Fournestreaux’s unseemly behavior and betrayal of his position as “a worthy representative” of his country. The value of ‘Frenchness’ itself, Murr’s appeal implied, derived from stipulations of proper conduct, which he claimed de Fournestreaux contravened upon his very arrival in Beirut. Murr’s complaint to France’s General Consul thus not only defended his reputation at the crowded Beirut harbor; he also redeployed the very tenets of French prestige to contest the honorable status of France’s second-highest official in notionally Francophile Lebanon.

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Robert A. Nye, *Masculinity and Male Codes of Honor in Modern France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

<sup>73</sup> CADN 92 PO/A 258, 29 December 1912, Duaibis Murr to CGF Beyrouth.

When de Fournestreaux called Duaibis Murr a “dirty Arab,” the racialized insult functioned to enforce codes of indigenous contact, mapping European imperial hierarchy onto their dockside altercation. Murr’s indignant response to the French Vice-Consul’s offensive conduct, though, destabilized the very categories that structured both imperial authority and the ideology of French prestige and protection in Lebanon. As Murr challenged his mistreatment and marginalization, he operated in the same idiom of French ‘civilization’ and European respectability that informed de Fournestreaux’s insult. Like the petitioners who denounced the immoral practices of Silvestre Culty to call his “French origin” into question, Duaibis Murr drew upon the supposed virtues of ‘Frenchness’ to condemn an “[un]worthy representative” of “noble France” in Lebanon. Offended as intimately as the Frenchman Culty, Murr’s complaint to the French consul was likewise animated by an insult to his integrity.

### **Scandalous Encounters**

#### *Frenchwomen’s Travails*

When de Fournestreaux called Duaibis Murr a “dirty Arab” on the crowded steamship in Beirut’s harbor, he was reacting to the latter’s unsettling proximity to the woman whom he was escorting. The racialized insult functioned to discipline codes of indigenous contact, mapping the gendered boundaries of European imperial hierarchy onto the French Vice-Consul’s encounter with the Lebanese lawyer. Murr’s indignant response, though, reveals the tensions that strained such imperial logics in the context of Franco-Lebanese relations. The notions of honor and affection that shaped this discursive field provided Murr with the idiom not only to denounce the conduct of a high-ranking French official, but also to contest his own interpellation. He thereby destabilized the very categories that structured the imperial system of gender arrangement and sexual surveillance. As he challenged his mistreatment and marginalization, Murr engaged in the

same imperial discourse of French civilization and European respectability that informed de Fournestreaux's insult and indigenization of Murr as a "dirty Arab." This section surveys a set of gendered confrontations in which imperial anxieties over the racialized virtue and vulnerability of French women were instantiated in sites of contact and conduct that became sites of scandal.

The experience that a 23-year-old Frenchwoman reported to the French General Consul in 1903 exemplified the supposed sexual peril that women risked in traveling alone to fin-de-siècle Beirut.<sup>74</sup> Félicia Peyron recounted to the consul how she had been "deceived"—by a fellow Frenchwoman, moreover—into coming to Beirut to work in a *brasserie* that she claimed turned out to be a brothel. Though "since [her] arrival [she had] wanted to leave" the brothel, she was "threatened to be killed by Turks" if she did, so she escaped covertly, leaving all of her clothes and possessions behind. Peyron affirmed her bourgeois values of respectable appearance and autonomy, lamenting that "the few clothes that [she] has on [her] belong to charitable neighbors who all had pity on [her]."<sup>75</sup> By asserting her unwillingness to work in a brothel, even if this meant sacrificing her possessions and risking penury and uncertainty, Peyron defended her enduring feminine respectability, especially in a dangerous and deceptive foreign context.

In addition to requesting money for travel and clothes, Peyron's missive to the consul issued a warning: "poor women...[who] must go looking [for work] these days will have the same fate."<sup>76</sup> Drawing from her own experience, Peyron articulated the threats that prevailing anxieties of gender and class conjured for European women, particularly those of lesser means or in need of employment, traveling alone to unfamiliar foreign locales. In early twentieth-century Lebanon, ideological premises of French prestige and local Francophilia joined with notions of

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<sup>74</sup> On discourses of morality and social danger in fin-de-siècle Beirut, see Hanssen, *Fin-de-Siècle Beirut*, esp. Ch. 7, "Public Morality and Social Morality."

<sup>75</sup> CADN 92 PO/A 194. 20 January 1903, Félicia Peyron (Beyrouth) to CGF Beyrouth.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

Oriental decadence and danger to create a mixture of allure and insecurity. In such a context, Peyron's plea implies, even the promise of a café job from a fellow Frenchwoman could prove perilously misleading, and poor women like herself needed to rely, at least in theory, on French protection in an overseas urban, Oriental context.

Three years earlier, another Frenchwoman in Beirut, writing the consul to complain of an alleged theft and insult, had insisted that “even on foreign soil any French woman must have the right to be respected.”<sup>77</sup> Another complainant echoed this confidence in France's protection, voicing her assurance to the consul in the same year that “France only protected people of honor and conscience, that France is everywhere the protector of religion, of honor and of the oppressed.”<sup>78</sup> And Paul Bouziate—who would later accuse his maid of theft, and his neighbors of anti-French hostility—appealed to consular intervention in a 1900 dispute against a Beirut photographer named Sabonghi, who he alleged had intentionally placed a photograph of his sister-in-law in a “window facing the road,” exposing her likeness to the gaze of passersby. Bouziate deemed this public exposure of his female relation “contrary to the usage and laws of Orientals as well as to Europeans,” marking Sabonghi's action as morally disreputable, even by “Oriental” standards.<sup>79</sup> In Bouziate's interpretation, Sabonghi's display intentionally deployed the gendered symbolism of feminine modesty and virtue to shame a European woman as well as her male relatives. With his paternalistic defense of his sister-in-law's reputation, Bouziate presented an alleged contravention of both Oriental customs and French prerogative as a threat to European prestige, symbolically incarnated by a woman's image within the frame of a photograph.

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<sup>77</sup> CADN 92 PO/A 174. 7 June 1900, Veuve Calvaire to CGF Beyrouth.

<sup>78</sup> CADN 92 PO/A 174. Latifé Yazbek to CGF Beyrouth, 5 November 1900. French “protégé” status was a product of Ottoman capitulations, as a guarantee to ensure judicial protection of those with religious, cultural, or financial ties to French interests.

<sup>79</sup> CADN 92 PO/A 174. 22 January 1900, Paul Bouziate to CGF Beyrouth.



*Juliette Aubey's Trajectories*

While no archival evidence attests to French consular interest in the photograph of Paul Bouziate's sister-in-law—nor to other complaints and encounters described in this chapter—extensive documentation does reveal a particular fixation with another Frenchwoman in early twentieth-century Beirut. Juliette Aubey arrived in Beirut in 1906; according to her fiancé and his employer, she soon thereafter absconded from their guardianship and was discovered in the company of an Arab medical student. When she refused to return with the two men, Aubey was brought to the consulate for interrogation, then sent to a religious hospital, where she caused a commotion by struggling for a revolver and a razor and threatening to end her own life. Citing the scandal that this scene would cause Beirut's French community, the consul expelled Aubey from the city, intending to return her to her parents in France.<sup>80</sup> Aubey, however, maintained her independent mobility and eventually evaded consular supervision in Egypt.

The danger that Juliette Aubey posed—to her own reputation and to the status of the French community, or *colonie*, of Beirut—derived not from her exploitation or mistreatment, but through her own supposedly inappropriate conduct. The affair of this 18-year-old woman, whose behavior and very presence in the city became subjects of intense official concern, illustrates anxieties over the vulnerability and reputation of French women overseas. Apprehensions over unsupervised white women in extra-metropolitan settings channeled anxieties over interracial contact, sharpening an imperative to preserve feminine respectability from both urban perils and sexual predation.<sup>81</sup> Aubey's ultimate expulsion from Beirut reflects the gendered enforcement

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<sup>80</sup> CADN 92 PO/A 320. 19 February 1906, Rapport Fouques-Duparc, CGF Beyrouth.

<sup>81</sup> A rich and growing literature on white women in colonial territories has explored these tensions as well as women's various forms of resistance. See for example Nupur Chaudhuri and Margaret Strobel, *Western Women and Imperialism: Complicity and Resistance* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992); Julia Clancy-Smith and Frances Gouda, eds., *Domesticating the Empire: Race, Gender, and Family Life in French and Dutch Colonialism* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1998); Carina Ray, "'The White Wife Problem': Sex, Race and the Contested Politics of Repatriation to Interwar British West Africa," *Gender and History* 21, no. 3 (November 2009):

mechanisms that disciplined status and comportment to maintain a fragile façade of French prestige. Her urban trajectories and moral—and potentially mortal—transgressions were perceived to erode the honor and insularity of Beirut’s French community, the not-quite-colonial *colonie* anchoring an imagined empire of affection.<sup>82</sup>

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At the French diplomatic archives in Nantes, in a series on miscellaneous commercial affairs that reached Beirut’s General Consulate, a curiously thick folder on the Affaire Juliette Aubey testifies to the extent of official interest in the young mademoiselle.⁸³ The thirty-four sets of documents in this dossier—more than in any other in the series—record the diplomatic, ministerial, and even parental negotiations over her case, as well as Aubey’s own perspective. Interrogations of Aubey, her fiancé, and her fiancé’s employer are followed by the official report and expulsion order from the consul and his communication with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Paris, French consular personnel in Egypt, and the commanders of the ship designated to transport Aubey to Marseille via Port Said. These archival traces testify not simply to the salience of this particular case, but to the potency of patriarchal logics that themselves transformed an unremarkable incident into material of official interest. Even as Aubey’s parents resisted consular interference with her broken engagement, the French General Consul arrogated paternal authority over her independent decision-making.

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628-646; Rebecca Rogers, *A Frenchwoman’s Imperial Story: Madame Luce in Nineteenth-Century Algeria* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013).

<sup>82</sup> The literal translation of this term is “community,” though it carries a telling connotation of colonial settlement. Nancy Green’s study of Americans’ social networks and consular correspondence in early twentieth-century Paris provides another intriguing example of a non-colonial *colonie*, set in the context of early debates on imperial “Americanization.” Nancy Green, *The Other Americans in Paris: Businessmen, Countesses, Wayward Youth, 1880-1941* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014).

<sup>83</sup> CADN 92 PO/A 320 Affaire commerciales diverses, Dossier “Expulsions – Affaire Juliette Aubey.”

When Aubey traveled to Beirut, she had supposedly been confided to the care of her fiancé, Saloman Soriano, and his employer, the jeweler Georges Matalani.<sup>84</sup> Aubey came to the attention of the French consul, a diplomat named Fouques-Duparc, after she “secretly [and] suddenly left the honorable family to whom she had been entrusted”—Matalani’s—and “ran away” to the home of an Arab medical student named Mahmoud Azmi in the Gemmayzeh district of Beirut, where Soriano and Matalani tracked her down.<sup>85</sup> In his report to the consul the following day, Matalani stated that he “reproached her for her conduct,” signaling his disapproval of her whereabouts and choice of companionship. He testified that Aubey “had been entrusted to [him] until her marriage,” but now renounced this responsibility.<sup>86</sup> Qualifying her as “French and a minor,” he abdicated his supervisory role and urged the consul to “take the measures [he] find[s] appropriate” toward the young woman.<sup>87</sup>

Aubey’s testimony to the consul, however, vehemently asserted her own agency and independent mobility. She repeatedly professed that she “was not entrusted to M. Matalani” and that her parents had not placed her under anyone’s supervision as a condition of her travel to Beirut. When confronted by Matalani and Soriano, she refused to leave with the two men to return to Matalani’s home. She declared that “she was free and that [he] could complain to whomever he wanted,” effectively daring Matalani to denounce her private conduct through the public forum of consular authority. According to Matalani, the young student Azmi even

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<sup>84</sup> Soriano’s likely Sephardic Jewish identity was not broached by any of the parties in the case, nor was Aubey’s presumptive Catholicism. Religious considerations seem to have been less salient than the gendered dimensions of Aubey’s conduct.

<sup>85</sup> CADN 92 PO/A 320. 17 February 1906, Matalani to CGF Beyrouth; 19 February 1906 report CGF Beyrouth. Azmi’s religious affiliation also was not commented upon, though his probable Muslim status likely heightened the racialized stakes of the affair.

<sup>86</sup> CADN 92 PO/A 320. 19 February 1906, Campana, CGF Beyrouth, interrogation G. Matalani.

<sup>87</sup> CADN 92 PO/A 320. 17 February 1906, Matalani to CGF Beyrouth.

threatened him not to return to reclaim Aubey.<sup>88</sup> For her ostensible guardian, Aubey's defiant pronouncement of her individual freedom was compounded by a challenge to his authority and an affront to his masculine dignity.

The French consulate approached Aubey's case as a matter of disciplining a wayward daughter and a disruptive interloper in the French community in Beirut, a young woman who had flouted gendered strictures and evaded familial supervision. Questioned by a consular official, Aubey contradicted her interrogator's paternalistic presumptions, insisting that her parents had entrusted her to neither Soriano nor Matalani. She explained that she "was not getting along with [her] fiancé" and had decided to leave without telling him, since she wished "to avoid the always tedious goodbyes."<sup>89</sup> She had also sent a message that she would "stay a while longer in Beirut" to her mother, who concurred with her decision to leave Soriano, replying that "[if] you see that you will not be happy with that man, leave him and come back to us."<sup>90</sup> Later correspondence between the consul and her parents confirmed this familial acceptance of Aubey's choice. In response to a letter informing them of her expulsion, they stated that they accorded their daughter "full freedom...to contract any profession that will please her, either in France or abroad, or to marry in the way that seem[ed] to her best."<sup>90</sup>

Yet this private affair of a young woman's engagement and her family's permission became a subject of public intervention for France's consulate in Beirut. French consular personnel seemed unwilling to accept that an eighteen-year-old woman had traveled of her own volition, even with parental consent, and could live autonomously in Beirut. Even less

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<sup>88</sup> CADN 92 PO/A 320. 17 February 1906, Campana, CGF Beyrouth, interrogation Juliette Aubey; 16 February 1906, Note Juliette Aubey. Aubey's interrogators curiously do not linger on Azmi's role in the affair, instead focusing on her actions and irresponsibility.

<sup>89</sup> CADN 92 PO/A 320. 17 February 1906, Matalani to CGF Beyrouth.

<sup>90</sup> CADN 92 PO/A 320. 17 February 1906, Campana, CGF Beyrouth, interrogation Juliette Aubey; 26 March 1906, M. and Mme Aubey to CGF Beyrouth.

comprehensible was her decision to abandon her fiancé and seek the company of a local Arab man. In the paternalistic geography of the French *colonie*, Aubey should instead have “come immediately to the consulate,” her interrogator insisted.<sup>91</sup> By eschewing the course of expected feminine subservience, Aubey’s urban itinerary mapped gender anxieties onto an imperial politics of scandal. Given her lack of protection amidst what the consul referred to as the “dangers that a young girl can run in a city like this one,” Fouques-Duparc urged returning Aubey to her parents in Paris.<sup>92</sup>

The French consulate’s fixation on the “dangers” for Aubey must be understood within the context of fin-de-siècle fears over young women’s increasingly independent mobility in modern cities, especially overseas and in colonial territories.<sup>93</sup> As a solitary woman in an urban setting, Aubey faced the heightened scrutiny common to suspected streetwalkers, whose lack of male accompaniment in public space blurred lines between vulnerable and inappropriate femininity.<sup>94</sup> Her discovery in the home of a man other than her fiancé seemed to confirm suspicions of her deviant and potentially immoral conduct. Racialized and religious concerns over the identity of her companion—though conspicuously unspoken—likely amplified the perceived imperative to safeguard Aubey’s purity and preserve Frenchwomen’s reputation. Orientalist typologies conjured Arab masculinity as deficient but dangerous, harboring a threatening sexual rapaciousness for white women.<sup>95</sup> The allegation that Aubey had willingly

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<sup>91</sup> CADN 92 PO/A 320. 17 February 1906, Campana, CGF Beyrouth, interrogation Juliette Aubey.

<sup>92</sup> CADN 92 PO/A 320. 20 February 1906, CGF Beyrouth to Mme Aubey.

<sup>93</sup> Whether or not Aubey could be considered a precursor to the “modern girl,” her insistence on her autonomy and liberty of movement upset traditional expectations that paternal figures ensure women’s safety and livelihood. On the transnational attributes of the “modern girl,” see Alys Eve Weinbaum, *Modern Girl Around the World* Research Group, et al, eds., *The Modern Girl Around the World: Consumption, Modernity, and Globalization* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008).

<sup>94</sup> On discourses of gendered danger in an urban context, see especially Judith Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

<sup>95</sup> This line of analysis is of course indebted to Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).

absconded with Azmi not only jeopardized her racial sensibilities and sexual respectability, but also endangered the gendered presentation of French prestige in Beirut.

After Aubey refused to return to the home of Georges Matalani during her interrogation on February 16, she allegedly “provoked a veritable scandal at the General Consulate by her screams and protestations.” In response to her outburst, Fouques-Duparc determined that Aubey “had to be consigned to the Hospital of the Sisters of Charity”—a verdict that reflected a contemporaneous practice of confining “deviant” women in medical and psychological institutions.<sup>96</sup> Her unruly actions accentuated her already questionable conduct: her disloyal departure from her fiancé, suspicious assignation with Azmi, and adamant rejection of both Matalani’s overture and consular protection. Fouques-Duparc’s decision to institutionalize Aubey—whether in response to her intransigence, potential immorality, or perceived insecurity—restricted her mobility and disciplined her inappropriate behavior. The scandal at the consulate, triggering an imperial sensitivity to endangered reputation, prefigured Fouques-Duparc’s even more decisive reaction to the scene at the hospital that followed, prompting his order to expel the young woman from Beirut.

On the morning of February 18, Saloman Soriano, accompanied by an indigenous officer of the French consulate named Abdallah Lebbana, visited his former fiancée at the Sisters of Charity hospital. According to Lebbana’s testimony later that day, Aubey and Soriano “exchanged a few words, behind [him], in a low voice,” and he overheard Aubey saying “I want it now, now.” After leaving the room, he noticed through the window that Aubey was holding “a revolver in her hand.” He then returned and demanded the weapon, which she had hidden. As he searched her, Aubey suddenly produced the revolver “from underneath her skirts,” so he

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<sup>96</sup> CADN 92 PO/A 320. 19 February 1906, Rapport Fouques-Duparc, CGF Beyrouth.

“rush[ed] onto her and disarmed her.” A desperate Aubey then leapt to the bed and reached for a razor, which Lebbana was also able to take from her.<sup>97</sup>

Why did Aubey struggle so conspicuously to obtain a weapon? In Abdallah’s testimony, he refers to an oddly offhand comment from Soriano, as the former searched Aubey, that he had “lost his revolver and that his fiancée probably had taken it from him.” Yet in Soriano’s own deposition to the consul, an even more puzzling reason emerges; he had given Mademoiselle Aubey his revolver, he testified, “because she was saying that she wanted to let herself starve to death.” Soriano identified the revolver as his, and the interrogator expressed shock that it was loaded.<sup>98</sup> Whether the weapon was for protection or aggression, and whether Soriano was absolving or incriminating himself in Aubey’s escapades, his role in the affair disturbed the consul less than the implications of her volatile conduct. If she had intended to commit suicide, the scene’s potentially dire consequences raised the frightening possibility that Aubey would succumb to the “dangers” of which Fouques-Duparc had warned her parents. The stakes of Aubey’s possible demise or dishonor thus mandated paternal authority to preserve her safety and to shield the French *colonie* from the incident’s shameful repercussions.

If Aubey’s conduct during her testimony at the consulate appeared offensive, then her behavior at the hospital ensured for Fouques-Duparc that “the continued stay of this young minor girl in Beirut can only have very serious disadvantages for her and be the occasion of a scandal in the community.”<sup>99</sup> The prospect of the young woman’s suicide registered for French authorities in Beirut as a disgrace to avoid by her outright banishment. In an imperial logic of power and prestige, Aubey’s scandal threatened not only her moral and physical integrity, but also her adherence to codes of feminine respectability. These gendered standards secured the

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<sup>97</sup> CADN 92 PO/A 320. 18 February 1906, Campana, CGF Beyrouth, interrogation Abdallah Lebbana.

<sup>98</sup> CADN 92 PO/A 320. 18 February 1906, Campana, CGF Beyrouth, interrogation Saloman Soriano.

<sup>99</sup> CADN 92 PO/A 320. 19 February 1906, Rapport Fouques-Duparc, CGF Beyrouth.

standing of the French *colonie* and functioned as essential pillars of national prestige, even—or especially—in a realm of informal imperial protection, where a maternal ideology of affection co-existed uneasily with patriarchal authority and perceptions of popular hostility such as Paul Bouziat’s.<sup>100</sup> Juliette Aubey’s affairs—her inappropriate companionship, improper comportment, and insecure confinement—damaged the symbolic as well as social standing that French femininity was expected to embody. A European woman’s respectable conduct may have been as imperative—and as vulnerable—in the not-quite-colonial context of fin-de-siècle Beirut as in the more strictly regimented racial and gender order of a formal colony.

### **Wartime Encounters**

#### *“Modest Children of France” and the Risk of “Levantizing”*

The eruption of the Great War in August 1914—mobilizing armies across the European continent and Ottoman Empire—irrevocably altered the channels through which French and Lebanese men and women like Aubey, Azmi, and even Fouques-Duparc interacted. While declarations of war between Paris and Istanbul ruptured informal French protectorship of the autonomous Lebanese *mutessarrifiyya*, expelling consular personnel, the complex ideological and affective ties of this trans-Mediterranean relationship continued to structure discourses of allegiance and even irredentism, among both Lebanese loyalists and French imperialists. These discourses had themselves been continually proclaimed, contested, and remolded through the quotidian encounters that this chapter has surveyed, processes that in turn informed how the postwar mandate colonial system took root in Beirut and Mount Lebanon. The individuals who

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<sup>100</sup> Elizabeth Thompson explores precisely these tensions between colonial politics of maternal welfare and paternal authority during the Mandate period in her seminal *Colonial Citizens: Republican Rights, Paternal Privilege, and Gender in French Syria and Lebanon* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000). Familial motifs featured in other regions of the French empire, of course, from the *mission civilisatrice* in West Africa to the exoticization of South Pacific islanders. The Franco-Lebanese relationship is distinguished by its imperial trajectory from not-quite-colony to colonial mandate as well as its potent affective mythology.



engaged in such everyday sites of contact—local villagers and foreign employers, aggrieved parents and suspicious expatriates, a Lebanese lawyer and a deviant Frenchwoman—shaped relations between France and pre-Mandate Lebanon in seemingly more prosaic, but no less significant ways, than the administrators, military officials, and elites whose experiences the following chapter will consider. Routed through the intermediary of the French consul, pre-war disputes over acts of exploitation, abuse, or even an offensive word or gesture revealed the contradictions and contingencies underlying the narrative of protection and prestige invoked by French and Lebanese alike.

How petitioners to the consul—French citizens as well as Lebanese *protégés*—deployed these discursive tropes, however, differed according to the power structures and immediate circumstances in which they were embedded. Whereas a prominent silk company owner like Charles Guerin leveraged his indispensability to the local economy to lend heft to his accusation over an apparently petty idiomatic insult, Marie El Khoury lacked recourse to such economic and social influence. Instead, her appeal—an indictment of a Frenchman’s volatile behavior—drew from a discursive arsenal of idealized tenets of French virtue, morality, and civilization, repurposed to underscore her aggressor’s shameful conduct and call his very Frenchness into question. In negotiating minor confrontations over an insulted beard and stolen laundry, Guerin and El Khoury engaged distinct facets of French imperial intervention, respectively recalling France’s economic interests and ideological commitments—in Mount Lebanon’s silk industry and in the historic abolition of slavery—to navigate localized conditions in Qrayeh and Beirut. At the micro-level of such encounters, the proximate politics of honor, reputation, and comportment determined how Guerin, El Khoury, and others deployed discursive tactics to assert and contest their local status and negotiate the conflicts of everyday life. The ideological field

between France and Lebanon, I have argued throughout this chapter, was composed of precisely such sites of quotidian contact and quarrel. On-the-ground interactions between employers and employees, men and women, elites and subalterns reshaped the idealized bonds of affection and allegiance between France and Lebanon, thereby molding the conditions through which the Franco-Lebanese informal protectorate was transformed into an imperial Mandate.

Within the prewar Ottoman Empire, though, French influence and authority were routed through the consulate in Beirut, which continued to receive appeals into the waning summer of 1914. Read with the advantage—or impediment—of hindsight, these last letters conserved in French consular archives appear simultaneously prescient and parochial, inflected with an urgency oblivious to the impending perils. Two particular messages that arrived in the weeks before war—one anxiously bemoaning Lebanese hostility, the other proclaiming idealized devotion to France—illustrate the countervailing pressures that notions of protection and prestige had generated within this trans-Mediterranean relationship.

One of these letters came from the oft-petitioning Paul Bouziat, voicing a persistent dissatisfaction over his status as a Frenchman among supposedly antagonistic locals. The other was signed by a would-be Lebanese volunteer named Antoine Eddé at the very outset of war, expressing an enduring emotional commitment to France that likely flattered French national sensibilities, but that also articulated the affective as well as political complexity of Franco-Lebanese ties in the era before Mandate colonialism. These final two encounters reveal how immediate concerns over local honor and status, such as Bouziat's, co-existed unevenly with the French historic and ideological investment in Lebanon that structured sentimental pledges like Eddé's. Both appeals invoked imperially resonant discourses to achieve particular aims, and each

demonstrates how opportunities for agency or opposition were inscribed in the ideological as well as proximate politics of French imperial paternalism.

In late July 1914, Bouziate wrote to the French General Consul in Beirut, requesting an increase in his salary as an editor and an instructor, in order “to live in a more French manner.”<sup>101</sup> Echoing imperial anxieties over European poverty and the dangers of raising appropriately French children in colonial contexts, Bouziate voiced particular concern that “a continued stay in the Orient would risk Levantizing” his children.<sup>102</sup> Given its associations with cosmopolitan rootlessness, shady commerce, and devious conduct, the notion of ‘Levantization’ implied, for Bouziate, that prolonged exposure to immoral practices and local resentment in Lebanon would not only jeopardize his children’s French status, but also potentially endanger their respectability.<sup>103</sup> Bouziate stresses to the consul a preoccupation with his “honorability,” his capacity to maintain adequate living standards among those whom he characterized as offensive *indigènes* and treacherous false friends. He reports that he faces persistent insults from “these Beirutis whose antipathy for the French disguises itself by professions of attachment to France,” and contrasts their disingenuous Francophilia with the cause of the “modest children of France [who had] come to Syria to live honorably and patriotically.”<sup>104</sup> From Bouziate’s perspective, not only did untrustworthy “Syrians” and Lebanese undermine the claims of honorable Frenchmen, but their inconstancy and deception masqueraded in the very garb of affection meant to signal alliance with France, on a popular as well as on a political level. Reconfigured not as bonds of

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<sup>101</sup> Other Frenchmen and French *protégés* in reportedly poor financial position also appealed for consular relief or employment assistance. See CADN 92 PO/A 194, 1 May 1905, J. Suau to CGF Beyrouth; 6 June 1905, Joseph Maman to CGF Beyrouth; CADN 92 PO/A 199, 20 March 1906, Jean Terrzil to CGF Beyrouth.

<sup>102</sup> CADN 92 PO/A 258. 27 June 1914, Paul Bouziate (Beyrouth) to CGF Beyrouth. On the imperial anxieties over “poor whites” and the inculcation of Europeans standards, see Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge*.

<sup>103</sup> On the associations of ‘Levantine,’ see Albert Hourani, “Ideologies of the Mountain and the City.”

<sup>104</sup> CADN 92 PO/A 258. 27 June 1914, Paul Bouziate (Beyrouth) to CGF Beyrouth.

protection but as barriers to prestige, the disingenuous promises of affection that Bouziat perceived seemed to entrap this insecure Frenchman in his own anxious allegations of animosity.

*“Mother” France and the Approach of War*

Antoine Eddé—along with several other Christian Lebanese whose appeals in August 1914 reached the French consulate—faced objectively direr circumstances than the displeased Bouziat. Though the negotiations that brought the world to war had taken place in the distant halls of European capitals, their consequences had caught individuals like Eddé in the crosshairs of imperial antagonisms. Rightly worried that the Ottoman military would revoke the long-standing exemption from compulsory service for Lebanese Christians, Eddé earnestly pleaded to the French consulate and “the glory of this good Mother” to accept him into France’s military.<sup>105</sup> Eddé’s plangent appeal humbled himself as “not a millionaire...no[r] a monarch,” but promised to give his life out of dedication to France. Pronouncing his lifelong “Franco-Lebanese love” and offering to “spill his blood for the honor of France,” Eddé deployed a filial idiom of sentiment and “sacrifice,” of “gratitude” and “duty.” His pledge articulated not only a desperation to escape Ottoman conscription, nor simply an undiluted Francophilic patriotism, but the sense of ideological and affective interconnectedness whose sincerity Bouziat so disparaged. Appealing to the French General Consul represented for Eddé a trans-Mediterranean channel of practical salvation, carved out of idealized but multivalent languages of affection and reworked in particular instances of encounter, alliance, and conflict.

For hundreds of thousands of Frenchmen and Lebanese, the Great War ended with famine, disease, dismemberment, or death. The following chapter will examine how the ruptures

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<sup>105</sup> CADN 92 PO/A 258, 14 August 1914, Antoine Eddé to CGF Beyrouth. See also CADN 92 PO/A 258, 7 August 1914, Farid Bakhus to CGF Beyrouth; 21 Aug. 1914, Philippe Awad to CGF Beyrouth; 24 August 1914, Réchid bey Nakhlé (Deir-el-Kamar); 7 October 1914, P. Pierre Abouzaïd to CGF Beyrouth; 11 October 1914, Pierre Dagher to CGF Beyrouth.

of war affected the discourses and exchanges between France and Lebanon, and prepared the ground for the installation of postwar colonial authority, before delving into the imperial engagements of Mandate elites and administrators. The fracturing and reconstruction of paternal connections between France and Lebanon, this chapter will show, exposed both the fault lines between ideology and intervention and the hardened sediment out of which notions of protection and prestige were reconstituted after the war.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### A Moral or Military Mandate? Allegiance, Intervention, and Martyrdom between France and Lebanon during the Great War

When Antoine Eddé wrote to the French General Consul in Beirut in August 1914 to pledge his “life for France” and volunteer for the upcoming war effort, he could not have anticipated how many of his compatriots would perish over the course of the next four years.<sup>1</sup> While struggles over meters of territory decimated entire battalions on the Western Front, the population of Mount Lebanon suffered from a devastating confluence of environmental catastrophes, disease, and even a plague of locusts. Compounded by an Entente blockade and Ottoman military requisitioning and forced expulsions, famine wiped out nearly a third of Mount Lebanon’s population, with between 150,000 and 300,000 succumbing between 1914 and 1918.<sup>2</sup> For partisans of a historic French commitment to protect the security and sanctity of Lebanon—French and Lebanese agents, activists, government officials, and religious authorities alike—such severe crisis in the context of the Great War posed a dire moral as well as military dilemma. How could France uphold pledges of protection, hearkening back to the last outbreak of mass violence in Lebanon over a half-century earlier, when the geopolitical exigencies of total war precluded humanitarian intervention? Instead of relieving the beleaguered Lebanese population, the blockading French fleet exacerbated mortal conditions of starvation and isolation. Pleas for assistance and promises of benevolence further cultivated “pro-French” sympathies, but also

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<sup>1</sup> Centre des Archives diplomatiques de Nantes (hereafter CADN), 92 PO/A 258, Antoine Eddé to Consul Général de France (hereafter CGF) Beyrouth, 14 August 1914.

<sup>2</sup> For numerical estimates, as well as treatments of the Lebanese experience in the Great War more generally, see Nicholas Ajay, “Mount Lebanon and the Wilaya of Beirut, 1914-1918: The War Years” (PhD diss., Georgetown University, 1972); Linda Schatkowski Schilcher, “The Famine of 1915-1918 in Greater Syria,” in John Spagnolo, ed., *Problems of the Modern Middle East in Historical Perspective: Essays in Honor of Albert Hourani* (Reading, UK: Ithaca, 1992); Elizabeth Thompson, *Colonial Citizens: Republican Rights, Paternal Privilege, and Gender in French Syria and Lebanon* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); Melanie Schulze Tanielian, “Politics of Wartime Relief in Ottoman Beirut (1914–1918),” *First World War Studies*, 5 (2014): 69-82; *ibid.*, “Feeding the City: The Beirut Municipality and the Politics of Food during World War I,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 46 (2014): 737-758; Leila Fawaz, *A Land of Aching Hearts: The Middle East in the Great War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014).

jeopardized the safety of Lebanese under Ottoman occupation. Expressions of amity and alliance with France rendered this suspect population acutely vulnerable to Ottoman repression. Languages of sentimental attachment, I argue, at once heralded salvation and threatened survival, revealing underlying tensions within an imperial ideology of protection. By investigating a series of debates between French and Lebanese observers and officials over the question of intervention, this chapter contends that unstable dynamics of devotion and obligation shaped both wartime experience and the imperial logics that emerged in the postwar colonial regime.

Antoine Eddé confronted the implications of his avowed “Franco-Lebanese love” less than two years after volunteering. One of many Lebanese, mostly Christian young men who had offered his services for France at the outset of the European war, Eddé was one of the few whose request was granted—and whose records have survived. Three reports in his name were forwarded to the French Foreign Minister between April and August 1916 from Arwad (Rouad) Island, where France’s naval Third Squadron was based just a mile from the Syrian coastal city of Tartus.<sup>3</sup> Identified as a volunteer interpreter, Eddé’s role included gathering intelligence on the mainland, likely as one of the numerous spies that French and British forces employed in the region.<sup>4</sup> By 1916, though, the commitment with which he had pledged his life so fervently to “Mother France” in 1914 had transformed to sharp disillusionment. While he had previously professed his eagerness to “spill his blood for the honor of France,” he now pleaded on behalf of the Lebanese men, women, and children in dire need of assistance, stressing the imperative for French involvement and underscoring the stakes of inaction. With its gunships so conspicuously

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<sup>3</sup> While no archival documents attest to Eddé’s enlistment, another, undated appeal preceded these reports, in which he reiterated his “prayer” and concludes with an exclamation of “*Vive la France!!!*” CADN 92 PO/A 258, Antoine Eddé to CGF Beyrouth, undated.

<sup>4</sup> On the politics of French and British spies in Syria and Lebanon, see Nicholas Ajay, “Political Intrigue and Suppression in Lebanon during World War I,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 5, no. 2 (Apr., 1974): 140-160; Eliezer Tauber, *The Arab Movements in World War I* (London: Frank Cass, 1993); Roberto Mazza, “For God and *La Patrie*: Antonin Jaussen Dominican and French Agent in the Middle East 1914-1920,” *First World War Studies* 3, no. 2 (October 2012): 145-164.

stationed just off the Syrian coast, France's passivity seemed a dereliction of the maternal beneficence that Eddé had so piously invoked in his 1914 letter to the French Consul. It was "sad to see," the Lebanese volunteer remarked from Arwad, that instead of fulfilling a historic mandate of protection, "in France we are abandoning this matter completely."<sup>5</sup>

By failing to uphold its mission of protection, Eddé implied, France was forsaking its most ardent—and embattled—proponents, Lebanese Christians facing retribution for their pro-French attitudes. His reports highlighted expulsions and starvation, miserable living conditions and "desperate calls" for aid, and he forecast a "general massacre" of Christians akin to the genocidal campaign against Armenians then underway. After willingly offering his life in August 1914, he now envisioned the involuntary sacrifice of thousands, martyred for their very love of France. In promising an invasion that never came, Eddé announced that his "conscience no longer permit[ted]" him to raise his countrymen's hopes of imminent salvation from the French. "We have already compromised numbers of people and families," he wrote in anguish, "who have paid with their blood for their sympathies for France."<sup>6</sup> French officials, too, debated the political possibilities of a military intervention that they believed Lebanon's Christian population had long expected.<sup>7</sup> In the context of broader war aims, however, the imperative of cutting off supplies to the Ottoman military transcended the humanitarian impetus of armed assistance.<sup>8</sup> With the moral charge of relief left to American and non-governmental initiatives,

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<sup>5</sup> Archives du Ministère des affaires étrangères (hereafter AMAE), 1 CPCOM 872, Antoine Eddé to Jules Cambon, 14 April 1916.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> AMAE, 1 CPCOM 872, Ministère de la Guerre to Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, Note sur l'opportunité d'une intervention française en Syrie, 5 May 1916.

<sup>8</sup> On the history of humanitarian intervention in Lebanon and the Middle East, see especially Davide Rodogno, *Against Massacre: Humanitarian Interventions in the Ottoman Empire, 1815-1914* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011); Watenpaugh, *Bread from Stones: The Middle East and the Making of Modern Humanitarianism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015).



France seemed to have abandoned its unique responsibility of protection, eroding its prestige and endangering the lives and loyalties of its Lebanese clients.

Eddé and his French interlocutors concurred that the destruction of the Lebanese population was occurring precisely *because of* traditions of attachment between Lebanon and France. Not only did the eastern Mediterranean blockade close routes of possible material succor; the narrative of inherent Franco-Lebanese alliance especially condemned those suspected of supporting France as de facto internal enemies of the Ottoman Empire. The Lebanese allies who proclaimed their filial loyalty to France the most effusively—by volunteering for the French army like Eddé, evoking a history of religious protection like Maronite leaders, or even appealing for French relief—were thus seen as the most likely targets of intentional starvation, mass expulsion, and even summary execution. Guarantees of French protection simultaneously affirmed Lebanon's privileged status and endangered its survival, mandating a moral intervention yet withholding the military initiative to back up these imperial precepts.

Rather than take for granted the Lebanese allegiance to France expressed by Antoine Eddé in 1914, or attempt to ascertain the veracity of such proclamations, this chapter explores how moral and affective discourses structured the appeals, debates, and consequences of French non-intervention in Lebanon during the Great War. Vocabularies of sentiment did not simply demarcate pre-existing spheres of influence—confirming Maronite support for France, for instance—but themselves constructed affective frameworks of allegiance and antagonism. Tropes of benevolence and gratitude, undergirding bonds of protection between France and Lebanon, redounded to French imperial hubris yet also imposed unattainable promises of Lebanese salvation. The question is not why Eddé turned to France to escape Ottoman conscription or relieve famine, but how and why he employed languages of love and obligation

to do so. His was not the only letter to draw from this discourse, cultivated over decades of literary, commercial, and cultural contact but abraded and remolded through the frictions of war. The letters of Lebanese volunteers and agents like Eddé—read alongside correspondence between French officials, Maronite leaders, and colonial activists—provide a window into an unstable process of imperial formation across ruptures of ideology and empire.

Professions of loyalty and promises of protection, I argue, provided Eddé and others with mechanisms of moral and political suasion. For French officials, on the other hand, the pressures of unfulfilled obligation in wartime threatened to unravel colonial aspirations and the certitude of Lebanese support. Eddé's flattery of and frustration with an ideal of familial reciprocity not only responded to material conditions; his shift in perspective from devotion to distress also illustrated the unanticipated consequence of an ideology of Franco-Lebanese interconnection. Notions of allegiance and affection provided a multivalent idiom through which French and Lebanese agents, activists, and officials—in circuits between Lebanon and Arwad, Cairo and Paris—navigated questions of imperial prerogative. The effects of this discourse extended from Eddé's disappointment to the privations, expulsions, and executions of Lebanese targeted for their pro-French sentiment. The martyrdom of Lebanese Christians—epitomized by the public hangings of prominent activists in 1915 and 1916—intensified the imperative to rescue victims of anti-French animus and heightened the stakes of French imperial investment. If the idea of enduring Lebanese fidelity to a protective “Mother France” generated mortal danger in addition to filial duty, then its moral implications mandated upholding an ideology of imperial beneficence to support postwar colonial claims as well as the partisans and protégés of *la France du Levant*. The affective languages and military logics that informed debates over protection and

intervention influenced the course of the war, the structure of France's postwar colonial mandate, and the contested formation of the state of Greater Lebanon in 1920.

*Pledging Life and Loyalty*

Before he was confronted with the famine and mass death that he reported to French authorities on Arwad Island in 1916, Antoine Eddé had eagerly anticipated the upcoming conflict as a “holy war” in which to prove his deep-seated faith in France. His August 1914 appeal to the French Consul proclaimed his identity as “Lebanese by birth” but “a Frenchman by heart.” He had cultivated an enduring love for France since his childhood, when he “learned to pronounce its name with the well-loved names of Papa and Mama.” Eddé deployed a vocabulary of both paternal and maternal affection as the foundation of his own professed French identity. After enthusiastically receiving “paternal benediction” from his father to volunteer for France's war effort, he turned to the representative fatherly authority of the French Consul, begging the latter to grant his permission to enlist. If the Consul symbolized French paternal prerogative, the maternal figure to whom Eddé addressed his plea seemed to embody the essence of France itself. To this “good mother” he pledged a “duty of gratitude that every Lebanese owed” as the beneficiary of her historic protection and maternal care. He articulated his appeal in affective and religiously infused language, invoking “the name of God, the name of France, the name of Franco-Lebanese love” in pleading for the Consul “not to deprive a son of the happiness to sacrifice himself for his mother.”<sup>9</sup>

Eddé drew upon this mythologized discourse of mutual alliance at a particular moment of imperial confrontation. He volunteered to serve France not purely out of patriotism, but also to escape conscription into the Ottoman military, which would soon join the war on the opposing

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<sup>9</sup> CADN 92 PO/A 258, Antoine Eddé to CGF Beyrouth, 14 August 1914.

side of the Central Powers. Over a dozen such letters from Lebanese Christians in August 1914 remain preserved in the French consular archives, and their offers to volunteer likely constituted only a fraction of attempts to evade Ottoman military service.<sup>10</sup> While Lebanese Maronites were technically exempt from conscription, as a privilege of the semi-autonomous status established for Mount Lebanon after the 1860 violence, few knew how long this exemption would endure if hostilities broke out. For over half a century, the security of Lebanon—and especially its Christian population—had been guaranteed by informal French protectorate, though its premises had not yet been tested by the strains of international conflict. France’s role as “protector” of Christians under the Ottoman Sultan’s sovereignty had further expanded since medieval capitulatory agreements, and, as I argued in Chapter one, its informal protective regime increasingly—and even intentionally—blurred the religious, political, economic, and affective registers of this unique imperial formation. Like the Lebanese men and women whose everyday conflicts the previous chapter investigated, Eddé and other volunteers deployed languages of allegiance and obligation to articulate their own vision of this ideological bond. How such tropes of interconnection were invoked—as well as idealized, ignored, or reworked—in the crucible of the Great War points to the multivalence and instability of moral discourses as mechanisms of imperial influence.

Eddé’s letter, drawing on familial metaphors and religious motifs of piety and sacrifice, obscured the practical incentives of his offer in favor of a more abstract sentimental attachment. Summoning the legacy of French intervention in defense of Lebanon’s Christians, he eulogized the soldiers whose “French blood has reddened our Lebanese lands” and envisioned a “tricolored flag that has gloriously fluttered so many times above our beloved mountains” as a heroic

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<sup>10</sup> At least one other Lebanese Maronite sought to enlist through contact with the Patriarchate in Bkirké. Thanks to Graham Pitts for this observation.

symbol of salvation. The image also advanced an implicitly imperial vision of French hegemony, grounded in a mythology of martyrdom and protection. Through a reciprocal sense of honor and indebtedness, Eddé asked whether it would “be too much for us to spill our blood once to help France take vengeance on its enemies?”<sup>11</sup> His rhetorical sacrifice at once fulfilled a long-deferred martial duty and implicitly equated the legacy and legitimacy of Lebanese protection with France’s European war effort.

Other petitioners to the French consul in August 1914 also cast their appeals in an idiom of gratitude and commitment. A Lebanese Maronite named Aref Gorayeb wrote on August 20 that he was “electrified by love of France,” vowing that he “love[d] France with all [his] heart” and would “devote [him]self” to it with his life.<sup>12</sup> The next day, Philippe Awad requested to serve as a volunteer doctor in the French army, as a fulfillment of the “sacred duty that every Maronite must accomplish without hesitation” in recognition of France’s historic support. Like Eddé, Awad gratefully recalled to the consul the “great benefits and powerful protection that France has always accorded us.”<sup>13</sup> Through a biblical analogy, he compared his “meager offering” to that of a widow whose proverbial two coins Jesus graciously accepted, investing France’s political protectorate with a veneer of spiritual authority. As he enacted the piousness of the widow, he granted the French consul the Christlike capacity to receive his offering as well as to bestow blessings. In referencing and reinforcing a model of French protection, Gorayeb’s and Awad’s appeals also sustained a French imperial prerogative to demand immanent sacrifice in the name of a transcendent bond between France and Lebanese Maronites.

The commitment of a twenty-one-year-old petitioner named Pierre Dagher expressed a similar sense of spiritual and filial obligation. He proclaimed himself “freely and entirely at

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<sup>11</sup> CADN 92 PO/A 258, Antoine Eddé to CGF Beyrouth, 14 August 1914.

<sup>12</sup> CADN 92 PO/A 258, Aref Gorayeb to CGF Beirut, 20 August 1914.

<sup>13</sup> CADN 92 PO/A 258, Philippe Awad to CGF Beirut, 21 August 1914.

France's service" and considered volunteering a "sacred duty" from which he "would not want to shirk." Like Eddé, he described himself as a "Lebanese son of France," ready to mobilize when "France our protector and our mother is threatened." Years of attending French primary schools, he stressed, had inculcated a "French soul and sentiments." Dagher channeled the popular conviction in the imperial benefits of French education to negotiate standards of mutual obligation. His testimony did not *reflect* a familial or hegemonic relationship between France and Lebanon, but itself arranged a nexus of maternal responsibility, filial duty, and affective commitment central to French imperial ideology and aspirations. He even blurred the geopolitical boundaries of empire, situating Lebanon as "a lost little corner of France," precariously positioned "among people who hate and detest it for its attachment to France"—and against whom he would pledge its ardent defense. Dagher not only pleaded for French protection; he also insisted on Lebanon's essential Frenchness, sketching an inverted colonial process by which "France is inviolably attached to Lebanon."<sup>14</sup>

For Elie Achkar, volunteering marked his "devotion and patriotism toward the French," gratitude for French protection, and a means to honor his father, who had served in a French regiment in Albania. Achkar explicitly "affirm[ed] the Lebanese love and zeal for our honored mother," professing a maternal allegiance to France out of his own father's sacrifice.<sup>15</sup> A father named Suleiman Kanaan, on the other hand, voiced filial loyalty through his own son's offer to "fulfill his duty toward France" and pledged both his and his son's "attachment...[to] France, our mother and our protector." Like Philippe Awad, Kanaan referenced the proverbially modest gift of a "widow's piece of silver" that he hoped to present the French Consul in Beirut, implying a similar pressure of scriptural righteousness. In exchange, he expected the "triumph of France, on

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<sup>14</sup> CADN 92 PO/A 258, Pierre Dagher to CGF Beirut, 11 October 1914.

<sup>15</sup> CADN 92 PO/A 258, Elie Achkar to CGF Beirut, undated.

which our existence depends,” presenting Lebanon as integral to the French military and imperial victory.<sup>16</sup> Whether or not a massacre of Christians was imminent in August 1914, the standards of protection that both French and Lebanese invoked conjured this sectarian threat and compelled France’s defense of Lebanon’s vulnerability.

Letters like Dagher’s and Kanaan’s were some of the last individual correspondence to reach the French Consulate before its departure from Beirut shortly after the Ottoman declaration of war. Preserved in French consular archives, for example, is a petition from the village head of Barouk containing 77 signatures of individuals with Maronite surnames.<sup>17</sup> Petitions from local notables in Mount Lebanon include dozens of names—in both French and Arabic—of other volunteers for France’s military effort. Réchid bey Nakhlé, the local governor of the mostly Maronite town of Deir-al-Kamar promised “to serve the beautiful tricolored flag as a volunteer with a thousand people of my country.”<sup>18</sup> While he may have exaggerated the numerical ranks of his support, the patriotic fervor with which he committed himself to “such a noble country in this critical period” tapped into French officials’ presumption of popular Francophilia in Lebanon. His letter to the consul, though, was not composed in “the language that [he] love[d] with all [his] heart,” but translated into French and brought from Mount Lebanon to Beirut. Only two of his would-be volunteers, he acknowledged, even spoke French. The idiom in which he articulated his understanding of Franco-Lebanese connection was not, then, the language so effusively praised by colonial activists as the key to French cultural influence, but a more abstract and affective means of engaging imperial sensitivities.

Even as Eddé, Dagher, and other Lebanese volunteers were pledging their lives for the French war effort, metropolitan war planners were seeking to augment military ranks by

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<sup>16</sup> CADN 92 PO/A 258, Solouman Kanan to CGF Beirut, 23 August 1914.

<sup>17</sup> CADN 92 PO/A 258, Farès Nohra Garbough to CGF Beirut, undated.

<sup>18</sup> CADN 92 PO/A 258, Réchid bey Nakhlé to CGF Beirut, 24 August 1914.

recruiting from the vast population of France's existing colonial empire, from North Africa to Madagascar, West Africa to Indochina. These efforts, though, encountered not pledges of allegiance and indebtedness, let alone calls for French colonization, but the resentment and resistance of indigenous populations. Discourses of sacrifice and obligation functioned inversely in the formally colonial context, as imperial officials—whether out of ideological earnestness or under the increasing pressure to mobilize *chair à canon*—imposed expectations of colonial gratitude and metropolitan service in the form of a literal “blood tax” to empire. As Richard Fogarty and Gregory Mann's work has explored, calls for colonial subjects to contribute to France's military efforts were often couched in the language of the “civilizing mission,” according to which the supposed beneficiaries of French colonial development owed their imperial sovereign martial repayment in exchange for its civilizational largesse.<sup>19</sup> When these attempts foundered amidst vigorous opposition, colonial recruiters increasingly relied on policies of material inducement and forcible conscription. As Fogarty and Mann demonstrate, though, the experiences of military service nonetheless furnished soldiers with an ideological vocabulary to articulate political claims, expose republican contradictions, and contest imperial authority.

By the time French military officials—encouraged by a range of expatriates and activists—began earnestly recruiting Syrian and Lebanese volunteers in 1917, their efforts more closely resembled the fraught attempts to augment France's forces with unwilling colonial subjects. Efforts to assemble a “Légion d'Orient” of Syrian, Lebanese, and preponderantly Armenian diaspora populations in Egypt, France, West Africa, the United States, and South America gathered a relatively paltry number of volunteers, and their eventual role in combat was

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<sup>19</sup> Richard Fogarty, *Race and War in France: Colonial Subjects in the French Army, 1914-1918* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008); Gregory Mann, *Native Sons: West African Veterans and France in the Twentieth Century* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006).



militarily negligible.<sup>20</sup> The project was not without consequences, however; as Simon Jackson has argued, the practices of recruiting and commanding the *Légion* rehearsed forms of colonial authority that would structure the postwar French Mandate governance.<sup>21</sup> And like the rhetorical devices used to enforce a sense of “duty” among colonial recruits, the terms with which supervisors characterized the *Légion d’Orient* inverted the proclamations of gratitude and obligation voiced by Lebanese volunteers in their letters of August 1914. Whereas the latter had themselves voiced their ardent commitment to the French cause, the *Légion’s* soldiers, according to an official report from November 1917, were “not disposed to any sacrifice” and had no “idea of fatherland” beyond their own village, let alone an attachment to France. They demonstrated “no discipline,” moreover, and were “unsuited for modern warfare”—assessments driven by Orientalist prejudices of Arab backwardness and parochialism. French military administrators, the report concluded, “would be wrong to believe that the *Légion d’Orient* was motivated by sentiments of deep sympathy for France.”<sup>22</sup> Even accounting for three unforgiving years of war and the complications of a haphazard global recruitment drive, such a stark rejection of the *Légion’s* patriotic commitment to France contrasted markedly with the affirmative pledges of Lebanese volunteers in the heady days of August 1914.

As the war dragged on without prospects of victory, the notion of shared sacrifice became all the more imperative as an incentive to persevere across multiple fronts. In the global context of empire, a discourse of loyalty and obligation functioned distinctly in colonial territories and

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<sup>20</sup> One official estimate put the number of recruits in November 1917 at about 300. AMAE, 1 CPCOM 881, 14 November 1917, Compte-rendu de mission, Officier-Interprète Mercier. On the *Légion d’Orient*, see also Eliezer Tauber, “La Légion d’Orient et La Légion Arabe,” *Revue Française d’histoire d’outre-Mer* 81 (1994): 171-80; N.E. Bou-Nacklie, “Les Troupes Spéciales: Religious and Ethnic Recruitment, 1916-46,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 25, no. 4 (Nov. 1993): 645-660.

<sup>21</sup> Simon Jackson, “Global Recruitment: The Wartime Origins of French Mandate Syria,” in Ludovine Broch and Alison Carrol, ed.s, *France in an Era of Global War, 1914-1945: Occupation, Politics, Empire, and Entanglements on Légion d’Orient* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

<sup>22</sup> AMAE, 1 CPCOM 881, Compte-rendu de mission, Officier-Interprète Mercier, 14 November 1917.

the informal French protectorate of Mount Lebanon. The ideological legacy of “Franco-Lebanese love” and an ambiguous politics of protection informed how petitioners like Eddé and Pierre Dagher composed their appeals to French beneficence. Even as Lebanese volunteers promised filial allegiance, they also invoked notions of maternal responsibility and paternal authority, cast as particularly urgent given looming Ottoman oppression. Outside of a formal colonial situation, they deployed the familial tropes of French imperium to sketch a framework of mutual obligation and alliance. This discursive schema did not necessarily convince French political and military planners of Lebanese dependability or martial capacity—especially of the broader Syrian diaspora population, as the dismissive evaluation of the *Légion d’Orient* suggests—but did arguably shape how policymakers, activists, and other observers approached the rapidly escalating disaster unfolding in the previously protected sanctuary of Mount Lebanon.

For those who remained in Lebanon and in coastal cities like Beirut, as well as their advocates and countrymen like Antoine Eddé on Arwad Island and beyond, the war threatened to sever an idealized guarantee of historic French protection. And whether or not the desperate volunteers who sought to evade Ottoman conscription in August 1914 foresaw an impending sectarian massacre, an insidious successor to the violence of 1860, their anxieties over a potential backlash to their ambiguously privileged status were not entirely unfounded.<sup>23</sup> As Ottoman subjects, Lebanese appellants to France’s consular authority operated within a rapidly shrinking sphere of legal recourse and imperial possibility, even if claiming the status of French *protégés*.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> On Ottoman military recruitment more generally, see Erik Jan Zürcher, “The Ottoman Conscription System, 1844-1914,” *International Review of Social History* 43 (1998): 437-449.

<sup>24</sup> Since *protégé* could be an ill-defined category, not all appellants claiming this status were necessarily beneficiaries of legal or commercial privileges. An exchange between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the French ambassador to Egypt illustrates the ambiguity of the “delicate” question of Syrians and Lebanese requesting *protégé* status, misleadingly concluding that “French protection in the legal sense of the word has never been given to Christians (nor) to Lebanese” and that “we have never accorded personal protection to Syrians or other Ottomans except for the reason of functions that they fulfilled in our service.” AMAE, 1 CPCOM 874, DeFrance to MAE, 27 October 1916.

The military administration of Djemal Pasha abrogated Mount Lebanon's privileges of autonomy and foreclosed avenues of contacting the French consul, let alone the possibility of serving in the French military. But the outbreak of the Great War not only reshaped political and diplomatic conditions; it also dramatically altered the affective coordinates through which Lebanese interlocutors and agents such as Eddé were able to navigate French imperial ideology. Caught in hostilities between the French and Ottoman empires, Lebanese suspected of supporting France faced the danger of reprisals and repression, as ideals of allegiance were transmuted into signs of treason. The language and legacy of these sentimental bonds, I suggest in the following section, conditioned responses to the ensuing mortal consequences, ensnaring French and Lebanese participants alike in a moral bind over how to recalibrate notions of Franco-Lebanese connection within the dire context of total war.

### *Appealing for Intervention*

In early 1915, plagues of locusts ravaged fields across the Middle East, from Egypt through Palestine and Jordan and across Lebanon and Greater Syria. An observer in Beirut described how clouds of insects literally blotted out the sun, destroying crops and necessitating a full-scale campaign simply to remove millions of carcasses.<sup>25</sup> The blight compounded the agricultural and economic disruptions of the war to produce a devastating famine throughout the region, especially in isolated Mount Lebanon. Ottoman military mobilization and the requisition of supplies diminished the ranks of labor as well as foodstuffs, and the Franco-British blockade closed access in September 1915 to crucial outside resources. Historians have debated causes of the famine, recognizing the role of environmental conditions as well as concerted Entente and

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<sup>25</sup> Fawaz. *Land of Aching Hearts*, 94. See also Salim Tamari, *Year of the Locust: A Soldier's Diary and the Erasure of Palestine's Ottoman Past* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).

Ottoman military policies.<sup>26</sup> Recent dissertations by Melanie Tanielian, A. Tylor Brand, and Graham Pitts have further explored the local and regional dynamics, social and individual experiences, and environmental and imperial factors that shaped this watershed period in Lebanese history.<sup>27</sup> And as Najwa al-Qattan and Elizabeth Thompson have demonstrated, the transformative effects of war and famine fundamentally marked both popular memory and the gendered colonial regimes of postwar Lebanon and Syria.<sup>28</sup> The wartime catastrophe, I argue in this section, also brought to the fore the moral and ideological stakes of French intervention for a mythologized Franco-Lebanese relationship. Pressure to relieve the famine and undermine Ottoman occupation came from Lebanese agents and activists as well as France's own military and administrative officials in the eastern Mediterranean, who in turn engaged with Lebanese Maronite leaders and French diplomatic personnel over the potential implications of action or inaction. Through appeals to moral obligation, correspondents redeployed affective discourses of protection to contest the mortal consequences of French military policy. The ideology of imperial protection was severely tested through the wartime abandonment of Mount Lebanon; only when converted into a narrative of martyrdom could logics of Lebanese affection and particularity be salvaged and resuscitated within the postwar French empire.

From his outpost with the French blockade force on Arwad Island, only a mile offshore, Antoine Eddé undertook multiple missions to the Syrian coast and the Lebanese hinterland. His

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<sup>26</sup> Linda Schatkowski Schilcher, "The Famine of 1915-1918 in Greater Syria," in John Spagnolo, ed., *Problems of the Modern Middle East in Historical Perspective: Essays in Honor of Albert Hourani* (Reading, UK: Ithaca, 1992).

<sup>27</sup> Melanie Tanielian, "The War of Famine: Everyday Life in Wartime Beirut and Mount Lebanon (1914-1918)" (PhD diss., University of California-Berkeley, 2012); A. Tylor Brand, "Lives Darkened by Calamity: Enduring the Famine of World War I in Lebanon and Western Syria" (PhD diss., American University of Beirut, 2014); Graham Auman Pitts, "Fallow Fields: Famine and the Making of Lebanon" (PhD diss., Georgetown University, 2016).

<sup>28</sup> Najwa al-Qattan, "When Mothers Ate Their Children: Wartime Memory and the Language of Food in Syria and Lebanon," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 46 (2014): 719-736; al-Qattan, "Historicising hunger: the famine in wartime Lebanon and Syria," in *The First World War and its Aftermath: The Shaping of the Middle East*, ed. T.G. Fraser (London: Gingko Library, 2015); Thompson, *Colonial Citizens*. See also Abdallah Hanna, "The First World War According to the Memories of 'Commoners' in the Bilad al-Sham," in *The World in World Wars: Experiences, Perceptions and Perspectives from Africa and Asia*, eds. Heike Liebau et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2010).

reports conveyed a bleak account of starvation, forced exile, and repression.<sup>29</sup> The situation was “*dreadful, dreadful*,” he wrote, and he estimated that 80,000 had already perished since January, with many more dying every day. Since not even “a sack of wheat” was permitted to reach Mount Lebanon, its population faced utter extermination, Eddé warned.<sup>30</sup> Other reports to French officials echoed Eddé’s estimation of the extent of suffering. A French agent in August 1916 observed that he “cannot describe to you the dark misery that weighs on this poor nation,” without food or supplies.<sup>31</sup> An interview with a Lebanese survivor who had escaped to Arwad Island the previous May noted that he wept from the “horrors” he had witnessed.<sup>32</sup> Indeed, contemporary accounts reported almost inhumane practices, from scavenging through excrement to eating diseased and decaying animals and even one’s own children.<sup>33</sup> The nightmarish quality of such assessments shaped the sense of pathos with which relief missions depicted their relief efforts.<sup>34</sup> Folded into a narrative of abandoned protection, the ghastly details of famine only amplified the moral urgency with which advocates of French imperial intervention like Eddé pressed their case to political and military officials.

Anticipating a “general massacre,” Eddé sounded a “cry of alarm” to his immediate superiors, pleading that they transmit his emotional assessment of Lebanon’s misery to the desks of policymakers in Paris. The famine, Eddé wrote, had created the “darkest misery for the rich as well as the poor,” thus framing the imminent danger to Lebanon as a moral rather than simply

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<sup>29</sup> The testimony of agents and spies, of course, presents challenges for the historian interested in ascertaining the accuracy of the information they provided. My purpose, however, is not to establish the veracity of these accounts, but to attend to the moral and affective claims through which they appealed to particular imperial logics.

<sup>30</sup> AMAE, 1 CPCOM 872, Antoine Eddé to E. Flandin, 22 May 1916.

<sup>31</sup> AMAE, 1 CPCOM 874, L. Kokan, “Situation au Liban,” 8 July 1916, Annex Doynel de Saint-Quentin to MAE, 18 August 1916.

<sup>32</sup> AMAE, 1 CPCOM 873, Hanna Kachache, “La Situation au Liban,” *al-Moqattam*, 26 May 1916.

<sup>33</sup> The latter phenomenon was likely apocryphal, but as Najwa al-Qattan argues, provided a powerful moral analogy for the despair faced by many families. Al-Qattan, “When Mothers Ate Their Children.”

<sup>34</sup> See for example James Levi Barton, *Story of Near East Relief (1915-1930) An Interpretation* (New York: Macmillan, 1930), as well as the writings of AUB president Bayard Dodge, cited in Simon Jackson, “Transformative Relief: Imperial Humanitarianism and Mandatory Development in Syria-Lebanon, 1915–1925,” *Humanity* 8, no. 2 (Summer 2017): 247-268, here 252n39-40.

economic or agricultural catastrophe. The disaster, though, was not entirely indiscriminate, as Eddé stressed that Ottoman policies of expulsion, starvation, arrest, and execution specifically targeted Christians and suspected supporters of France. His sources indicated that “all the large Christian families have been exiled to the Interior,” and referred to the “very severe measures” undertaken by the Ottoman military administration “to starve the Christian population of Lebanon.”<sup>35</sup> The combined effect of these efforts pointed ominously to a campaign of annihilation analogous to the already infamous—and ongoing—decimation of the empire’s Armenian population. Invoking the deportations and death marches that were wiping out Armenians by the tens of thousands, Eddé raised the dramatic possibility that if the French “wait two more months, there will not be any Syrians either.” He foresaw that, of the Christians whom France had pledged to protect, “there will not be very many of them when we arrive”—if, that is, the French ever arrived to save their purported beneficiaries and protected clients.<sup>36</sup>

The imperative to protect the Lebanese—and to preserve France’s imperial status—was particularly urgent, Eddé’s reports stressed, given the explicit targeting of “all those who have had or have French sympathies.” He cited the example of a large and influential family, with over 200 members across fifteen villages, who had been arrested, “accused of having sympathy for France, and have been sent to the Interior, where they will be starved to death.”<sup>37</sup> These were the Lebanese families who Eddé lamented had “paid with their blood for their sympathies for France,” whom the French had endangered by encouraging such alliance, and to whom a disillusioned Eddé’s “conscience no longer permit[ted]” him to continue promising imminent salvation from French intervention. By appealing to the persecuted status of pro-French

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<sup>35</sup> AMAE, 1 CPCOM 873, Antoine Eddé, Ile Rouad, 1 June 1916.

<sup>36</sup> AMAE, 1 CPCOM 872, Antoine Eddé to Etienne Flandin, 14 April 1916.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

Lebanese Christians, Eddé reframed the guarantee of security that had long justified the French informal protectorate over Lebanon.

Eddé's plea for intervention deployed an idiom of allegiance and obligation that complemented his own effusive pledge to faithfully defend France in August 1914. While he had been willing to spill his own blood to "help France take vengeance on its enemies," he now beseeched French officials to halt the suffering that war had brought upon the starving and suppressed Lebanese population. Instead of proclaiming his filial devotion, he now underscored the responsibility of protection that France bore as "good mother." But as calls for protection were most dire, Eddé was forced to observe—indeed participate in—the apparent abandonment of France's loyal allies in the Near East in pursuit of military objectives. The geopolitical imperative of isolating the Ottoman Empire was more compelling to the Quai d'Orsay than the moral compulsions of "Franco-Lebanese love."<sup>38</sup> This very language of love in which Eddé and his fellow Lebanese volunteers had espoused their loyalty to France now endangered precisely those who suffered for their "ancient attachment to France."<sup>39</sup> A discourse of affection generated mortal consequences for French allies in Lebanon as well as a moral dilemma, as the notion of France as potential savior persisted as both article of faith and devastating illusion.

French officials themselves echoed Eddé's assessment of the particular dangers faced by purportedly pro-French populations. France's commander on Arwad Island and the future postwar Governor of Lebanon, Albert Trabaud, surmised that Lebanese families were being "pursued for their loyalty to France."<sup>40</sup> The commander of French naval forces in the

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<sup>38</sup> Christopher Andrew and A.S. Kanya-Forstner relate the disputes that the so-called "Syrian party" of the Foreign Ministry occasioned through its aggressive push for post-war colonial control over Greater Syria, or *la Syrie intégrale*. Andrew and Kanya-Forstner, *The Climax of French Imperial Expansion* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1981), 68-70.

<sup>39</sup> AMAE, 1 CPCOM 874, DeFrance to Briand, 17 August 1916.

<sup>40</sup> AMAE, 1 CPCOM 872, Trabaud to de Spitz, 14 April 1916.

Mediterranean, Admiral Dartige du Fournet, concurred, anticipating “the lamentable fate of Syrian populations who are generally devoted to us, and a part of whom, at the very least, is persecuted for its ancient attachment to France.”<sup>41</sup> France’s ambassador in Egypt, Albert Defrance, acknowledged in May 1916 that “the presence of our fleet and our occupation of Rouad [had given] birth to Syrians’ hopes that have not been realized.” These empty aspirations, he continued, endangered in particular “the Lebanese known to be sympathetic to us and to pin their hopes on intervention from France.” He conceded as “unfortunately true” that if Lebanon’s inhabitants had been “reduced to famine, harassed, condemned, deported, and hanged by the Turks, it is because they are partisans of France and because our fleet represents a continual hope for them and a threat for their oppressors.” The conviction that Lebanese persecution derived from their ardent love of France reflected not necessarily the “Turks” motivations, but the manifestation of an inflated imperial imagination. Through wartime intelligence reports, appeals for intervention, and assessments of popular sentiment, French officials and their Lebanese interlocutors alike advanced tropes of love and martyrdom, danger and disaffection, to establish the moral stakes of military inaction. A narrative of devoted allies suffering for their very support for France implicated the tenets of moral prestige, paternal prerogative, and maternal virtue that functioned as pillars of French imperial ideology and colonial claims.

Lebanese agents, operating within the nexus of intelligence gathering in the eastern Mediterranean, played a crucial role in disseminating this narrative. Their accounts, too, were neither unbiased nor entirely accurate depictions of Ottoman policy. They can be approached, though, not as evidence of a proxy campaign against France’s Lebanese supporters, but as calculated interventions into French imperial mythology and wartime politics. When a Maronite monk and French spy reported in May 1916 that the Ottoman government intended “to make all

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<sup>41</sup> AMAE, 1 CPCOM 874, Defrance to Briand, 17 August 1916.



those suspected of sympathy for France disappear,” for instance, he was both affirming a legacy of Lebanese Francophilia and highlighting its vulnerability. By predicting that the Young Turk regime sought to “destroy the Lebanese by famine, like it destroyed the Armenians by massacres and deportations,” the agent invoked a compelling precedent of Ottoman internal repression.<sup>42</sup> Another report later that summer, from a Lebanese informant identified as L. Kokan, claimed that Christians were intentionally provided with only one-third of the rations necessary for survival, in a deliberate attempt “to make Beirutis and Lebanese perish little by little from hunger.” The decision to “condemn our country to death,” Kokan informed his French handler, owed exclusively to “the love that it carries for France.” Lebanon appeared to its enemies as “united with France,” an assessment that he endorsed by qualifying it “rather as a purely French nation,” transcending even the distinction between imperial metropole and colony.<sup>43</sup> Lebanon’s intimate connection to France, in this evaluation, endangered Lebanese prospects for survival, notwithstanding—and indeed because of—its confidence in French protection. The naval official who transmitted Kokan’s report from Cairo underscored this assessment, emphasizing that the Lebanese population was “convinced that they are paying for their sympathies for France.” Nonetheless, he concluded, the Lebanese “hoped for relief only” from France, even as they “reproached the protectorate nation for delaying rescuing them.”<sup>44</sup> The notion of a particular bond with France conditioned expectations of French salvation, yet also provoked resentment when this anticipated rescue did not materialize.

In his report on the situation in Lebanon, Kokan underlined the stakes of non-intervention, directly challenging French officialdom that if “you do not liberate [the Lebanese

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<sup>42</sup> AMAE, 1 CPCOM 872, Defrance to Briand, 21 May 1916.

<sup>43</sup> AMAE 1 CPCOM 874, L. Kokan, “Situation au Liban,” 8 July 1916, Annex Doynel de Saint-Quentin to MAE, 18 August 1916.

<sup>44</sup> AMAE 1 CPCOM 874, Doynel de Saint-Quentin, 18 August 1916, “La situation au Liban d’après un agent.”

nation] from the tyranny of its government before the next winter, you will have morally participated in its loss.” This calculation of French moral culpability jeopardized France’s imperial status, stressing that abandonment of its protective obligations was not “what we expect from a particular power of civilization.” Kokan called into question the credibility of France’s civilizing mission, even among Lebanese allies whose political, cultural, and sentimental ties to France appeared inviolable and eternal. While French officials worried that Lebanese clients might turn to other foreign powers for material succor and imperial alliance, Kokan suggested that this population had “begun to murmur against” its erstwhile protector. The occupying Ottoman government, he reported, had “condemned it to perish for the love that it held for France.”<sup>45</sup> If Lebanese were turning away from France, targeted for their very affective investment, this was interpreted as a product of hostility to French influence and cast doubt on France’s uncontested hegemony in Lebanon, before as well as after the war.

Maronite elites, as the religious and social intermediaries whom France traditionally counted as its staunchest allies, reiterated their trust in French support, but stressed the imperative for intervention to relieve famine and repression in Lebanon. According to the Maronite Archbishop of Egypt, Joseph Darian, who remained in contact with French authorities while the Lebanese patriarch was imprisoned, France represented the “age-old protector of Lebanon” and “the only nation to which, by instinct, the Lebanese soul has always turned.” The Lebanese, Darian professed to Albert Defrance, were indeed “Frenchmen hidden under the name of Maronites.”<sup>46</sup> The patriarch’s secretary, Bulus Aqil, who also served as a French agent,

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> AMAE, 1 CPCOM 873, Darian to Defrance, 22 May 1916. Darian also published over the course of the war a pamphlet entitled “Etude historique sur l’origine de la Communauté Maronite et son autonomie au Mont-Liban depuis l’antiquité jusqu’à maintenant,” which a French diplomatic official reviewed favorably as supportive of a “French protectorate for which he established the traditional bases on facts and probing documents.” AMAE 1 CPCOM 878, Note, Annexe 2, Defrance to MAE, 15 August 1917.

characterized Mount Lebanon as “always aflame with love for France.”<sup>47</sup> Both Darian and Aqil, like petitioners seeking to avoid conscription or secure relief, undoubtedly embellished their pleas with language designed to flatter French diplomatic sensibilities and national amour-propre. Yet their invocations of sentimental attachment cannot be dismissed as mere rhetorical flourishes. Precisely because France’s informal protectorate over Mount Lebanon relied on Maronite cooperation and authority, its leaders were already steeped in the idiom of affection and allegiance through which they both professed their loyalty and articulated their appeals. Their revision of this discourse demonstrated how an imperial ideology of French protection simultaneously endangered its most robust allies and imposed moral obligations of intervention.

In his correspondence with DeFrance, Darian connected the distress faced by “our poor Lebanon” to its “profound love” for France, implying that these very bonds of affection had tightened the noose around the Lebanese population. The “sincere attachment to France” of its “Maronite brothers,” he averred, provoked the ongoing resentment of the “barbarous Turks.” Their retaliatory campaign against the Lebanese depended in turn on “the abandonment of Lebanon by France.” In addition to Ottoman hostility, though, Lebanon faced an even more insidious danger, Darian alleged, raised by France’s own wartime policies. The very weapon with which French forces intended to target the Ottoman war effort—the blockade of the eastern Mediterranean coast—was turned against the Lebanese themselves. Decimated by famine, deprived of supplies by both land and sea, and targeted for their pro-French sympathies, “Lebanon suffer[ed] by France and because of her,” Darian accused. Whether intentionally or not, the blockade actually harmed precisely “those whom it was supposed to protect: the

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<sup>47</sup> Bulus Aqil to Allied agent, 3 October 1916, cited in Ajay, “Mount Lebanon,” Appendix 4c, 181. Ajay’s useful appendix contains correspondence from Aqil’s family’s private collection, obtained from Aqil’s sister.

Christians of Syria, in general, and the Lebanese, in particular.”<sup>48</sup> Both discursively and in practice, then, wartime formulations of a privileged Franco-Lebanese relationship conditioned paradoxically counter-productive consequences, as protection transmuted to privation, allegiance to endangerment, and emotional affinity to moral disaffection.

Observing the exceptional violence from which “only Lebanon suffered,” Darian implied that “generous and chivalrous France” owed more robust protection of its loyally Francophilic clients. His calls for intervention evoked the idealized *France du Levant*, summoning French responsibilities on behalf of “this little France of the Orient that France of the Occident has always protected.”<sup>49</sup> If Lebanese Maronites were effectively French, this formulation implied, their appeal merited not the largesse of charity, but the imperatives of fraternity. The reciprocal ties that Darian sketched between France and Lebanon—with a European metropole juxtaposed to an imperially French Orient—strengthened mutual allegiance, but also imposed mutual obligations. These obligations were configured across an uneven distribution of power, in which French naval forces bore the preponderant material advantages. The ideological bonds, though, were unequal yet familial, intertwining filial devotion from France’s “Maronite brothers” with a vision of parental guardianship, and the military commitment to protect Lebanon with a willingness to shed blood for the imperial *mère-patrie*.

The language of maternal responsibility and filial sacrifice also informed the Maronite secretary—and French spy—Bulus Aqil’s correspondence with French authorities. He similarly proclaimed an enduring faithfulness to France and recounted the campaign of persecution that its abandonment had occasioned. From Mount Lebanon in October 1916, Aqil described the “poor

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<sup>48</sup> AMAE, 1 CPCOM 873, Darian to Defrance, 22 May 1916. On the operations and overall effects of the blockade, which he considers an “unqualified military success,” despite certain incidents of “tragi-comedy,” see Ajay, “Mount Lebanon,” 186-215

<sup>49</sup> AMAE, 1 CPCOM 875, Darian to Defrance, 13 November 1916.

Lebanese” whom Ottomans had “sacrificed through vengeance to punish them for their loyalty to a generous and compassionate mother.” But “where [was] this generosity and this pity from France?” he asked plaintively, belying a sense of disillusionment with the maternal love of French protection. Lebanon’s “enemies,” he observed, mocked expectations of French salvation: “Where is she, this mother, isn’t she coming to save you? You see what your attachment to France is worth to you.” While the Lebanese still “consider[ed] themselves as a French people,” Aqil assured his Entente handler, he nonetheless remarked that “previously our mother France never neglected its people.” With no support forthcoming, he despaired, his people “were not saved” and indeed merely “lived to die.”<sup>50</sup> Aqil’s appeal directly targeted French sensitivities of imperial and moral prestige. He affirmed Lebanon’s enduring filial allegiance, avowing that his “eyes remain[ed] turned toward our mother France, whom we will never denounce.”<sup>51</sup> At once affective and strategic, his promise leveraged the familial ideology of Franco-Lebanese attachment both to flatter and to provoke French imperial investment.

The commitment of high-ranking Maronite priests like Darian and Aqil to an idealized “mother France” heightened expectations for French intercession in the wartime catastrophe that threatened France’s Christian allies—especially because the French blockade was largely responsible for these conditions. Darian exalted France’s capacity “to save our poor country,” at once exaggerating military capacity and imposing a moral burden on the very forces that exacerbated the Lebanese famine.<sup>52</sup> France’s historic protectorate over Lebanon, Darian wrote to Defrance, signified that it had “contracted toward Lebanon a moral obligation that impelled it, so to speak, to safeguard its rights as well as its duties.” While referencing the potential harm to “the interests of France in the Orient” if military action were further delayed, he also underscored

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<sup>50</sup> Bulus Aqil, Intelligence Report to Allied Agent, 19 October 1916; cited in Ajay, Appendix IV, 195.

<sup>51</sup> AMAE, 1 CPCOM 874, Aqil to Darian, 25 October 1916.

<sup>52</sup> AMAE, 1 CPCOM 875, Darian to Defrance, 13 November 1916.

France's responsibility to "not allow a people friends and brothers with the French people to be crushed and annihilated." Intervention represented no less than the "only hope for Lebanese Maronites," the preservation of French preeminence, and the very survival of Lebanon's people.<sup>53</sup> Trabaud, the French governor on Arwad, acknowledged in late 1916 that notwithstanding—and indeed in part due to—their loyalty to France "to the end," the outcome of not responding to wartime famine could be the wholesale "extermination of the Lebanese."<sup>54</sup> At stake was not only the fate of a population, but also the principles of moral standing, ideological influence, and material interests that anchored French imperial prospects.

### *The Invasion that Never Came*

French officials in the eastern Mediterranean theater recognized the potential colonial consequences of unfulfilled promises of military intervention. Trabaud affirmed that Lebanon had been "always loyal to France by traditional interest," yet worried that the unaddressed calamity had caused this sentiment "to undergo a dangerous crisis for our interests." Such a "classic land of French influence," he lamented, was "becoming a little detached each day from its age-old ideal."<sup>55</sup> The "sufferings of the Lebanese," the former General Consul in Beirut, François Georges-Picot noted in August 1915, had already caused them to "murmur against the delay in coming to occupy their country."<sup>56</sup> The disturbing implication was that, absent more compelling moral and material investment, France might sacrifice this previously secure redoubt of affective allegiance and imperial hegemony.

An ideology of protection and prestige, though, afforded France the opportunity to assume "the role of awaited liberator," an undertaking that would preserve Lebanon within the

<sup>53</sup> AMAE, 1 CPCOM 873, Darian to Defrance, 22 May 1916.

<sup>54</sup> AMAE, 1 CPCOM 875, Trabaud to de Spitz, Etude d'un ravitaillement armé du Liban, 3 December 1916.

<sup>55</sup> AMAE, 1 CPCOM 872, Trabaud to de Spitz, 14 March 1916.

<sup>56</sup> AMAE, 1 CPCOM 870. Georges-Picot to MAE, 7 August 1915.

French imperial orbit and mark “the splendid crowning achievement of old friendships of several centuries, the work of several generations.” In a genealogy of heroic intervention, the crisis of the Great War thus figured as a successor to the sectarian violence of 1860, as well as to the mythologized lineage of the Crusades. The presumption was that another disruption to Lebanon’s political status and survival would be countered by France’s guaranteed guardianship, reestablishing an imperial hierarchy that distinguished between the prerogative of protection and its requisite gratitude, while obfuscating the costs of allegiance born by imperiled Lebanese. A failure to uphold this role of savior could shake the ideological foundation of French imperial protection, with aftershocks for the logics and legitimacy of its postwar mandate regime.

All that was required, Trabaud wrote, was “an opportune gesture” to demonstrate French beneficence. Lebanon’s “loyalty in the days of struggle,” he declared toward the end of the desperate year of 1916, was “enough to amply justify a slight effort by France for its devoted partisans.”<sup>57</sup> This “slight effort” implied more than humanitarian charity; even as the blockade prevented most material assistance from reaching Lebanon, geopolitical considerations rejected the possibility of armed intervention.<sup>58</sup> Unmet promises of relief, Trabaud acknowledged, had already “caused a great deception to our most genuine supporters.”<sup>59</sup> The divergence between rhetorical and military support not only further endangered suffering Lebanese, but also eroded the credibility and exposed the contradictions of French imperial promises.

The expectation of French rescue was met by assurances that the Lebanese would commit their lives to such an expedition. From Egypt, Maronite Archbishop Darian promised to Trabaud

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<sup>57</sup> AMAE, 1 CPCOM 875, Trabaud to de Spitz, Etude d’un ravitaillement armé du Liban, 3 December 1916.

<sup>58</sup> According to a Lebanese spy for the French, Trabaud was able to procure a substantial sum for Lebanese relief on a visit to Paris, which was distributed through the Maronite Patriarchate. Butrus Khuwayri, *Al-Rihlah al-Suriyah ft al-Harb al-'Ammumiyah 1917* [*The Syrian Journey in the Great War, 1917*] (Cairo: al-Yusufiyah Baban Press, 1921), 72-73; cited in Ajay, “Lebanon during World War I,” 143n4.

<sup>59</sup> AMAE, 1 CPCOM 872, Trabaud to de Spitz, 14 March 1916.

that Lebanon's "brave and energetic mountain folk...[were] dedicated to showing France that they want to be its worthy children," ensuring armed resistance to the "odious yoke" of France's Ottoman enemies. Pledging Lebanon's "strong people, valiant, ready to receive [France] with dignity," he proclaimed that they preferred to sacrifice themselves "arms in hand, like knights, like heroes," rather than perish "little by little, without glory" by succumbing to an emasculating famine.<sup>60</sup> Darian appealed directly to colonial interests, envisioning that an occupation of Lebanon could provide a "powerful base" for expansion into Greater Syria. If France represented the imperial hegemon, then Lebanese Maronites would serve as "the true sentinels of France standing on these mountains that guard the entrance to Syria."<sup>61</sup> According to one Lebanese spy, Darian conveyed the impression that "our dear old friend, France, has informed me of its intention to send a military force to liberate Syria and Lebanon," with instructions to provide updates on mobilizing inhabitants of coastal villages.<sup>62</sup> Deploying a discourse of protection and alliance, Darian offered martial defenders for the French empire, even as he lamented that France had abandoned the Lebanese "with no one to protect [them] against their enemies."<sup>63</sup>

Darian's narrative of Franco-Lebanese connection wove together ideological, political, and affective commitments. France's "moral obligation" to Lebanon, he stressed to DeFrance, was "founded on the historic events of the past, on the continuous relations between the two countries and finally on the sentiments that [France] has aroused in Lebanese hearts."<sup>64</sup> A legacy of intervention both sustained and was strengthened by its emotive appeal. "When France treads on the sacred land of our dear fatherland," Darian continued, blurring pious and patriotic

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<sup>60</sup> AMAE, 1 CPCOM 873, Darian to DeFrance, 22 May 1916. On the gendered consequences of famine and conscription during the Great War, see Thompson, *Colonial Citizens*, especially chapter one, "World War I: Famine, Memory, and a Shattered Social Order."

<sup>61</sup> AMAE, 1 CPCOM 875, Darian to DeFrance, 13 November 1916. See chapter one for exploration of the ideal of Lebanese particularity as a site of French influence and fantasy in the Near East.

<sup>62</sup> Khuwayri, 4-5, cited in Ajay, "Lebanon during World War I," 147.

<sup>63</sup> AMAE, 1 CPCOM 875, Darian to DeFrance, 13 November 1916.

<sup>64</sup> AMAE, 1 CPCOM 873, Darian to DeFrance, 22 May 1916.



registers to envision a postwar French presence in Lebanon, “it must not encounter corpses and bare rocks,” a wasteland empty of human life and material value. France’s colonial prospects, he implied, depended on urgent salvation, not out of humanitarian pity, but as a condition of familial alliance. In forwarding Darian’s message to the Minister of Foreign Affairs in Paris, Defrance underscored his acknowledgement of France’s “material and moral obligations” to the Lebanese, incurred through its imperial prerogatives as the “age-old protector of Lebanon.”<sup>65</sup>

Expectations of intervention, according to Lebanese agents, observers, and French officials, increased after the occupation of Arwad Island on 31 August 1915. According to a rear admiral of the occupying Third Squadron, this military action served as a “crack of the whip, reviving hopes...of a forthcoming intervention on a larger scale.”<sup>66</sup> The Foreign Minister himself anticipated that the occupation—and even, naively, the blockade—would be “interpreted by the native populations as proof of the interest that [France] carries for Syria.”<sup>67</sup> As a not disinterested informant, Antoine Eddé claimed that five thousand armed men had arrived on the coast of northern Lebanon on September 1 to welcome an invasion, only to be dispersed out of vindictive “Turkish” hostility. Christians and Muslims alike were prepared to fight alongside the French, Eddé claimed, and the entire population “lived in the hope of the arrival of French troops.”<sup>68</sup> From Arwad, Albert Trabaud further dramatized a narrative of dedication and disillusionment: after the symbolic raising of the French flag “on the tower of the old Saracen castle,” he reported, “5000 Lebanese, as if at its call, descended from the foothills of the mountains.”<sup>69</sup> Literally drawn to the emblem of French salvation—and of imperial sovereignty—these crowds

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<sup>65</sup> AMAE, 1 CPCOM 873, Defrance to Briand, 23 May 1916.

<sup>66</sup> AMAE, 1 CPCOM 870, Contre-Amiral Darrieus to Ministère de la Marine, 22 September 1915.

<sup>67</sup> AMAE 1 CPCOM 870, MAE to Ministère de la Marine, 7 September 1915.

<sup>68</sup> AMAE, 1 CPCOM 873, Antoine Eddé, Ile Rouad, 1 June 1916.

<sup>69</sup> AMAE, 1 CPCOM 872, Trabaud to de Spitz, 14 March 1916. On the history and mythology of “Saracens,” see John Tolan, *Saracens: Islam in the Medieval European Imagination* (New York: Columbia University, 2002).

“returned disappointed to their villages,” when French ships did not disembark on the coast. Christians came out of their houses, Trabaud continued, to bless a French ship patrolling the coast, and he claimed that even “Arab Muslims themselves contemplated the French colors with sympathy.” Notwithstanding the hyperbole of these visions, they communicated—and themselves contributed to—the extent to which Franco-Lebanese mythology conditioned military assessments of commanders most proximate to the potential site of invasion. According to the testimony of the Lebanese agent Kokan, “hearts leapt with joy, and inhabitants counted on an upcoming liberation” whenever French planes flew over Beirut.<sup>70</sup> The same question, Trabaud imagined, echoed throughout Lebanon and Greater Syria: “French, when will you come to us?”<sup>71</sup>

In ventriloquizing popular sentiment and envisioning a long-awaited welcome for French forces, Trabaud situated tropes of Franco-Lebanese alliance within the military and geopolitical parameters of possible invasion and occupation. Expelling the Ottoman army from the Middle Eastern territories of French colonial ambitions would be rendered both more practicable and more palatable if limited French troops could count on local uprisings. Syrian and Lebanese émigré associations and French colonialist societies fed this optimism with their own calls for invasion.<sup>72</sup> From the outset of the war, Georges-Picot had assured the French Foreign Minister that a landing force of several hundred soldiers would be backed by 30-35,000 Lebanese.<sup>73</sup> Shortly after his arrival in Beirut in the summer of 1914, Georges-Picot stated that France bore economic and a “moral obligation” as Lebanon’s “traditional protector.”<sup>74</sup> In addition to

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<sup>70</sup> AMAE, 1 CPCOM 874, L. Kokan, “Situation au Liban,” 8 July 1916, Annex Doynel de Saint-Quentin to MAE, 18 August 1916.

<sup>71</sup> AMAE, 1 CPCOM 873, Antoine Eddé, Ile Rouad, 1 June 1916.

<sup>72</sup> Andrew and Kanya-Forstner, *Climax of French Imperial Expansion*, 69.

<sup>73</sup> Tauber, *Arab Movements*, 12. The Foreign Minister declined this proposal, and subsequent initiatives to arm or support Lebanese auxiliaries were likewise rejected or watered down by French and British ministries. The former’s blunt assessment by early 1915 was that “nothing appears less desirable than intervention in Syria.” AMAE, 1 CPCOM 867, MAE to Paul Cambon, 8 January 1915.

<sup>74</sup> AMAE 206 CPCOM 124, CGF Beyrouth to MAE, 19 July 1914.

flattering presumptions of French influence and prestige, estimates of the expected martial contribution of the Lebanese converted an abstract currency of affection into the raw figures of military preparation and potential imperial profit. When a British agent affirmed that the “whole population of Syria, ready to join the allies, waits from one day to the next for the landing of the French,”<sup>75</sup> DeFrance concluded that this anticipated alliance would enable French “protection” to extend over all of Greater Syria after the war.<sup>76</sup>

The conclusion that popular affection for France and an expectation of intervention would facilitate colonial regime building, however, conspicuously blurred Syrian and Lebanese attitudes. Whereas some reports insisted that “Syrians” would welcome French occupation, others underscored the particular Francophilia of Lebanese Christians. DeFrance claimed that, united in suffering and exasperation with the Turks, “Muslims as well as Christians wait anxiously for an intervention” from France, while Admiral de Spitz, commander of the French Third Squadron in the eastern Mediterranean, specified that “*Christians* wait[ed] for occupation by the French from one day to the next.”<sup>77</sup> In the same report, DeFrance relayed a rumor that “if the French landed in Syria, orders had been given to exterminate the Christians and set fire to the towns,” highlighting the perilous lines of affection and antagonism that a discourse of Franco-Lebanese connection had etched into Ottoman Arab provinces.<sup>78</sup> The fantasy of universal imperial gratitude, of multiconfessional calls for French protection, was counterposed not only to the particular narrative strain of religious alliance, but also to the nightmare scenario of benevolent intervention inspiring the very massacres it was intended to prevent.

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<sup>75</sup> AMAE, 1 CPCOM 872, “Renseignements donnés par Mustafa Bey,” d’Entrecasteaux, 29 March 1916.

<sup>76</sup> AMAE, 1 CPCOM 872, DeFrance to Briand, 7 April 1916.

<sup>77</sup> AMAE, 1 CPCOM 872. DeFrance to MAE, 1 April 1916; de Spitz, “Résumé des renseignements recueillis du 1er au 15 avril, sur la situation politique dans la Syrie,” 16 April 1916. Emphasis in original.

<sup>78</sup> AMAE, 1 CPCOM 872. DeFrance to MAE, 1 April 1916.

Trabaud, meanwhile, maintained confidence that in Lebanon, “the Christians were armed, waiting for us and calling for us.”<sup>79</sup> The image conjured both the allure of French imperial might and the welcome that intervention would receive from France’s traditional clients. By specifying yet simultaneously overlooking distinctions between Syrian and Lebanese as well as Muslim and Christian allegiances, military planners at once encouraged grander territorial designs beyond Mount Lebanon and obscured the complications that might arise from colonizing such a heterogeneous—and far from universally receptive—population.<sup>80</sup> This distortion would bear destructive consequences in the colonial aftermath of the war, when French imperial authority created an expanded state of Greater Lebanon, isolated from its Syrian neighbors yet including a substantial non-Christian population. Already in 1917, a naval report noted that Syrian Muslims, conscious of French colonial policy in Algeria, were “persuaded that all of France’s favor went to Christians, particularly to Maronites.”<sup>81</sup> The unresolved contradictions of French wartime presumptions—that Lebanese Christians were most reliably supportive, yet that all of Syria was ripe for the taking—reflected not merely ad hoc incoherencies, but persistent ambiguities that ran through an imperial politics of affection in the so-called *France du Levant*.

Christians, French military officials attested, faced particular danger in wartime Lebanon because of their purported support for France. Like Antoine Eddé, Admiral de Spitz reported that multiple Christian families had been exiled from Beirut “for having spoken of the Allies’ advance.” This reading of Ottoman wartime measures of repression foregrounded suspicions of religious and political allegiance to France, overlooking domestic rationales of maintaining imperial authority. Summoning the oft-invoked specter of Lebanese annihilation, de Spitz noted

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<sup>79</sup> AMAE, 1 CPCOM 872, Trabaud to de Spitz, 14 April 1916.

<sup>80</sup> These tensions were also manifest within the Quai d’Orsay and Chamber of Deputies, where the so-called “Syrian party” continued to clamor for annexation of *la Syrie intégrale*. Andrew and Kanya-Forstner, *Climax of French Imperial Expansion*, 74-77.

<sup>81</sup> AMAE 1 CPCOM 876, Defrance to MAE, Rapport Services spéciaux Division Navale de Syrie, 19 April 1917.

that his sources urged intervention before the harvest, because Turkish soldiers had allegedly “announced that Christians [were] only currently tolerated for working the earth; and that as soon as the harvest is ready, the Christians will be massacred.”<sup>82</sup> More practically, an invasion after the harvest might sap the motivation of starving villagers, for whom famine theoretically provided a potent impetus to revolt. Even as de Spitz claimed that “calls to France increase[d]” from Christians and Lebanese, though, he tellingly instructed Trabaud to “avoid any action or speech that could be interpreted as a promise of military intervention.”<sup>83</sup> Without authorization to disrupt the blockade even for humanitarian relief, de Spitz sought to minimize the moral as well as military responsibility that such a pledge might engender.

Toward the end of 1916, Defrance suggested with a hint of exasperation that “in general the Syrian populations, even the Lebanese, wait passively for relief from external help.”<sup>84</sup> Lebanon, he implied, was almost—but not quite—an exception to prejudices of Oriental impotence and passivity; only European intervention would relieve their predicament. Defrance had previously voiced a conviction that across Greater Syria, “the Lebanese [were] the only ones on which France could count entirely” in a potential military action.<sup>85</sup> As early as October 1915, just a month after the French occupation of Arwad, Defrance responded to a consideration—and ultimate rejection—of the possibility arming local populations to combat “Turkish domination” by observing that it would nonetheless be “easy to provoke the uprising...of Syrians and, especially, of Lebanese.”<sup>86</sup> The less discriminate term “Syrians” did not convey the particular commitment to France that he presumed as a matter of course from the Lebanese.

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<sup>82</sup> AMAE, 1 CPCOM 872, de Spitz, “Résumé des renseignements recueillis du 1er au 15 avril, sur la situation politique dans la Syrie,” 16 April 1916. Emphasis in original.

<sup>83</sup> AMAE, 1 CPCOM 872, de Spitz to Ministre de la Marine, 16 April 1916.

<sup>84</sup> AMAE, 1 CPCOM 875, Defrance, Annexe à la dépêche politique, 23 December 1916.

<sup>85</sup> AMAE, 1 CPCOM 874, Defrance to Briand, 9 September 1916.

<sup>86</sup> AMAE, 1 CPCOM 870, Defrance to Delcassé, 1 October 1915.

Even after the military option of invading Syria and Lebanon had been replaced by the chimerical hopes of the *Légion d'Orient*, French government assessments stressed the allegiance of Lebanese and Christians in particular. The new naval commander of the Syrian division, Admiral Varney, reported in the summer of 1917 that “Maronites and other Christians in Beirut insist[ed] on an expedition and remain loyal to us.” Noting the resistance of many Maronites to absorption in an expanded Syria, Varney attributed this reluctance to their “devotion to France” and preference for a French imperial order. In terms of martial commitment, though, he highlighted Maronites’ encouragement for both Syrians and Lebanese to “march side by side with French expeditionary troops to conquer Syria.”<sup>87</sup> This vision undoubtedly appealed to French policymakers, eager for a less costly solution to Lebanon’s predicament and predisposed to expressions of universal devotion. Yet its distortions obscured the tensions that such an ambiguous politics of imperial affection would pose for the postwar colonial order.

A report on possible military operations in Syria from July 1917 recognized that “Syrian populations and in particular the Lebanese [were] persecuted, for the very reason of their attachment to France.”<sup>88</sup> Non-intervention, the report continued, “has diminished our prestige in the entire Orient,” for even the Lebanese, France’s “traditional clients themselves, victims of Turkish abuses, lose patience.” Inaction represented an “abdication” not only of humanitarian responsibilities to victimized allies, but also of military and political interests that a mythology of timeless French influence in the Orient had cultivated.<sup>89</sup> An agent and activist for *la Syrie française* based in Cairo deployed a similar argument of devotion and danger to stimulate action; targeted because its “children [were] French by heart and by sentiments,” these “French of the

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<sup>87</sup> AMAE, 1 CPCOM 877, Varney, Renseignements sur la Syrie, 27 June 1917.

<sup>88</sup> AMAE, 1 CPCOM 878, MAE, Nécessité d’une opération militaire en Syrie, 16 July 1917.

<sup>89</sup> AMAE, 1 CPCOM 878, Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, Nécessité d’une opération militaire en Syrie, 16 July 1917.

Orient” would suffer still further if “France delayed this urgent intervention,” which would cause a “great breach in its moral and intellectual prestige.”<sup>90</sup> Morally as well as imperially, France’s historic pledges and wartime prerogatives toward Lebanon dictated an imperative of invasion. Its population’s attachment to France, in this logic, at once heightened their mortal danger and exacerbated the moral compunction over persistently deferred intervention.

The ongoing famine, without the remedy of French assistance, “would especially decimate the Lebanese,” acknowledged France’s ambassador to Great Britain, Paul Cambon, whose brother Jules was a high-ranking official in the Foreign Ministry. Echoing dire prognostications of massacre and explicitly invoking France’s traditional religious alliance, Cambon forecast that soon “there would not remain any more of these diverse ‘Christian nations’ on which we once founded our influence.” With every day that French support did not arrive, he suggested, even “the most reliable loyalties become hesitant,” and even “the milieux until now most ardently favorable toward France” became increasingly discouraged. The political and moral implications of French abandonment overlapped, as Cambon intimated that English imperial designs might “cultivate” such disillusionment to secure a colonial foothold up the coast from Egypt. French promises of relief sounded hollow, Cambon warned, if local populations wondered “how a great friendly Power cannot do anything to provision a country that has been confided to it and to relieve its miseries.” By grounding French claims in the “ambitions that our interests, like our historic memories, impose on us in the Orient,” Cambon linked the mythologized narrative of *la France du Levant* to pressing imperial and political concerns. He recognized the dialectic of encouragement and disappointment, through which French policy appeared “at once chimerical and contradictory” and was interpreted as “hesitation and

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<sup>90</sup> AMAE 1 CPCOM 875, J. Kahil to Pierre Dalbet, 9 January 1917. Jean Kahil, *Les aspirations syriennes: le vœu de la Syrie* (Le Caire, 1916).

weakness” even by loyally Francophile locals. As “fine words” supplanted “effective action,” France’s imperial status and moral credibility both suffered in the eyes of its partisans.<sup>91</sup>

Cambon’s recommendation urged a “definitive decision” on intervention, effectuated with the “resolution and energy” that he characterized as the “secret to success in the countries of the Levant.” Yet he too confronted the obstacle of military priorities in a global war. He expressed exasperation over pledges that “relief will come after French victories on the European front,” a moment that seemed increasingly remote as trenches were dug deeper and casualties mounted exponentially at Verdun and the Somme. Antoine Eddé—much lower in administrative hierarchy, but also closer to the populations in whose name Cambon pressed for action—had also recognized the precedence of the European theater but urged an opportune military engagement. Once the battles at Verdun had concluded, Eddé opined rather prematurely in April 1916, he “believe[d] that we could now do something.”<sup>92</sup> The pleas of this Lebanese volunteer—formerly prepared to sacrifice his life, now providing unsolicited advice on military strategy to France’s Foreign Ministry—sought to connect the political opportunity for intervention to its moral exigency. Even this confluence, though, guaranteed neither protection nor salvation for the Lebanese population in the midst of the Great War.

When French military authorities confronted the potential implications of armed relief, they uncovered both the ideological imperative of aiding Lebanese victims and the violent consequences that might accompany—and indeed derive from—French support. A War Ministry report from early May 1916 on the possibility of intervening in Syria accepted the premise that Christian populations had “counted on an Allied intervention,” but were now increasingly targeted by Ottoman authorities, particularly after the defeat at Gallipoli and the seizure of

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<sup>91</sup> AMAE, 1 CPCOM 874, Cambon to Briand, 11 September 1916.

<sup>92</sup> AMAE, 1 CPCOM 872, Eddé to Jules Cambon, 14 April 1916.



sensitive French consular documents (the subject of the next section). The principal advantage of intervention, the report acknowledged, would be the “relief of populations that call for our protection.”<sup>93</sup> Upon considering tactical challenges and geopolitical disadvantages, however, as well as the salient possibility that an invasion would “provoke terrible reprisals against all Christian subjects,” the Ministry came to the same conclusion that a subsequent report issued the following year: that “it is neither appropriate, nor possible, to intervene in Syria.”<sup>94</sup> Even in the third year of war, French officials lingered on the obligations posed by “the call of Syrian and particularly Lebanese populations, who are subjected to the most unbearable persecutions, for the very reason of their attachment to France.” Their unavoidable conclusion, the report observed, was that they had been “definitively abandoned by France.”<sup>95</sup> These calculations surmised the conundrum faced by French policymakers and advocates of intervention: a commitment to Lebanese security and survival encouraged its beleaguered inhabitants to amplify their appeals to French beneficence, which in turn condemned them to targeted Ottoman retaliation and further degraded France’s status, as Entente ships continued to prevent the arrival of rescue or relief. The fate of the Lebanese men and women who bore the costs of this deadly promise would determine how imperial activists as well as administrators reworked the narrative of wartime experience to craft postwar colonial logics.

### *The Meanings of Martyrdom*

When eleven Lebanese and Syrian activists and notables were hanged in Beirut’s central square in August 1915, their deaths transformed an anonymous mass tragedy of starvation and suffering into a more viscerally comprehensible campaign of repression, with particular names

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<sup>93</sup> AMAE, 1 CPCOM 872, Ministère de la Guerre, “Note sur l’opportunité d’une intervention française en Syrie,” 3 May 1916.

<sup>94</sup> AMAE, 1 CPCOM 876, Ministère de la Guerre, Projets d’intervention en Syrie, 15 April 1917.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

and faces, victims and villains. Over the following months, dozens more would be executed, following condemnation from the Ottoman military tribunal that had been established in the mountainous resort town of Alay. The victims were both Muslim and Christian, from different parts of Lebanon and Syria, and their crimes were offenses of treason and disloyalty to the Ottoman state. They were mostly members of pre-war political organizations, reform movements, groups advocating for regional autonomy, and Arab nationalist societies, and also included journalists, editors, and former members of the Ottoman parliament.<sup>96</sup> Several had attended the first Arab Congress, held in Paris just over a year prior to the outbreak of war, while others had corresponded with the French government to sound out possible avenues of support. Their death sentences, carried out in public, inspired popular outcry and helped consolidate the memory of wartime suffering and victimization.<sup>97</sup>

Historically and historiographically, the martyrs of 1915-16—hanged in what became known Martyrs' Square in both Beirut and Damascus—have appeared chiefly as symbols of opposition to the Ottoman regime.<sup>98</sup> Responsibility for their execution was levied almost singularly on the figure of Djemal Pasha, the Young Turk triumvir whose notorious brutality as military governor of Lebanon and Syria earned him the epithet Djemal the Butcher.<sup>99</sup> The killings, in this narrative, galvanized resistance from nationalists across the Arab Middle East, sparking what came to be known as the Arab Revolt. Their memorialization has subsequently endured across the fractures of anti-colonial, independence, and postcolonial struggles,

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<sup>96</sup> For a list of victims, see Tauber, *Arab Movements*, 54-55.

<sup>97</sup> For accounts of the executions, see Fawaz, *Land of Aching Hearts*; Tauber, *Arab Movements*.

<sup>98</sup> George Antonius, *The Arab Awakening* (London: H. Hamilton, 1938); Zeine P. Zeine, *Arab-Turkish Relations and the Emergence of Arab Nationalism* (Beirut: Khayyats, 1958).

<sup>99</sup> Talha Çiçek's revisionist account attempts to rehabilitate Djemal's actions as efforts at upholding a centralized Ottoman state, an interpretation that is not so much inaccurate as incomplete. Talha Çiçek, *War and State Formation in Syria: Cemal Pasha's Governorate During World War I, 1914-1917* (New York: Routledge, 2014).

furnishing emblems of unity against foreign oppression and occupation.<sup>100</sup> Yet like debates over blame for the Lebanese famine—levied on Ottoman persecution and Entente blockade, environmental catastrophe and concerted policy—the concept of martyrdom that these figures engendered was subject to interpretation and appropriation. For this traumatic event in the midst of the Great War also generated another curious consequence, perceptible when situated within the longer trajectory of Franco-Lebanese relations. From the perspective of French officials, agents, and partisans such as those surveyed in previous sections, the martyrdom of Lebanese activists derived not simply from supposed Turkish cruelty, but from their status as emblems of imperial loyalty to *France*. How this narrative was crafted and deployed, I suggest, enabled policymakers and ideologues to revise imperial logics of protection and reestablish Lebanon as a bastion of postwar French affective empire.

The victims of the 1915-16 executions, according to most contemporary and historical accounts, were consecrated most prominently as martyrs to Arabist and nationalist causes. One victim in Beirut, for instance, allegedly professed with his last words that he “die[d] for [his] country” and proclaiming, “Long live my homeland! Love live the Arab nation!”<sup>101</sup> The hangings, historians of postwar Arab nationalism have generally concurred, provided a common frame of reference for pan-Arabists as well as advocates of Syrian and Lebanese nationhood. By demonizing Djemal Pasha as the figurehead of an oppressive “Turkish” regime, a patriotic memory culture mythologized individual deaths at his hands as tokens of heroic resistance. In its immediate consequences, the visible execution of these well-known figures inspired the very resistance that Jemal’s exemplary punishment was intended to suppress among suspect

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<sup>100</sup> On the recent history and contemporary politics of memorializing martyrs and the famine in Beirut, see Tanielian, “War of Famine,” 206-207.

<sup>101</sup> Antun Yammin, *Lubnan fi l’harb: Aw-dhikra al-hawadith wa al-mazalim fi Lubnan fi l-harb al-‘umumiyaa, 1914-1919* [*Lebanon in War: Remembrance of the Events and the Oppression in the World War, 1914-1919*], vol. 1 (Beirut: al-Matba‘a al-Adabiyya, 1919-1920), 110.

populations. Read into the history of the Arab Revolt, the wartime executions in Beirut and Damascus, as well as Jerusalem, catalyzed long-standing shared grievances over Ottoman authority. Anger at the occupation regime over the requisitioning of food and supplies, the threat of conscription, and prolonged famine bubbled over into resentment at the targeting of prominent local leaders, including Sunni Muslim leaders alongside Maronite clergymen, and the gruesome spectacle of their public martyrdom.

While multiconfessional in their victims, however, the executions bore particular implications when folded into pre-existing narratives of Franco-Lebanese alliance. Combined with reports that Ottoman authorities were rounding up Christians for mass deportation or starvation—whether their claims were sustainable or spurious—and the conviction of widespread Lebanese support for France, even the sentencing of a single prominent Maronite could trigger a broader panic that sectarian identity implied treasonous sentimental allegiances. Connections between individual Lebanese and representatives of the French government were not merely abstract; pre-war contact with French officials or consular personnel had been preserved in diplomatic correspondence, which could serve as damning evidence of collusion. When the Maronite priest Yusuf al-Hayek was condemned and executed in March 1915, even before the first wave of military tribunals, the incriminating document was a letter in which he had called for French military liberation of Lebanon. Written testimony seemed to confirm the words of another French spy in the Levant that “the attachment of Maronites to France is incontestable.”<sup>102</sup> Such letters also endangered even those who had not actively plotted for French intervention or assistance. Dying for perceived ties to France, amidst a campaign of famine, expulsions, and executions, became a frighteningly literal possibility for Maronite

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<sup>102</sup> AMAE 1 CPCOM 879, Jaussen, Note sur les populations syriennes, forwarded Defrance to MAE, 8 October 1917.

Christians. The discourse promulgated by both French and Lebanese activists and officials, ensuring inviolate and eternal bonds of affection, was transformed into a fatal liability for those sent to the scaffold and those who witnessed their deaths alike.

The reason that communication between French and Lebanese was available to furnish proof of treasonous collaboration was because, shortly after the departure of French government personnel from Beirut in early November 1914, the records of the French General Consulate had fallen into the hands of the Ottoman occupation regime. François Georges-Picot, the General Consul who would later become the first High Commissioner of postwar Mandate Syria and Lebanon, had—like many others in the early weeks of the Great War—spectacularly miscalculated the possible duration of hostilities, assuring his local employees that he would return in a mere two weeks. Unlike other nations' consular officials, though, Georges-Picot declined to destroy the Consulate's stock of documents, instead entrusting them to the American delegation and placing the archives under American consular seal, which Ottoman authorities promptly broke and confiscated.<sup>103</sup> According to another version of this story, Georges-Picot had hidden documents behind a false wall in the Consulate and divulged their location to Philippe Zalzal, the Lebanese drogman who subsequently delivered this information to Ottoman officials in exchange for his family's safety.<sup>104</sup> In either case, once the files had been opened, their contents provided the Ottoman military court in 'Alay with a cache of signed letters and petitions written to the French consulate to serve as incriminating evidence of pre-war disloyalty.

Among those executed based on documents obtained from the consular archives was another Maronite priest, Yusuf al-Hani, as well as the brothers Farid and Philippe Khazen, who had served as honorary drogman for the Consulate. Hani was executed on 5 April 1916, the

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<sup>103</sup> Fawaz, *Land of Aching Hearts*, 245.

<sup>104</sup> Tauber, *Arab Movements*, 39-45; Ajay, "Lebanon during World War I," 155-158.

Khazens on 6 June. The sentence of the former was sealed by his signature, along with that of five other Lebanese notables with frequent contact with French officials, on a memorandum sent to the French General Consul in March 1913, calling for a program of reforms to safeguard the status of Christians in Ottoman Syria and Lebanon.<sup>105</sup> This document was among those published in May 1916 and recirculated as proof of treason in a volume promulgated by the Ottoman military to defend the executions to an international audience.<sup>106</sup> The gravest transgression, from the perspective of the Sublime Porte, was the petition's call for French occupation and for the union of Beirut and Mount Lebanon under French protection. The profession that Christians of Syria were "inseparably attached to France," bound by "love for France and for its civilization," likely registered in its emotive grandiloquence as less alarming to the Ottoman regime than the geopolitical implications of direct incursions to its territorial integrity.<sup>107</sup> From the perspective of French imperial advocates, however, the sentiments of gratitude and affinity espoused by the letter's authors, their consideration of France as an "adopted Fatherland," were not mere rhetorical accoutrements to an active campaign of subversion.<sup>108</sup> Rather, these discursive gestures arguably supplanted the substantive efforts of intervention that French policymakers had declined to pursue. Ideological affirmation of France's status, in other words, overshadowed the consequences of political and military inaction, of which Yusuf al-Hani's life counted as collateral testament to abidingly loyal alliance between France and Lebanon.

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<sup>105</sup> One of these, Khalil Zénié, benefited from a French government stipend to produce propaganda "for the French cause in the Orient," as well as later support for his "devoted" wartime service from Arwad Island. AMAE 206 CPCOM 428, Président de la Chambre de Commerce de Paris to MAE, 19 December 1913; AMAE 1 CPCOM 871, 16 January 1916.

<sup>106</sup> Commandement de la IVème Armée, *La vérité sur la question syrienne* (Istanbul: Imprimerie Tanine, 1916). Documents were also published in Egyptian newspapers, including *al-Moqattam*. AMAE 1 CPCOM 935, Defrance to MAE, 5 August 1916.

<sup>107</sup> AMAE 1 CPCOM 935, Defrance to MAE, 31 May 1916. Slight differences in translation from the Arabic mark the versions published by the Ottoman military and those reproduced by the French Foreign Ministry.

<sup>108</sup> *La vérité sur la question syrienne*, 51.

The preoccupation of Ottoman authorities, on the other hand, already predisposed to mistrust the loyalty of Arab provinces, was to perceived threats to Istanbul's sovereignty and ongoing war effort. The contacts with French diplomatic personnel that most unnerved them were from Lebanese and Syrian activists who had pursued a diverse range of political projects before the war, from regional reform and decentralization to territorial secession and outright independence. Suspicion of Franco-Lebanese allegiance was filtered through pre-existing concerns of imperial stability. The domestic dispute of a Marie El Khoury or the complaint of an insulted Duaibis Murr did not figure as disruptions to political or military order; the archival traces left by the confrontations between ordinary individuals analyzed in the previous chapter made little perceptible mark on the prosecution of geopolitical conflict. The corpus of French consular documents functioned for Ottoman officials more as a means to indict prominent internal enemies among suspect populations and assert imperial authority through exemplary justice than to uncover a broader but more abstract ideological framework. Investment in an idealized Franco-Lebanese relationship registered as subversive inasmuch as it constituted a political maneuver that imperiled Ottoman authority, not as a reworking of the tenets of obligation and esteem that structured bonds between Paris and Beirut. Yet by weaponizing ties to France, the use of these materials simultaneously endangered Lebanese—construed as inviolably Francophile—and paradoxically strengthened French imperial aspirations as their potential saviors and benevolent sovereign.

For proponents of Franco-Lebanese alliance, victims' connection to France—and their condemnation through French consular correspondence—colored their martyrdom in a peculiarly Gallic shade. French officials in the eastern Mediterranean, commanding the blockade responsible for Lebanese starvation and advocating an enduring loyalty that further jeopardized

Ottoman subjects, lamented that their most robust allies had been indicted by their very correspondence with France's diplomatic office. Albert Trabaud, convinced of Lebanese devotion as well as the Ottoman campaign against pro-French sympathies, exclaimed forthrightly that those executed had been "compromised for us and by us!"<sup>109</sup> The guilt of having implicated France's Lebanese interlocutors, Trabaud implied, was matched by the heroic martyrdom of their sacrifice. Even though any encouragement of Lebanese separatism, or even support for political autonomy, imperiled those whom France purported to protect, the notion that Lebanon's executed notables had perished "for us" preserved a sense of moral righteousness as well as imperial hubris. Yet Defrance still claimed that in September, after the hangings of mostly Muslims, "Syrians and Lebanese implore a foreign intervention."<sup>110</sup>

In the frank assessment of France's Naval Ministry in April 1916, the wave of arrests and punishments meted out by the Ottoman regime following its seizure of French consular papers "could only be erased by a coming intervention."<sup>111</sup> The moral imperative of intervention, in this calculus, was heightened by the responsibility that France bore for the demise of Lebanese victims. With no such expedition authorized, though, the burden of obligation was left to the self-sacrifice of Lebanese martyrs. A discursive shift of emphasis transformed the executed men from victims of French negligence and collusion into emblems of France's enduring prestige. French authorities and agents suggested that their final statements from the scaffold were not proclamations of Arab nationalism, but professions of fidelity to France. According to a report from Albert Defrance in Egypt, the last words of Philippe and Farid al-Khazen were impassioned exclamations of "Vive la France!"<sup>112</sup> The Maronite priest al-Hayek, Admiral de Spitz contended,

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<sup>109</sup> AMAE 1 CPCOM 872, Albert Trabaud, 14 March 1916.

<sup>110</sup> AMAE 1 CPCOM 870, Defrance to MAE, 10 September 1915.

<sup>111</sup> AMAE 1 CPCOM 872, Note Ministère de la Marine, 1 April 1916.

<sup>112</sup> AMAE 1 CPCOM 873, Albert Defrance, 5 July 1916.



affirmed from the scaffold his vow to “spill [his] blood for France.”<sup>113</sup> Six months earlier, al-Hayek had reputedly been assured by the French consul that “France, one must hope, will soon come to save you.”<sup>114</sup> His martyrdom for France was only bolstered by the endurance of this conviction, even as prospects of French rescue diminished.

Whether or not these figures pledged their mortal allegiance to France during their final moments, the language in which French officials reconstructed their commitments conformed to a multivalent idiom of martyrdom, remolded to absolve French complicity and resolve an imperial contradiction. The promise of Antoine Eddé to sacrifice his life at the outset of war was perversely fulfilled through the deaths of those convicted for their ties to France. When Eddé reported that the Maronite patriarch Elias Hoyek, long counted on as a staunch French ally, had proclaimed that “we will all die martyrs of France,” he expanded the latter’s patriotic fatalism to an entire population.<sup>115</sup> Before he was summoned to a military court in May 1916, the patriarch, according to DeFrance’s communication with another Maronite priest, had even requested to be “buried in a French flag” in the event that he were condemned to death.<sup>116</sup> This narrative of willing martyrdom eclipsed for French officials and partisans any doubt sown by a later statement in Hoyek’s name, assuredly coerced or outright fabricated, denying that the “dear Ottoman fatherland” had persecuted Christians and refuting any affective or political ties between Maronites and France.<sup>117</sup> For Hoyek and his French interlocutors, the “traditions of attachment” that he had professed in August 1914 persevered, binding Maronites to France as their “generous protector.” His mortal gratitude prescribed continued loyalty in the face of death,

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<sup>113</sup> AMAE 1 CPCOM 872, de Spitz, 16 April 1916.

<sup>114</sup> AMAE 1 CPCOM 870, Rapport Tohmeh, 3 October 1915.

<sup>115</sup> AMAE 1 CPCOM 873, Antoine Eddé, Ile Rouad, 1 June 1916.

<sup>116</sup> AMAE 1 CPCOM 872, DeFrance to MAE, 19 May 1916.

<sup>117</sup> AMAE, 1 CPCOM 875, Elias Pierre Hoyek, undated. The document also lacked a signature, suggesting that if not coerced, it was likely fabricated.

eschewing the resentment expressed by Antoine Eddé as he witnessed the French blockade jeopardize the very Lebanese to whom its leaders had pledged support.

If last words of allegiance made martyrs to France of the war's Lebanese victims and notables, an unexpected survivor claimed the mantle of martyrdom in its aftermath. None other than Philippe Zalzal, blamed for sacrificing French consular documents and for the "treachery" of condemning his countrymen to save himself, not only proclaimed his innocence, but even asserted his own victimhood after the war.<sup>118</sup> After navigating banishments and imprisonments from the Ottoman occupation force, Zalzal was tried by the French mandate administration for treason in early 1919.<sup>119</sup> While he avoided the death sentence, he was condemned to a life of forced labor.<sup>120</sup> He resurfaced in the French archival record when he wrote an undated letter in 1922 to France's Chamber of Deputies, invoking his "right to petition" to appeal what he deemed an unjust verdict. Relating the dangers he survived after Georges-Picot's imprudent failure to destroy the Consulate's records, he asserted that he had continued to serve France with such "bravery and such devotion" that he effectively sacrificed himself in order to "preserve the prestige of the French government." Georges-Picot had behaved so irresponsibly, Zalzal alleged, that he had jeopardized not only Lebanese lives, but also their faith in France. By assuming the blame for divulging the documents' location, the loyal drogman had sought "defend the interests of your country and the reputation of its agents," even as the Consul concocted a tale of Zalzal's betrayal to obscure his own responsibility.<sup>121</sup> Convinced that the French would eventually

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<sup>118</sup> Tauber, *Arab Movements*, 40.

<sup>119</sup> Already during the war, amidst the executions of 1916, the Foreign Ministry deemed Zalzal "no longer worthy" of his monthly stipend as an auxiliary drogman and claimed "suspicions" dating back to Ottoman entry into the war. Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, Note pour le Service personnel, 17 May 1916.

<sup>120</sup> *Correspondance d'Orient* 15 Feb. 1919, Nouvelles diverses, 139.

<sup>121</sup> To this allegation, the reader of Zalzal's petition appended an incredulous "!!" in the margin. According to a report from the French attaché in Rome of a conversation between Zalzal and Father Giannini, the apostolic delegate in Beirut, the former blamed the consequences of the archival seizure on the appellants whose documents had been uncovered, contending that "those who write must well know that they take responsibility of everything that they

“appreciate this sacrifice,” Zalzal reiterated that he had succumbed to his ordeal “on account of France,” but that he did so willingly on behalf of France. In his letter to the Chamber of Deputies, he pleaded that his years of service and suffering merited more honorable recognition, and he appealed to French principles of justice as “the fundamental pillar of the gigantic republican edifice.”<sup>122</sup> Invoking a central pillar of French political mythology as well as its civilizing imperial ideology, this erstwhile agent of Franco-Lebanese protectorate positioned himself as a martyr to the ideals he claimed to be upholding in France’s name.

### *Conclusion*

As the case of Philippe Zalzal suggests, the language of martyrdom provided a compelling medium to interpret the privations of the war years. A notion of sacrifice offered meaning to individual suffering as well as to the mass devastation of famine and occupation. The purpose of sacrifice, though, after a war with hundreds of thousands of victims in even the isolated region of Mount Lebanon, was neither self-evident, stable, nor predetermined. For Arab nationalists, the martyred victims of the 1915 and 1916 hangings in Beirut and Damascus epitomized Ottoman oppression and galvanized political movements for self-determination. The traumatic experiences of war and famine, as Elizabeth Thompson has fruitfully investigated, also had profoundly gendered effects, shaking the foundations of paternal authority for households and structures of imperial governance alike.<sup>123</sup> This occurred not only on tangible social and political levels, eviscerating traditional modes of sustenance and legitimacy and necessitating a recalibrated “paternal bargain” between the French colonial administration and local male elites

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have put in their letters.” Giannini supposedly responded that “there will also be those responsible for what will happen to them, and we will know where to find them.” AMAE 1 CPCOM 935, Attaché français à Rome to MAE, 23 April 1915.

<sup>122</sup> AMAE 50 CPCOM 153, Philippe Zalzal to Raoul Perret, Président de la Chambre des Députés, undated.

<sup>123</sup> Thompson, *Colonial Citizens*, chapter one.

in the postwar years. Also jeopardized through the tremors of the Great War were the affective premises that shaped the French imperial perspective toward Syria and especially Lebanon. The loss of lives as well as loyalties—willingly sacrificed yet morally abandoned—imperilled the claims of Franco-Lebanese love and logics of protection that had sustained a conviction in Lebanon’s place at the heart of a mythical *France du Levant*. Viewing Lebanese martyrs as suffering for—as well as because of—their affinity for France functioned to stabilize a long-standing imperial fantasy at the moment of its greatest vulnerability.

Since the French intervention following the spasm of sectarian violence in Mount Lebanon in 1860, France’s ideological protectorate rested on the presumption that it would again assure the safety and security of Lebanese Christians.<sup>124</sup> This informal structure for intervention was in turn based on reciprocal tenets of obligation and mutual sacrifice, cultivated on both sides by writers, activists, and politicians. It was these principles that Antoine Eddé and others invoked in volunteering their lives for the French war effort in August 1914, and with which he called on France to come to Lebanon’s aid amidst the devastation of famine two years later. The French unwillingness or inability to uphold such promises—complicated by the preeminence of military and geostrategic priorities in the context of war—enabled challenges of the very ground of moral legitimacy and paternalistic oversight that French imperial champions claimed. These promises of salvation, moreover, were consistently issued throughout the war by France’s most proximate agents and officials and called for by Lebanese activists and Maronite clients. As Eddé as well as French authorities recognized, a failure to intervene could irreparably harm France’s fragile sense of prestige in this previously secure realm of imperial influence. Even more tangibly, the

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<sup>124</sup> That the French expedition arrived to tour Mount Lebanon *after* most violence had calmed does not necessarily detract from this mythology. Rather, aggrandizing the French protective role in memory may have substituted for substantive military or political commitment. See chapter one, as well as Rodogno, *Against Massacre*; and Fawaz, *An Occasion for War: Civil Conflict in Lebanon and Damascus in 1860* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

fleet that Eddé exhorted to provide relief was actively responsible for *preventing* aid from reaching the Lebanese coast. The very words of encouragement with which political and military leaders in the eastern Mediterranean continued to proclaim French benevolence endangered a population whose loyalties were already suspect under Ottoman occupation. The trope of Franco-Lebanese alliance, absent the material backing that its unwritten charter neglected to provide, entrapped Lebanon's isolated inhabitants in a combustible climate of disaster and fear, subject to exemplary retribution and premonitions of massacre.

The execution of Lebanese notables—even alongside their Syrian counterparts, and for crimes more salient as evidence of anti-imperial separatism than as signs of imperial affection—functioned in this context to scramble the idiom of sacrifice that bound Lebanon to France. If their deaths epitomized for the local population Ottoman oppression, they also shifted the focus away from French complicity in Lebanese victimhood. To interpret their martyrdom as both “for us and by us,” in Albert Trabaud's candid if self-serving assessment, was at once to acknowledge the culpability of France's subversive contacts—and Georges-Picot's reckless conduct—and to refocus the meaning of martyrdom from its mortal consequences to a conviction in ideological purity. Last words of patriotic love obscured the destructive role of French ships that prolonged famine, of discourses that heralded allegiance, and of mismanaged diplomatic documents that sent men to the gallows. Calls to Mother France from the lips of the condemned echoed more compellingly in the French imperial imagination than the pleading for survival from its metaphorical children, the “French of the Orient.”

The implications of wartime non-intervention enabled the postwar French colonial apparatus to assume a leading role in revitalizing the Lebanese economy, society, and sheer survival. As Graham Pitts and Simon Jackson have recently argued, the distribution of grain and

provision of humanitarian assistance sought not only to compensate for intentionally withholding aid during the Great War, but also to establish the political and military structures through which the mandate colonial regime would take hold.<sup>125</sup> Moral and military debates over Lebanese allegiance, French intervention, and the meaning of martyrdom, this chapter had endeavored to show, exposed fractures in the affective logics that upheld an unstable ideology of Franco-Lebanese protection. Unreciprocated pledges of devotion, volunteers like Eddé and officials like Trabaud both acknowledged, risked eroding the edifice of prestige through which these idealized bonds were forged. Appeals for salvation carried existential stakes, and their instrumental urgency mapped unevenly onto the affective coordinates of mutual obligation and esteem. France's unwritten commitment of protection not only proved inadequate in the context of an inter-imperial war with colonial implications. It also incriminated individual lives as well as the moral logics that sustained the particular Franco-Lebanese imperial formation. A postwar protective regime, I suggest, was contingent on reconceptualizing Lebanese suffering as martyrdom for France and on rehabilitating affective principles of moral fidelity alongside the institutions of mandatory governance.

The tensions that ran through French imperial attitudes toward Lebanon, however—and which emerged starkly over the course of wartime debates and decision-making—would bedevil this ideological and political project almost from the start. The blurred salience of identity—Christian and Muslim, Lebanese and Syrian—evident in discussions of popular allegiance and affection posed only an abstract conundrum in discursive representations of wartime dynamics. Once France obtained a colonial mandate for all of Greater Syria, though, the ambiguous distinctions between Lebanese loyalty and Syrian suspicion, their levels of civilization and

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<sup>125</sup> Pitts, "Fallow Fields," 74-77. Jackson, "Transformative Relief: Imperial Humanitarianism and Mandatory Development in Syria-Lebanon, 1915-1925," *Humanity* 8, no. 2 (Summer 2017): 247-268. My thanks to Simon Jackson for sharing an advanced copy of his article, and to Graham Pitts for sharing his dissertation.

sentiment, and the precise meaning of affective and historic ties to “Mother France” came unavoidably to the fore. Mythologized as Lebanon’s venerable protector, France’s role as colonial sovereign would require reconciling an unfulfilled legacy of privilege and salvation with the exigencies of occupation and the ideological recalibration of France’s postwar empire.

**CHAPTER FIVE**  
**Mandating Protection:**  
**France, Greater Lebanon, and the Politics of Affective Empire**

By the end of the war, Lebanon itself had become a martyr. So proclaimed the Maronite archbishop Alfred Khoury, speaking in January 1919 at a conference convened in Marseille to discuss France's role in the Arab provinces of the former Ottoman Empire. The "martyr of Lebanon," Khoury declared, represented the "tragic coronation and bloody consecration" of its historic relationship with France.<sup>1</sup> In the immediate postwar context, amidst the collapse of Lebanon's erstwhile Ottoman sovereign, its ties to France were tested at a key moment of colonial opportunity.

Organized by the Chambers of Commerce of Marseille and Lyon, the summit at which Khoury proclaimed Lebanon's martyrdom brought together an array of politicians, activists, and intellectuals, as well as businessmen, journalists, teachers, jurists, and other professionals, with the purpose of articulating across multiple domains the extent of French interests and influence throughout the region. Experts analyzed different facets of French involvement in Greater Syria, divided into four thematic sections: economic and agricultural; archeological, historical, and ethnographic; cultural and educational; and medical and scientific. These topics were brought together under the conference's title, the *Congrès français de Syrie*. Its purview was broad, and so too was its conception of the Syrian lands with commercial or cultural ties to France. While some participants insisted that their projects were not aimed at colonization, most advanced a more explicitly—and more far-reaching—imperialist agenda, conceived as the rightful heritage of France's traditional involvement across the Near East.<sup>2</sup> The congress, asserted the president of one section, would "exercise a real influence on the fate of this semitic Orient, this *France du*

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<sup>1</sup> Alfred Khoury, Congrès français de Syrie, 3 January 1919.

<sup>2</sup> Jackson, "'What is Syria Worth?' The Huvelin Mission, Economic Expertise and the French Project in the Eastern Mediterranean, 1918-1922," *Monde(s)* 2 no. 4 (2013): 83-103.



*Levant.*”<sup>3</sup> In the postwar moment of uncertain imperial arrangements, as statesmen and delegates debated peace terms in Versailles, the meeting in Marseille sought to stake a claim to a hitherto unrealized French Levant, a fantasy of empire grounded in empirical studies and material interests, but bound together by a shared conviction in its affective ties to France.

It was in the context of this conference that Khoury made his lament. If he focused his account on Lebanon specifically, rather than all of Greater Syria, Khoury explained, this owed not only to its “definite national character” and traditional autonomy of the former, but especially to its particular experience during the Great War. Tracing Lebanon’s connection to France back to the Crusades, he attributed its wartime suffering—the famine and persecution that should have “shaken the civilized world with a shiver of horror”—to this very attachment, for which the Ottoman regime had punished the Lebanese population through subjugation and starvation. Those who had perished, he avowed, represented “fallen martyrs to the French cause.” Rather than begrudge the mortal consequences of Franco-Lebanese alliance, though, Khoury embraced Lebanon’s martyrdom; its sacrifice ensured that this bond was “sealed in tears and blood.” Out of the death and despair of the war, he envisioned the emergence of a “purified and better world,” one in which France renewed its role as Lebanon’s “age-old protector,” and the Lebanese pledged in return their enduring gratitude, their “touching and occasionally fierce loyalty.”<sup>4</sup>

The martyred Lebanon that Alfred Khoury presented to the Marseille conference was, then, a martyr to *France*. As such, it was based on the same calculus through which French advocates and officials had interpreted the Ottoman executions of Syrian and Lebanese notables during the war. Suffering functioned as proof of fidelity, which persevered through the trials of

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<sup>3</sup> Ernest Babelon, Séance du Vendredi soir, le 3 janvier 1919, Congrès français de Syrie, Fascicule 2: Section d’Archéologie, Histoire, Géologie, et Ethnographie, 7.

<sup>4</sup> The text of Khoury’s speech would later be published in a robust but short-lived Lebanese nationalist publication, *La revue phénicienne*. On *La revue phénicienne*, see especially Asher Kaufman, *Reviving Phoenicia: The Search for Identity in Lebanon* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004), 87-96.

occupation, oppression, and starvation. For the Maronite archbishop, of course, appealing to French alliance, especially after the fall of the Ottoman Empire, was also a political strategy, aimed at ensuring support for a Maronite-dominated state entity.<sup>5</sup> To achieve this objective, however, the conditions of mutual Franco-Lebanese attachment needed to be discursively rehabilitated as well as politically reenacted. At the same time, the extent of France's empire across Syria was left to be delineated and defended. Pre-war imperial fantasies gave rise to the contradictions of colonial authority, and pledges of support gave way to policies of suppression. An ostensibly age-old legacy of protection had to be forged anew, within an imperial system that at once constrained and encouraged French colonial prerogative. While a League of Nations mandate accorded France political supervision over both Lebanon and Syria, its ideological "mandate to protect" encompassed at once an isolated Lebanon and an imagined Levant.

While Khoury singled out Lebanon for its particular wartime anguish and enduring loyalty, its martyrdom was also entwined in a larger imperial web. The idealized configuration of *la France du Levant* was imperfectly superimposed on the political landscape of the Near East. As the region took shape in the wake of war and Ottoman dissolution, French and British—as well as Lebanese and Syrian—politicians and activists sought to carve spheres of influence along favorable boundaries. Notwithstanding competing wartime agreements, it was the newly founded League of Nations that would adjudicate the status of former Ottoman territories in the Middle East. The guiding consideration was not popular opinion, as the muted impact of the American-led King-Crane commission attested, but the continuation—indeed expansion—of European imperial authority over the non-European world. My purpose is not to trace these lines of continuity or expansion, but to explore the ideological ambiguity that French claims of

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<sup>5</sup> Kamal Salibi, "The Lebanese Identity," *Journal of Contemporary History* 6 no. 1 (1971): 76-86; Salibi, *A House of Many Mansions: The History of Lebanon Reconsidered* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2005); Kais Firro, *Inventing Lebanon: Nationalism and the State under the Mandate* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2003).

connection to Lebanon and confluence of interests and influence in the Levant engendered in the postwar context.

Under the rubric of a colonialist congress devoted to achieving a French Syria, the concept of a “martyr of Lebanon” reveals an underlying tension between French imperial ambitions and imagination. The idealized tradition of a singular Franco-Lebanese relationship, once confronted with the imperial vacuum after 1918, came into conflict with a colonial agenda that envisioned a robust French presence throughout Syria. If the economic interests of the Marseillais and Lyonnais did not convince the full ranks of the French *parti colonial* of the latter, colonizing the Levant was alluring precisely because basing an imperial endeavor on principles of affection seemed significantly less costly than policies of occupation.<sup>6</sup> This calculation not only shaped the divergent colonial trajectories of both Syria and Lebanon; it also resuscitated an ideology of French imperial benevolence gravely shaken after the First World War.

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This chapter approaches the postwar creation of the French colonial mandate in Lebanon and Syria by analyzing how languages of protection and obligation functioned and were reformed in the immediate aftermath of the Great War. To do so, it surveys the discursive and political investment of French and Lebanese actors alike in the stakes of imperial protection across multiple arenas of ideological production: colonialist conferences like the *Congrès français de Syrie*, speeches and writings of French mandate officials and Lebanese activists, press reports on the role and implications of French colonial authority in the Levant, and commentaries on the major events that marked the early construction and consolidation of the postwar regime. A

⁶ Charles-Robert Ageron, *France coloniale ou parti colonial?* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1978); Christopher Andrew and A.S. Kanya-Forstner, “The French Colonial Party and French Colonial War Aims, 1914–1918,” *The Historical Journal* 17, no. 1 (1974): 79–106; Andrew and Kanya-Forstner, *The Climax of French Imperial Expansion, 1914-1924* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1981); Martin Thomas, *French Empire Between the Wars* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2005).

reinvigorated conviction in the affective basis of the French imperial project in the Near East not only reinforced an ideological mandate to protect; it also provided a misleadingly secure foundation for empire in the Middle East and beyond. Just as an imperial Levant seemed to take shape, its meaning had to be reframed and divided between two colonial entities. Lebanon was reimagined as a sphere of gratitude and loyalty, of almost-but-not-quite French civilization, while Syria became a terrain of irreducible Orientalist difference, where a repressive politics of counter-insurgency could be enacted without contradiction, if not without resistance.

In the chapter, I pursue two complementary arguments. First, I argue that after the rupture of the Great War, revitalizing an ideology of Lebanese affection and French prestige in the Levant was essential to establishing and justifying the French colonial mandate regime. Masked by a mythology of unbroken allegiance, this recuperative process proved imperative following the wartime devastation and disillusionment in Lebanon, which had rendered promises of French protection suspect even among its ostensibly most resolute supporters. Constructing a postwar colonial state in Lebanon—especially one that claimed not to be colonial at all—depended on resolidifying the affective foundation of Franco-Lebanese bonds. Doing so provided the ideological groundwork for what Elizabeth Thompson has compellingly described as the gendered and familial administrative apparatus that was instituted in the French mandates, one based on principles of paternal discipline and policies of maternal welfare.⁷ While Thompson rightly assesses the joint French colonial governance of Lebanon and Syria, a division between the two persisted, at once obscured and deepened in the formative postwar context. This partition was premised not simply on sectarian calculations—isolating Christian, Francophile Lebanon from hostile Muslim Syria—nor did it derive straightforwardly from a lineage of Lebanese

⁷ Elizabeth Thompson, *Colonial Citizens: Republican Rights, Paternal Privilege, and Gender in French Syria and Lebanon* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013).

exceptionalism, as work by Asher Kaufman and Carol Hakim has demonstrated.⁸ The colonial policy of divide-and-rule did contribute to a sectarian legacy in Lebanon, as much historical work has emphasized.⁹ But it also needed to be discursively as well as politically reproduced. This undertaking brought together clashing visions of an expansive but illusory *France du Levant* and of Lebanon as a secure redoubt of benevolent protection. Negotiating between these two imperial prerogatives was neither natural nor assured; both required substantial ideological labor to maintain.

The second, interconnected argument of this chapter is that, through the process of rehabilitating languages of affection and prestige—of pursuing a fantasy of *la France du Levant* beyond Lebanon’s political status and particular legacy—the persistent ambiguity that had long confounded clear delineation between Lebanon and Syria finally irrupted into irresolvable contradiction. By this I am referring not only to the altered geopolitical boundaries between the two, according to which the mandatory state of Lebanon expanded from the *mutasarrifiyya* of Mount Lebanon to include Beirut, the Mediterranean coastline, and the Beqa’ Valley. I am also alluding to the “mental map” of empire, whose coordinates designated zones of purported imperial interests and influence, admiration and entitlement.¹⁰ For advocates of France’s role in the Near East, these intangible attributes were simultaneously concentrated within the supposed “citadel” of Lebanon, among its Maronite Christian allies, and across the imagined expanse of the French Levant. Claims to a special relationship with Lebanon had co-existed for decades in the French imperial mindset with colonial ambitions over the wider realm of Greater Syria,

⁸ Kaufman, *Reviving Phoenicia*; Carol Hakim, *The Origins of the Lebanese National Idea, 1840-1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013).

⁹ Philip Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate: The Politics of Arab Nationalism, 1920-1945* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987); 57-58; Gérard Khoury, *La France et l’Orient arabe. Naissance du Liban moderne (1914-1920)* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2009).

¹⁰ Martin Thomas, ed., *The French Colonial Mind Vol. 1: Mental Maps of Empire and Colonial Encounters* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2011).

including its majority Muslim populations. This theoretical arrangement reconciled a historic political and religious commitment to protect isolated Lebanon with vague aspirations to possess the entire Levant. For the period since 1861, when mostly Christian Mount Lebanon came under nominal French protection but remained under Ottoman sovereignty, the incoherence of this imperial contradiction posed no immediate dilemma. The potentially incompatible rationales of protecting Christians and appealing to Muslims neither arose nor conflicted, and a belief in France as a “great Muslim power” persisted as a key component of imperial ideology. The reign of French influence and predominance of French interests remained safely aspirational, extending on land and in minds beyond the presumed protectorate over Lebanon.

Once the mandate system brought a limited French Levant into being, however, tensions between protection and colonization, affective ideology and imperial practice, came inevitably to the fore. The commitment to Lebanese particularity and its heritage as a Christian sanctuary confronted the exigency of appealing to—or at least claiming the affinity of—Muslims throughout the region, especially in the expanded state of Lebanon itself. For decades, assertions of popular love for France and established French interests across the Levant had overlapped with an emphasis on Lebanese exceptionalism: as a Christian “island” amongst hostile Muslim masses, as a protected daughter or younger sister of France, and as a resolute French ally and grateful devotee.¹¹ As a historic justification for French intervention, the principle of Franco-Lebanese alliance risked undercutting more wide-reaching aspirations of imperial grandeur. If traditional and sentimental ties bound France to Christian Lebanon, then the logics of imperial influence and geopolitical interests mandated ideological investment across a more expansive framework. And if French prestige functioned as an unstable currency of informal empire, then

¹¹ Archives du Ministère des Affaires Étrangères (hereafter AMAE), 399 PAAP 61. Georges Vayssié, “L’apothéose du Grand Liban – Le Général Gouraud dans le Nord,” *La Syrie*, 5 October 1920; Gaston Ducouso, *L’industrie de la soie en Syrie et au Liban* (Beyrouth: Imprimerie Catholique, 1913), cited in Labaki, 125.

its value was even more fragile under the postwar colonial mandate regime. Discourses of imperial influence could not simply be converted into mechanisms of colonial authority. Rather, they had to be actively re-established, calibrated to balance imperatives of protection and affection within imperially ambiguous structures.

Between Versailles and Marseille

Before the peace talks in Versailles that negotiated the aftermath of the Great War—and before the *Congrès français de Syrie* in Marseille at which Alfred Houry proclaimed Lebanon a martyr—the question of the Levant for French military and political officials was relatively straightforward: what type of colonial regime would be appropriate for Lebanon and Syria? A memo issued by the French Supreme War Council in Versailles on November 27, 1918, entitled “French Policy in the Levant,” laid out the conditions and stakes of this question.¹² The document’s authors first paid lip service to the credo of self-determination, the Wilsonian principle that would emerge as a prominent theme in debating the postwar order.¹³ They pledged France’s—and, rather presumptuously, Great Britain’s—commitment to guaranteeing a degree of autonomy for the former Ottoman provinces of the Middle East. Neither imperial power, the Council declared, would seek to “impose on the populations of these regions such or such institutions.”¹⁴ Notwithstanding this assurance, the underlying concern articulated in “French Policy in the Levant” amounted to whether Syria and Lebanon should become French colonies, provinces, or protectorates. The apparent contradiction between a promise of self-government and the imposition of colonial rule is striking not only as evidence of imperial hypocrisy, but also

¹² Archives de la Chambre de Commerce et d’Industrie de Lyon (hereafter ACCL) REL 014 03. Conseil Supérieur de Guerre – Section française – 1ère section, “La politique française dans le Levant,” 27 November 1918.

¹³ Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

¹⁴ ACCL REL 014 03. Conseil Supérieur de Guerre, “La politique française dans le Levant.”

for the tensions that would emerge through the attempt to determine the Levant's colonial classification. How might France's "invisible protectorate" over Lebanon, for instance, become visible? And how did claims of French interests and influence translate across the wider Levant? The particularity and protection of Lebanon, in this endeavor, served not as a solid anchor for France's claims of informal empire in the Middle East, but as an ideological burden that complicated French colonial ambitions.

The War Council's assessment of French policy in the Levant begins with a superficial account of the region's ethnography. It does so not to establish geographical or sectarian divisions, but in response to two seemingly incongruous questions: would the new postwar regime in Syria and Lebanon achieve French interests, and would it represent the will of the populations? The juxtaposition of these two inquiries is less significant for their apparent incompatibility—or even as evidence of Wilsonian rhetoric, infused into traditional power politics—than for the ways in which they were imagined as mutually reinforcing. In conflating French and indigenous interests, the memo tellingly identified the region only as "countries of French influence in the Levant." Lebanon and Syria did not simply reflect or enable French influence; they were *defined* by it. The two territories were seen as simultaneously riven by divisions between their "diverse races" and united in their shared antagonism toward "the Turkish oppressor," as well as in their appeal to and affection for France.¹⁵ Their ethnographic characteristics were thus both essential and immaterial, internally divisive but neutralized by a dialectic of external repulsion and attachment. Within this presumed sphere of French influence, Lebanon occupied an uncertain position, deemed at once superior and vulnerable, an object of protection yet also of colonization.

¹⁵ ACCL REL 014 03. Conseil Supérieur de Guerre, "La politique française dans le Levant."

Muslims and Christians, the postwar planners stated, did “not live in ardent friendship” in Syria and Lebanon. While Syrian Muslims were characterized by inherent “religious fanaticism” and considered less advanced, less assimilable, and less connected to Europe, Lebanese Christians were distinguished by their higher levels of civilization, education, and Westernization, making Lebanon almost an equal to France itself.¹⁶ This language of contrast co-existed, though, with a persistent slippage between Lebanon, Syria, and the Levant. Nonetheless, in the lead-up to, during, and even after international negotiations to determine the fate of former Ottoman territories, both French and Lebanese activists proclaimed Lebanon’s privileged connection to France.¹⁷ This dynamic affirmed the conclusion that followed: if the Maronites of Lebanon were “the most advanced, the most educated,” then they would “very naturally” take control of the region and thereby provoke the resentment of their Muslim neighbors. The conflicts that would inevitably arise, according to the War Council, necessitated European oversight to ensure peace and security. Because “the fortress of Lebanon could not survive” in mountainous isolation, it would require the benevolent protection of a “a maternal and affectionate Power like France.”¹⁸ The protective imperative of imperial motherhood was limited to Lebanon, even as military authorities, politicians, and colonial activists clamored for French supervision over all of Syria. The specter of religious discord served at once to conjure the threat of sectarian violence and to justify a French colonial presence, one that was unevenly invested in its own ideological premises of protection. Within France’s envisioned protectorate in the Levant, Lebanon figured as both cause and beneficiary of colonial intervention.

¹⁶ A secret report by the High Commission’s *Service des Renseignements* on 25 September 1921, “Les dangers présents de l’Islam,” concluded that Muslims harbored an “instinctive hatred of Europeans in general.” *Service Historique de la Défense* (hereafter SHD), GR 7N 4286.

¹⁷ Hakim, *Origins of the Lebanese National Idea*, 213-260.

¹⁸ ACCL REL 014 03. Conseil Supérieur de Guerre, “La politique française dans le Levant.”

This logic of imperial protection was marked by two overlapping lines of contradiction. First, while Lebanon was deemed sufficiently distinct from Syria to warrant separate consideration—given its “elite worthy of [France’s] own,” it had reached a stage of civilization beyond that of a formal colony—it was nonetheless bound to and indeed conflated with a larger, more heterogeneous Syria of the Levant. Even as the War Council asked whether one could “make a French citizen of the Muslim peasant [*fellah*] in the same way as the intelligent Maronite,” it also referred to “enlightened Syrians, passionate friends of immortal France.”¹⁹ This rhetorical question and self-serving presumption—flattering Maronite elites and French imperial hubris alike—blurred religious and regional identities while upholding colonial hierarchies. Lebanon was at once exceptional and subsumed within French affective empire. The two principles were equally and intricately rooted in the French imperial imagination, creating frictions for its colonial project in the Levant.

The second line of tension that fractured French imperial prognoses for Lebanon and Syria was their exaggerated estimation of popular affection throughout the Near East. In this calculation, France’s popularity among Christian and Francophile Lebanese nonetheless did not undermine its exalted status in “non-Europeanized” Syria. A belief that Syrians and Lebanese alike pursued the “great dream” of becoming a province of France represented not merely a rhetorical flourish, but an animating assumption of the French imperial mindset. More than a Franco-Maronite dream, this aspiration constituted a *sine qua non* of imagined empire; the self-image of benevolent Mother France was predicated on a wish for attachment from the (would-be) colonized.²⁰ Rather than an accurate assessment of Syrian or Lebanese popular opinion,

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Hakim, *Origins of the Lebanese National Idea*, 37-44.

though, this conviction reflected the imperative of rehabilitating and reimagining *France* and its empire after the Great War.

Devastated by warfare on its own soil, France's colonial status had also been deeply shaken by 1918. Conscripted soldiers from across the empire had not only witnessed firsthand the ravages of European war; they also experienced discrimination and cultivated a sense of disillusionment and resentment that they took back to their colonized societies, contributing to the interwar rise of anticolonial nationalism.²¹ In the face of an unstable empire and a ruined homeland, the idealized image of French popularity on the other side of the Mediterranean held great allure. Amidst the traumatic rupture of war and the uncertain political and imperial world that emerged, the incentive to revitalize France shaped not only the perspective toward empire, but also the vision of the empire's perspective toward France.

As during the war, officials were certain that intervention in Lebanon—whether in the form of humanitarian invasion or protectorate governance—was “not a question of conquering” and that entire populations were “calling for us!”²² This myth endured into the postwar period, echoing the “call of Syrians and especially the mountain dwellers of Lebanon” for French relief and liberation.²³ Without contesting that Lebanese inhabitants suffering from wartime famine did indeed hope for intervention—and were sorely disappointed by French inaction, as the previous chapter suggests—policymakers and colonial activists themselves actively promulgated a narrative of popular demand for French protection. The imagery of desperate populations pleading for the aid of France redounded to a conviction in French prestige and imperial

²¹ Richard Fogarty, *Race and War in France: Colonial Subjects in the French Army, 1914-1918* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008); Gregory Mann, *Native Sons: West African Veterans and France in the Twentieth Century* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006); Michael Goebel, *Anti-Imperial Metropolis: Interwar Paris and the Seeds of Third World Nationalism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

²² ACCL REL 014 03, Conseil Supérieur de Guerre, “La politique française dans le Levant.”

²³ AMAE, Fonds Gouraud, 399 PAAP 58. Toast à Fernand David, undated [likely 1922].

prerogative. Anchored in the mountains of Lebanon, this conviction transformed an act of colonial occupation into the fulfillment of a long-deferred aspiration that extended across Syria.

Even as Lebanese Christians were accorded a more privileged position within the “great French family,” the urge to project France’s widespread greatness extended across confessional boundaries. The Supreme War Council proclaimed that “all tribes, even of opposing religions” expressed “love for our great Fatherland,” maintaining that ties of affinity bound different communities to France even as the specter of sectarian discord justified French intercession.²⁴ Protector of Christians in the Levant, imperial France would also be a benevolent guardian for Syrian Muslims. This ambition reached the heart of metropolitan French imperial discourse, where a speaker in the Chamber of Deputies in late 1920 testified that “Syrians have been holding their arms out to us from time immemorial” and that “Christians as well as Muslims had long been calling for the French.”²⁵ This presumption of indiscriminate affection for France was linked, in the War Council’s November 1918 memo, to an idealized politics of prestige. Its conclusion invoked, somewhat incongruously, the inroads made by French missionaries in the region, neglecting to account for the divisiveness that evangelical efforts had inspired, among Maronites as well as Muslims.²⁶ Military action, it continued, would “affirm our prestige” by show of force and would “achieve the peaceful union of the tribes,” which it described as “heterogeneous but united in their affection for greater France.”²⁷ Inherently divided, Syria and Lebanon were nonetheless imagined as an integral realm of French influence and esteem. As sketched by postwar imperial planners, Syria’s sectarian diversity—and the dangers it would

²⁴ ACCL REL 014 03. Conseil Supérieur de Guerre, “La politique française dans le Levant.”

²⁵ AMAE 50 CPCOM 133, Chambre des députés, 2ème séance du 23 décembre 1920.

²⁶ On the tensions of missionary work within the Maronite community, see Usama Makdisi, *Artillery of Heaven: American Missionaries and the Failed Conversion of the Middle East* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009). On the contentious politics of conversion in the Middle East, see Beth Baron, *The Orphan Scandal: Christian Missionaries and the Rise of the Muslim Brotherhood* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014).

²⁷ ACCL REL 014 03. Conseil Supérieur de Guerre, “La politique française dans le Levant.”

pose for Christian Lebanon—enabled a fantasy of resolving hostilities through a benevolent, even welcomed, French colonial presence, at once necessitated and legitimated by the specter of internecine antagonism.

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Several weeks after the end of the war, the 1919 Paris Peace Conference assembled in Versailles to settle the multiple lingering questions posed by the dissolution of three major empires.<sup>28</sup> It was here that plans were mocked up to allocate former Ottoman and German imperial possessions to France and Great Britain as semi-colonial “mandates.” It was also where indigenous actors began to make direct appeals to the European powers, appeals which were more often than not ignored.<sup>29</sup> Lebanese voices may have resonated among their ostensible French protectors not simply out of traditions of sentimental allegiance, but also thanks to the appealing narrative of Lebanon’s martyrdom for France during the First World War. Amidst competing political agendas over boundaries and modes of governance, the language of martyrdom proved essential in shaping the postwar imperial context. It opened a new realm of discursive as well as political possibility, fertile for demands of Lebanese autonomy and French imperial protection, but sown with unresolved ambiguities over both Lebanon’s status and the meaning of the colonial mandate.

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<sup>28</sup> As historian Erez Manela and others have noted, the “Wilsonian moment” of claims for self-determination was not limited to the meeting rooms of the French capital. Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment*. See also Macmillan, *Paris 1919: Six Months that Changed the World* (New York: Random House, 2001).

<sup>29</sup> Pedersen, “Back to the League of Nations,” *American Historical Review* 112, no. 4 (October 2007): 1091-1117; Arsan ““This Age is the Age of Associations’: Committees, Petitions, and the Roots of Interwar Middle Eastern Internationalism,” *Journal of Global History* 7, no. 2 (2012): 166-188; Jackson, “Diaspora Politics and Developmental Empire: The Syro-Lebanese at the League of Nations,” *Arab Studies Journal* (2013): 166-190; Wheatley, “Mandatory Interpretation: Legal Hermeneutics and the New International Order in Arab and Jewish Petitions to the League of Nations,” *Past & Present* no. 227 (May 2015): 205-248.

The testimony of the Maronite Patriarch, Elias Pierre Hoyek,<sup>30</sup> serving as president of the Lebanese delegation at Versailles, exemplifies the pressure from Christian Lebanese (chiefly Maronite) activists—dubbed Lebanists in the historiography of Middle Eastern nationalist movements—for an independent, expanded state of Lebanon under French guarantee in the postwar order.<sup>31</sup> This was indeed Hoyek’s objective; as Carol Hakim has demonstrated, the Lebanist vision—and its cartographic manifestation, incorporating Beirut as well as the Mediterranean coast and the Beqa’ valley into a Greater Lebanon—came into focus precisely at the moment leading up to its ultimate achievement in 1920.<sup>32</sup> Hoyek had been a devoted partisan of France throughout his tenure as Patriarch, pledging at the outset of the Great War Maronite and Lebanese loyalty “to the traditions of attachment that a long series of benefits [had established] toward France, their generous protector.”<sup>33</sup> After the war, Hoyek invoked the suffering, from famine as well as from fighting, of those Lebanese who had “paid with their blood for their allied sympathies and their love of liberty.”<sup>34</sup> Policies designed to bring about the calculated starvation of Lebanon’s population, as well as targeted executions, he contended, represented Turkish and German “reprisals for Lebanese sympathies for France.”<sup>35</sup> He claimed that it was the “attachment of the Lebanese to the Allies’ cause and their loyalty to France [that had] provoked these measures of savage repression,” which endured even after Lebanon was abandoned by its erstwhile protector. Hoyek here deployed an argument analogous to Antoine

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<sup>30</sup> Among the different permutations and transliterations of the Patriarch’s surname [e.g. Huwayyik], I have used “Hoyek” for the sake of both simplicity and faithfulness to its most common rendition in French sources.

<sup>31</sup> Firro, *Inventing Lebanon*; Kaufman, *Reviving Phoenicia*.

<sup>32</sup> Hakim, *Origins of the Lebanese National Idea*.

<sup>33</sup> AMAE, 206 CPCOM 124, Hoyek to MAE, 27 August 1914.

<sup>34</sup> Hoyek, “Revendications du Liban – Mémoire de la Délégation Libanaise à la Conférence de Paix,” Paris, 25 October 1919.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

Eddé's wartime pleas for intervention, recalibrated to invoke a sense of postwar indebtedness.<sup>36</sup> Since affective bonds to France had imperilled Lebanese survival, Hoyek requested in “exchange for this devotion” recognition of Lebanon's protected status.

The desiderata that Hoyek submitted to the peace conference, and for which he appealed to French obligation, were not limited to the independence and expansion of Lebanon; they also included an explicit call for French protection under the mandate regime. In accepting the mandatory system of the League of Nations based on Lebanon's need for political tutelage and economic support, he also drew from an affective vocabulary to affirm its standing within a French realm of influence. While he stressed the imperative of Lebanese sovereign autonomy, he also conceived of Lebanon as an extension of France itself, a “terrain of French culture” marked by an “affinity like one rarely sees in the history of peoples.”<sup>37</sup> Hoyek, of course, was not simply operating within a traditional idiom of Maronite alliance with France; he was also seeking his community's and his own political advantage. But his testimony can also be read as evidence of the need to continually reiterate—and thereby reconstruct—a narrative of stability and mutual benefit between Maronite Lebanon and imperial France. The Patriarch was not only aligning Lebanese attitudes under the rubric of French protection; he also contrasted Lebanon's position—in the hierarchy of empire as well as civilization—with that of neighboring Syria.

The eventual creation of Greater Lebanon as a political entity occurred within an imperial framework in which Syria functioned as the violent backdrop against which Lebanon would be defined and defended. To justify his argument for Lebanese exceptionalism, Hoyek marshalled

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<sup>36</sup> The insistence on a “blood debt” was not unique within the French empire; Hoyek's claim, by this measure, was less compelling than those of West Africans, for instance, whose soldiers had been conscripted and killed at substantially higher rates than the relatively small numbers of Syrian and Lebanese military participants. Mann, *Native Sons*; Fogarty, *Race and War in France*.

<sup>37</sup> Hoyek, “Revendications du Liban.”

familiar tropes of Lebanon's Phoenician origin, as well as its history of autonomy since 1860.<sup>38</sup> He distinguished Lebanon especially for its ties to Western Europe, "with its mores, its affinities, its western culture." As opposed to the nomadic population of Syria, he proclaimed, Lebanon "constitutes the principal foyer of Western culture in the East." Hoyek attributed these qualities not only to historic reasons, but also to "essential differences" between the two peoples, and he bristled at attempts to "confuse Lebanon and Syria, or rather, to dissolve Lebanon within Syria." Considering the ambiguity with which Lebanese, especially within its extensive diaspora population, were often referred to as "Syrians,"<sup>39</sup> the Maronite leader rejected the latter designation as "generic and inappropriate." Even as Hoyek underscored this distinction, though, welcoming the role of French counsel and friendship in securing an "essentially Lebanese" government, he also called on mandate France to ensure "the national unity of the different communities of Lebanon."<sup>40</sup> The dual imperatives of Syro-Lebanese division and Lebanon's internal unity were not simply reducible to questions of religion and sect, or an assumption of Christian affinity and Muslim antagonism. Nor should Hoyek's appeal merely be dismissed as the disingenuous posturing of a Maronite nationalist. Rather, this paradoxical formation was built into the very imperial system that structured relations between France and the Levant. Even before assuming its officially enlarged borders on September 1, 1920—and thereby incorporating substantial populations of Muslims and Druze—the idea of Lebanon was premised on an essential difference, yet mandated an integral coherence.

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<sup>38</sup> Kaufman, *Reviving Phoenicia*, 85-86.

<sup>39</sup> On the politics and nomenclature of Lebanese and Syrian diaspora populations, see Stacy Fahrentholdt, "Transnational Modes and Media: The Syrian Press in the Mahjar and Emigrant Activism during World War I," *Mashriq & Mahjar: Journal of Middle East Migration Studies* 1, no. 1 (2013): 30-54; Sarah Gualtieri, *Between Arab and White: Race and Ethnicity in the Early Syrian American Diaspora* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009); Arsan, *Interlopers of Empire: The Lebanese Diaspora in Colonial French West Africa* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014); and Simon Jackson, "Diaspora Politics and Developmental Empire: The Syro-Lebanese at the League of Nations," *Arab Studies Journal* (2013): 166-190.

<sup>40</sup> Hoyek, "Revendications du Liban."





The *Congrès français de la Syrie* took place between the memorandum from the French Supreme War Council and the global gathering in Versailles to negotiate a postwar settlement. The Marseille conference staked its claims on both the “moral and material” influence that French cultural and commercial projects had supposedly inculcated. Yet if France’s position in the Levant was justified by its “glorious heritage,” grounded in “age-old rights” that signified an “intellectual and historic as well as commercial and economic patrimony,” why, then, did this language bear such insistent repetition?<sup>41</sup> What was supposedly natural and ahistorical required substantial attention and reconstruction. French imperial claims were grounded not only in geopolitical calculations, but also in an invented genealogy of protection and interconnection. Through an analysis of discursive production in the French and Lebanese press, political and private correspondence, and subsequent colloquia and propaganda, the following section seeks to understand how and why an ideology of protection and affection was continually propounded in the immediate postwar aftermath; what it confronted, elided, or obscured; and how the implications of this process shaped the French imperial formation in Lebanon and Syria.

### *Between Lebanon and the Levant*

In a speech to French intelligence officers in early 1922, General Henri Gouraud, as the High Commissioner for France’s recently obtained League of Nations mandates over Syria and Lebanon, clarified the ideological goals of French propaganda in the Levant. In addition to touting “intellectual, artistic, economic, and industrial development in the metropole and in the colonial empire,” its objective was to demonstrate France’s “friendship for Islam” alongside its age-old “mission as protector of Christians.” The driving purpose of this approach was less to

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<sup>41</sup> Ernest Babelon, “Le Congrès français de la Syrie. Les travaux de la section d’archéologie et d’histoire,” *Comptes rendus des séances de l’Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*, 63<sup>e</sup> année, no. 3 (1919): 225-228, here 227-228.

win over Muslim affection, or even to ensure Christian protection, than to “affirm the power of France.” Gouraud’s rhetoric, however, belied an incongruity between these aims. If Christian populations warranted explicit protection, this begged the question: from *whom*? And if Muslim populations accepted France’s “friendship,” then why was this protection warranted? The “power of France,” in the French imperial imagination, resolved this contradiction through a fantasy of universal French prestige.

Envisioning Lebanon as a secure site of protection and source of affection at the heart of the *France du Levant* elided the region’s troublesome Muslim inhabitants. Yet as long as French empire in the Levant was invisible, imagined, and informal, the twinned ideological imperative of protecting Christians and appealing to Muslims could coexist. But when France obtained a mandate over Syria and Lebanon after the First World War, its colonial role was both expanded and formalized, exacerbating the tension between ideological premises of protection and affection. Despite this rupture, Gouraud posited a continuity in France’s relations with the Levant: the “history of the Levant,” he claimed, “is almost entirely contained within that of France, such are the two countries so intimately combined.”<sup>42</sup> The question, in this postwar moment of dismantled and nascent empires, was not only what and where was the Levant; it also implied how this imagined entity—and its underlying imperial ambitions and ideology—would be “intimately combined” in the French colonial consciousness.

The two countries that Gouraud was referring to, of course, were not the contemporary states of Lebanon and Syria. His suggestion of intimate bonds between France and the Levant notably obscured the political divisions in the region that his own government had enacted. By 1922, colonial boundaries partitioned French mandate territory into multiple administrative

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<sup>42</sup> AMAE 399 PAAP 58. Gouraud, “La propagande française en Syrie et au Liban,” Conférence faite à MM. les Elèves-Officiers de Renseignement, 22 January 1922.

entities, ostensibly based on geography and sectarian composition: states of Aleppo and Damascus (eventually consolidated into Syria), territories for the Alawites and Druzes, and, as proclaimed to much fanfare on September 1, 1920, an expanded Greater Lebanon. As multiple scholars have pointed out, these arrangements were intended to facilitate a colonial divide-and-rule strategy, splintering potential resistance and mobilizing presumed support among Lebanese Christians.<sup>43</sup> Lebanon and Syria, I will argue, were delineated as respective zones of amity and antagonism, as tensions arose within the dual imperial mission that Gouraud outlined: between imperatives of Christian protection and illusions of Muslim friendship. An underlying conviction in French imperial prestige, I contend, endured through the very ambiguity of this endeavor. Deploying a stable virtue of protection—grounded in an affective fantasy of *la France du Levant*—enabled French colonial actors and advocates to envision imperial prerogatives across confessional bounds, even as they insisted upon Lebanon’s particular connection to France.

As the first High Commissioner of the French mandate in Syria and Lebanon, Gouraud’s role was symbolic as well as political and military.<sup>44</sup> A celebrated military general, Gouraud was also an ardent Catholic, as well as an experienced colonial hand, having served as aide and disciple to Marshal Lyautey’s indirect colonial administration in protectorate Morocco.<sup>45</sup> Both his Catholicism and his colonial experience, as well as his military background, shaped his position as imperial administrator of Christian and Muslim populations in the Levant. During the mandate’s formative early years, Gouraud not only directed policy and governance, his words

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<sup>43</sup> Philip Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate*; Gérard Khoury, *La France et l’Orient arabe*; Gelvin, *Divided Loyalties*.

<sup>44</sup> François Georges-Picot had served as acting High Commissioner from the end of the war to Gouraud’s appointment in 1920.

<sup>45</sup> Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate*, 73; Edmund Burke III, “A Comparative View of French Native Policy in Morocco and Syria, 1912-1925,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 9 (May 1973): 175-186.

also offer perspective on French assumptions and attitudes toward Lebanon and the Levant.<sup>46</sup> A letter he sent his sister from aboard the ship transporting him to Beirut in 1919 suggests the sources of his information about—and Orientalist interest in—the region under his supervision; he requested a multi-volume history of the Crusades and recommended the travelogue of nineteenth-century Orientalist Gabriel Charmes.<sup>47</sup> A close reading of Gouraud’s statements, speeches, and writings, though, exposes fissures within this imperial imagination. In seeking to uphold commitments to both France’s Christian protectorate and benevolent Muslim empire, the French mandate in Lebanon and Syria was at once essential and unattainable, compromised by a logic that stressed its universal appeal alongside its particularist rationale.

French influence in the Levant, Gouraud informed officers in his January 1922 address, was, more than in any other colonial realm, the “fruit of such a long historic tradition, the heritage of such a weighty past of education, protection, honor, and reciprocal affection.”<sup>48</sup> He outlined a framework of relations that, if it posited an “unwavering friendship that unites France to Syria,” privileged the glory of imperial France. French “prestige in the Orient,” he proclaimed, was integral to its “national patrimony,” a legacy that it had taken “a thousand years to construct.” As far back as Gouraud traced this mythologized history, he also projected French esteem irrevocably into the future, asserting that its bonds with the Orient were “indestructible and will last as long as the world.”<sup>49</sup> Presiding over a novel colonial form, Gouraud drew a line of imperial continuity, naturalizing sentiments of attachment while securing them in an insecure postwar political context.

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<sup>46</sup> This section draws from Gouraud’s personal papers, access to which I am grateful to Ministère des Affaires Étrangères archivist Françoise Aujogue for granting me.

<sup>47</sup> AMAE 399 PAAP 57, Gouraud to Marie-Thérèse, 14 and 17 November 1919. Incidentally, Robert de Caix makes the same request of his wife, over a decade later, while writing a report of a 1930 visit to Lebanon and Syria. AMAE 353 PAAP Vol. 2, de Caix, 1 April 1930.

<sup>48</sup> AMAE, 399 PAAP 58. Gouraud, “La propagande française.”

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

While purporting to represent Syrian attitudes toward France, Gouraud foregrounded the enduring radiance of French empire through history. The task of French officers in this realm, he emphasized, was one of sons carrying on the work of their fathers, acting out of a sense of “strict duty and pious homage” as well as “gratitude for the sentiments” that bound the two countries together. Gouraud at once conjured an image of paternal France and constructed a fantasy of colonial Syria. He recognized, though, that this ideological structure was fragile and necessitated continued maintenance, critiquing the “too soft illusions” of those who assumed too readily that French “influence in the Orient is solidly enough established” that it could be guaranteed without effort or investment.<sup>50</sup> Despite France’s ancient and inviolable connection to the Levant, then, he underscored the continual labor necessary to preserve its natural zone of influence and alliance.

The entity that Gouraud imagined and defended in the Levant, though, was neither coherently specified as Syria nor confined to Lebanon. Spiritually linking both to an eternal France, he insisted that the “souls of both countries have been united to such a point that Syria and Lebanon have never turned their eyes to another nation than France.”<sup>51</sup> This was not the ambiguous and expansive Levant of Etienne Lamy, however.<sup>52</sup> Gouraud presided over a clearly demarcated mandate territory.<sup>53</sup> His reference point, though, was not geography, nor even a distinct polity, but an affective sensibility, the symbolic coordinates of Syrian and Lebanese “souls.” At a dinner in his honor in March 1922, defending the mandate regime with its “slightly mysterious name,” he claimed that once pacification operations had concluded, “interior Syria itself, Muslim Syria, welcomed us as wholeheartedly as Christian Lebanon had welcomed us upon my arrival.” Lebanon and Syria alike, he contended, “saw in France a distant and infinitely

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> See chapter one.

<sup>53</sup> Asher Kaufman, *Contested Frontiers in the Syria-Lebanon-Israel Region: Cartography, Sovereignty, and Conflict* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013).

generous great Power that...has already for a long time brought the benefits of civilization.”<sup>54</sup> These ideological presumptions transformed notions of French influence into conditions for colonial intervention. Sustained through France’s informal protectorate over Lebanon and religious, cultural, and educational initiatives across the Near East, principles of mutual affection were also presumed to derive from a timeless legacy. The mandate system opened an abstract territory of affection to the fraught dynamics of colonial power, transmitted through languages of affinity but unevenly enacted between Lebanon and the Levant.

The mythology that Gouraud mustered in claiming an unbroken lineage of amity and prestige blurred the concomitant—yet competing—French ideological investments in Christian protection and Muslim friendship. Casting historical ties between France and the Levant back through the Middle Ages, Gouraud cited an alleged letter from the year 1250 from Louis IX, or Saint Louis, pledging that “this nation is a part of the French nation, for its friendship for France resembles the friendship that France carries for them.”<sup>55</sup> The nation to which this apocryphal letter referred, however, was explicitly that of Maronite Lebanon. Youssef Mouawwad has traced the origins of Saint-Louis’s letter to a forgery by an early nineteenth-century Maronite bishop. It is from this text, Mouawwad and Carol Hakim have suggested, that the Lebanese acquired the moniker “the French of the Levant,” and that a geneology of moral obligation and filial loyalty in part derived.<sup>56</sup> In the postwar context, then, even as Gouraud praised the universality of the French civilizing mission as a “brilliant light that France has spread for centuries over the countries of the Orient,” he also centered his argument on an invented history of Franco-Lebanese alliance. Recalling his arrival in the country, he rendered this metaphor

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<sup>54</sup> AMAE, 399 PAAP 58. Gouraud, Discours au diner France-Amérique, 9 March 1922.

<sup>55</sup> AMAE 399 PAAP 58. Manifestation en l’honneur du Général Gouraud, 26 January 1922.

<sup>56</sup> Mouawwad, “Aux origines d’un mythe: la lettre de Saint-Louis aux Maronites,” in *Européens vus par les libanais à l’époque ottomane*, eds. Bernard Heyberger and Carsten-Michael Wilbiner (Beirut: Ergon Verlag Würzburg, 2002). Hakim, *Origins of the Lebanese National Idea*.

dramatically literal, describing a sunset over the mountains as “one of the most beautiful sights that one can contemplate” and proclaiming solemnly: “This is Lebanon. This is Beirut.”<sup>57</sup>

Syria, on the other hand, Gouraud informed his audience at a 1922 gathering of the imperialist *Ligue maritime et coloniale française* also held in his honor, conveyed a more mysterious allure. Summoning the gendered trope of the veil, he described Syria as “an unknown beauty, veiled like an Oriental woman.” He sought to dispel the danger of the unfamiliar, however, disputing the “legend of the Syrian populations’ hostility” as well as the claim that “Syria is of no interest for France.”<sup>58</sup> Attendees in the Grand Amphitheatre of the Sorbonne, viewing the “projections in color” presented by esteemed geographer Jean Brunhes, may have been able to visualize for themselves the splendors of Lebanon and the promise of Syria, if not the veiled woman of Orientalist intrigue.

While France’s historic role in both regions warranted its imperial presence, Gouraud argued, he acknowledged the unique status of Lebanon, whose “traditions create a situation independent from the rest of Syria.”<sup>59</sup> What his remarks at once attested to and elided was that the French informal protectorate over Mount Lebanon had arisen precisely as a bulwark against *Muslim* aggression. The Lebanese, again, were positioned as at once cause and beneficiaries of imperial protection. In this historical narrative, Muslims represented the perpetrators and potential instigators of violence within Syria’s sectarian admixture. At the same time, colonial administrators and advocates envisioned the Syrian population not as objects of forceful colonization, but as grateful subjects of colonial beneficence. This apparent contradiction was not simply a sleight of civilizing rhetoric or imperial self-deception. It also illustrates how French intervention in Lebanon and Syria was premised on incompatible commitments to

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<sup>57</sup> AMAE 399 PAAP 58. Manifestation en l’honneur du Général Gouraud, 26 January 1922.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

particular protection and indiscriminate affection—the latter from the Muslim population against whom Christian security was imagined and enacted. Gouraud’s discursive production—along with that of associates, allies, and interlocutors—reveals how an ideology of French protection, influence, and affection was rehearsed and reconstructed in the aftermath of war and at the onset of a new form of colonial regime.

*Between French Levant and Mandate Syria*

In the early years of the mandate, this simultaneous blurring and sharpening of distinctions between Lebanon and Syria, Christian protection and Muslim affection, also could be found in the colonialist and general press. In 1922 alone, in the last year of Gouraud’s tenure and amidst the finalization of the mandate accords, articles from a range of political perspectives on these newest additions to the French empire juxtaposed France’s mythologized responsibility to Lebanese Christians with its illusory prestige among Syrian Muslims. The mandate administration’s press service highlighted the testimonies of friendly Arabic-language journals such as *al-Balagh*, *al-‘Adel*, and *al-Hurrié*, not to mention the Francophone daily *Le Réveil*, for their expressions of loyalty from Lebanese Christians alongside Muslims’ trust that France would “guide its path to progress and toward glory.”<sup>60</sup> Contesting either of these two founding premises of the mandate, though—whether by proclaiming France’s exclusive devotion to Lebanon or rejecting its affinity with Syria—unraveled its dual rationale of protection and prestige, exposing a foundational instability of French imperial ideology.

In a two-part article on “France in Syria” in the *Revue maritime et coloniale*, colonial activist Maurice Rondet-Saint proclaimed that “Mandatory France neither can nor wishes to deny its tradition, its role as protector of Christians of the Orient.” Nor, though, he added forcefully,

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<sup>60</sup> SHD, SS Sa 57, Revue de la presse de Beyrouth, 4 September, 1920. *Le Belagh*, “La France et l’Orient.”



would it consent to “forget its character as a great Muslim power.”<sup>61</sup> Fortifying the latter could be prioritized in this political calculation, as long as the former remained insulated within an unassailable affective mythology. The gravity of the French colonial experience in North Africa undoubtedly weighed heavily in Rondet-Saint’s concern over France’s status among Muslims. Particularly after the toll of the Great War, in which North African Muslim soldiers fought—and died—in Europe and were objects of official discrimination, the sensitivity of French colonial rule in Morocco, Tunisia, and especially Algeria was of paramount importance in questions of re-establishing postwar empire.<sup>62</sup> Rondet-Saint pledged that France would not jeopardize its supposed status among Muslims in the Near East even for the “Christians of Syria.” These, though, he heralded as “our heartfelt brothers, who, in the middle of the worse adversities, have never ceased to call themselves the French of the Levant.”<sup>63</sup> Esteem among Muslims, then, co-existed with the protection of Christians as twinned facets of an idealized imperial legacy, even though each risked undermining the other. The venerated French of the Levant were as figmentary as the fantasy of France’s empire of contented Muslims. Yet both were vital to French imperial ideology and aspirations in the Near East, and both needed to be persistently invoked and affirmed. Confidence in the allegiance of the Lebanese, as inheritors of a timeless affinity, may even have permitted a more robust investment in the notion of France as “a great Muslim power.” If Lebanon was a “younger sister of France,” then its familial bonds were presumably strong enough to withstand claims of Muslim allegiance and empire.

Tensions between Christians and Muslims, for commentators on the Levant, manifested themselves in both ancient and contemporary timeframes, as did the importance of France’s

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<sup>61</sup> M. Rondet-Saint, “La France en Syrie,” in “Le parlement et l’opinion,” *Revue maritime et coloniale*, Dec. 1922, 2151. AMAE 399 PAAP 58.

<sup>62</sup> Fogarty, *Race and War in France*.

<sup>63</sup> AMAE 399 PAAP 78. M. Rondet-Saint, “La France dans le Levant,” *Mer & Colonies* vol. 24 no. 106, 21.

continued involvement. The Orient represented what Maurice Muret, writing in the *Journal des débats*, referred to as the historic crossroads “where Muslim civilization enters into contact with Christian civilization.”<sup>64</sup> This glimpse into antiquity, though, was superseded by the “brilliance” of contemporary French influence. Damascenes, Muret reported from his five-week travels in Syria, were most impressed—“as the Orientals that they are”—by France’s “power and strength.” In Lebanon, he marveled at the inroads of the French language and sensibilities. He admits that, while he had read “in books and journals that France enjoyed a great intellectual and moral prestige in these regions of the Near East,” he had not truly understood “the amplitude, the extent, the superior quality of this prestige” until he experienced it firsthand. Whereas the “Oriental, and more specifically Syrian, mentality,” he posited, made the population impervious to competing “Anglo-Saxon” influences—with which French policymakers and commentators were consistently preoccupied—France’s status impressed even the most recalcitrant subjects. Muret articulated his impressions in the abstract idiom of prestige, even as he acknowledged that the concrete “‘policy of the mandate’ is as difficult a doctrine to define as to determine.” He concluded nonetheless that the stewardship of de Caix and Gouraud—the latter of whom he tellingly praised, referring to the resident general of protectorate Morocco and Gouraud’s former colonial mentor, as the “Lyautey of our Syrian lands”—would ensure that the mandate system would not be misgoverned as a protectorate or a colony. Rather, their efforts in this realm of French hegemony proved “the superiority of the new regime” an ambiguous form of colonial control disguised—and distorted—by dreams of France’s abiding prestige.

The Levant appeared in the French imperial imagination both as the historic point of contact between Muslim and Christian civilizations and as an ideologically central component of

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<sup>64</sup> Muret, “Notes sur la Syrie – La population syrienne et le Mandat français,” *Journal des débats*, 5 May 1922. [399 PAAP 78]. Muret’s broader attitude toward race and history is suggested by the Spenglerian title of perhaps his most noteworthy work, translated as *The Twilight of the White Races* (1926).

contemporary empire. For Alexandre Chignac, in *La dépêche coloniale*, Syria figured as “one of the essential poles of our policy of expansion” and the “sensitive crossroads of our influence in the lands of Islam.”<sup>65</sup> This “spiritual site, charged with the weighty heritage of history” occupied an exalted place in the French imperial orbit. In Chignac’s formulation, France’s role in the Levant was not necessarily to obtain material benefits, which he admitted it could not even guarantee, but to assure the “prestige of the flag.” Rather than attempt to appeal to economic interests, as did the business-oriented pressure groups of Lyon and Marseille, this argument stressed the almost transcendent significance of French dominance of the Near East. The value of imperial status was so compelling that it outweighed profits or politics; a sense of obligation compelled French intervention in historic lands, which “could not be sown by a better seed than that of France.”<sup>66</sup> The question of what constituted this colonial field, however, remained unspoken. What was essential was its quality as a terrain to cultivate the intangible value of imperial prestige.

Such expressions of sentiment and spiritual value were not the unique province of committed colonialists; in the popular press, too, empire in the Levant assumed almost mystical proportions. In the *Petit Parisien*, for instance, popular novelist—and occasional foreign policy commentator—André Lichtenberger penned an editorial in 1922 arguing in favor of continued funding for the French mandate.<sup>67</sup> Its work in Syria, he contended, was an undertaking “imposed by our entire past.” He also connected France’s economic interests to its “political ascendancy [and] intellectual brilliance” in this region. The mandate—precisely because it was “neither a protectorate nor a colony”—presented a new imperial opportunity to ground the material benefits

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<sup>65</sup> Chignac, “L’expérience syrienne,” *La dépêche coloniale*, 13 July 1922 (399 PAAP 78).

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> André Lichtenberger, “Pourquoi nous devons rester en Syrie – L’œuvre réalisée par la France est considérable et son achèvement se dessine,” *Le petit Parisien*, 24 July 1922.

and political considerations of empire in a more deeply rooted rationale.<sup>68</sup> The actual form and functioning of colonial governance appeared less relevant in such commentaries than the exalted *idea* of the French connection to the imagined Orient. An editorial in *Le Temps* envisioned France and the Levant united by “a bond of guardianship, in which friendship plays a greater role than the scheming of international law.”<sup>69</sup> This idealistic regime would be based “not on the former methods of authority or prestige”—which, presumably, took on a more aggressively imposing cast—but on “our old Oriental tradition of influence, sympathy, and intellectual propaganda.”<sup>70</sup> The Orientalism of the editorial was shaded with a veneer of friendship, a distortion that at once heightened imperial stakes and lowered a colonial barrier to entry; what was foreign was also familiar. Complications of military force or even practical governance dissipated in the mythology of age-old ties of affection. Divisive questions of religion and the dual commitment to protection (of Christians) and power (over Muslims) were obscured in language that rehearsed a notion of France’s civilizational virtue and historic ties to the Levant.

Nearly a decade into the mandate, the French High Commission’s press service continued to highlight articles that praised the “age-old prestige of France in the Orient.”<sup>71</sup> That such discourse persisted, even after the revolts and repression of the 1920s, attests to its potency in preserving the affective ideology that justified French colonial presence and upheld its imperial rationale. The press service’s collection of clippings, in French and Arabic (often with translations), provide insight less into the prevailing attitude among Syrians and Lebanese toward the mandate than into how the French administration *envisioned* a landscape of

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> “En Syrie,” *Le Temps*, 2 April (399 PAAP 78).

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Centre des Archives diplomatiques de Nantes (hereafter CADN) 1 SL/10 Carton 2, Politique et oeuvre française en Syrie – 1928 – Articles de journaux, “Lettre de Syrie: Ce que la France fait dans le Levant et ce que l’on pense d’elle,” undated.

popularity and prestige, based on selectively curated information. Even as the High Commission's *Service des Renseignements* worked to uncover potential plots and undermine anti-colonial resistance, languages of affinity were not mere window dressing to obscure an exploitative colonial order.<sup>72</sup> The ability to “imagine rediscovering [in the Levant] a bit of the French spirit, almost a second France,” as an Orientalist and Catholic observer remarked, was a central ideological underpinning of the process of imperial formation in the postwar Near East.<sup>73</sup>

This conviction, coupled with an insistence that “the Orient loves France,” strengthened the idea that the mandate represented “neither colonization, nor a protectorate...[but] a role of guide and counselor.”<sup>74</sup> Reflecting the protocol of the League of Nations mandate system, the French Foreign Minister insisted during a 1925 parliamentary debate that France was “not there to colonize,” nor to “exercise a protectorate,” but rather to enable “populations that had insufficiently evolved to administer themselves under our guidance...[and] paternal management.”<sup>75</sup> Conflating filial affection and parental guardianship, a discourse of “guidance”—prominently invoked by Gouraud in his conception of the mandate, if grossly overridden in practice—preserved both aspects of French imperial ideology, while upholding colonial hierarchies within a framework of protection and prestige.

The suggestion that the mandate in Syria and Lebanon was an irrefutable heritage of French influence in the region did not, of course, capture the entire scope of the French popular imagination. It faced particular opposition from those skeptical that such intangible ideas merited

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<sup>72</sup> Jean-David Mizrahi, *Génèse de l'Etat mandataire: service des renseignements et bandes armées en Syrie et au Liban dans les années 1920* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2003); Martin Thomas, *Empires of Intelligence: Security Services and Colonial Disorder After 1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

<sup>73</sup> CADN 1 SL/10 Carton 2, Politique et oeuvre française en Syrie – 1928 – Articles de journaux, “Lettre de Syrie: Ce que la France fait dans le Levant et ce que l'on pense d'elle,” undated.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid; CADN 1 SL/10 Carton 2, Edmond Besnard, “Le mandat français en Syrie,” *Cahiers des droits de l'homme*, 10 January 1928.

<sup>75</sup> AMAE 50 CPCOM 422, *Journal officiel de la République française des Débats parlementaires*, 18 December 1925, 1745.

substantial material investment. In addition to parliamentary critics of empire and advocates of competing colonial realms,<sup>76</sup> even those who accepted the premises of French historic and ideological obligations in the Levant could challenge the basis of mandate authority. In the *Journal des Débats*, journalist Auguste Gauvain contended that while it was “good to proclaim that maternal France owes an education to peoples to whom medieval memories attach it,” this occupation cost money—namely, some 160 million francs for 35,000 troops.<sup>77</sup> In a response in the same journal to novelist Henry Bordeaux’s praise of the French role in Syria, Gauvain critiqued an “Oriental policy founded on archeology and literature.”<sup>78</sup> The following year, his appraisal was even more pointed; not only had the occupation cost significant sums for minimal benefit, but French administration had fallen short based on its defenders’ own abstract metrics. France’s “prestige in Syria has suffered,” Gauvain opined, as it had neither “won the Arabs” nor avoided “disappoint[ing] the Christians.”<sup>79</sup> Even if the two aims were not necessarily incompatible, they were both calculated according to an arithmetic of prestige, the imbalance of which rendered each objective essential but unattainable.

The Syrian lands, Gouraud told *La dépêche coloniale* in early 1922, could be compared to “a young daughter that France might have had after the war.”<sup>80</sup> Because France “already had multiple children,” in this parental metaphor for empire, Gouraud acknowledged that the nation might not have felt “particular joy” upon the arrival of another potential economic and political burden. Yet seeing the child’s robust health and bright future, France would “take her resolutely by the hand to lead her to her destiny.” With this “sentiment of the mother of a family,” the

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<sup>76</sup> Andrew and Kanya-Forstner, *Climax of French Imperial Expansion*; Thomas, *French Empire between the Wars*

<sup>77</sup> AMAE Fonds Gouraud, 399 PAAP 78, Sub-Folder Presse June 1922. Auguste Gauvain, “La France en Syrie,” *Journal des Débats*, 25 June 1922.

<sup>78</sup> Auguste Gauvain, “La France en Syrie,” *Journal des Débats*, 3 July 1922.

<sup>79</sup> Auguste Gauvain, “La France en Syrie,” *Journal des Débats*, 21 April 1923.

<sup>80</sup> AMAE Fonds Gouraud 399 PAAP 78. *La dépêche coloniale et maritime*, “L’action de la France en Syrie – Déclarations du Général Gouraud, 5 April 1922.

French government was obliged to take on the “lovely and glorious charge” of managing Syria and Lebanon according to the “sacred mission of civilization” conferred upon it by the League of Nations.<sup>81</sup> While the metaphor of colonies (and colonial populations) as childlike wards of European guardianship was not unique to the new mandate territories, the status of the latter within France’s imperial family was more ambiguous and, by virtue of the mandate’s own charter, inherently aspirational. The notion of political guidance was filtered through a language of parentage, which not only infantilized the people of Lebanon and Syria and fixed their subordinate position in the French imperial imagination; this genealogical framework also served to bolster claims of ancient and enduring prestige as structures of colonial power. Imperial motherhood conveyed ownership as well as affection, and its familial logic justified this legacy of possession and protection.

*Between Mayselun and Mandate Lebanon*

At a bar in Beirut in the early 1920s, a celebrated French war hero named Walter arrives to great fanfare. His friend, a veteran of numerous campaigns across Greater Syria, observes a group of soldiers and local Lebanese women murmuring about his comrade’s exploits. “And at Mayselun, too?” overhears the narrator of this scene, the captain Lucien Domèvre. At the mention of Mayselun, which he calls one of the most “famous names of the Syrian epic,” Domèvre reflects on the contrast between the imagined object of these onlookers’ reverential awe and the hostile terrain where he had fought. As they marvel over the additional star on Walter’s military cross, given him by the High Commissioner General Henri Gouraud himself, Domèvre thinks of the “poor anonymous sentinel, his throat slit in the night” by nomads, brigands who will “forever trample his poor bones” buried in the sand of some desolate outpost.

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

When Walter finishes with his admirers and Domèvre awakens from his morbid reverie, he greets his comrade and poses a more pressing question, in anticipation of their evening in Beirut: “Where are we going for dinner?”

Neither Domèvre nor Walter fought at Mayselun, of course, for both are fictional characters in a 1924 novel by Pierre Benoit, an award-winning French writer and eventual member of the French Academy.<sup>82</sup> This mostly forgotten work of interwar pulp fiction illustrates the fractured quality of French imperial perceptions of the post-World War I Middle East. The novel takes place across three more or less concentric geographies: in Beirut (chiefly its cosmopolitan cafés, clubs, and restaurants, as well as the offices of the French military and colonial administration); in the surrounding mountains of Lebanon; and in the vaster, but vaguer, expanses of the Syrian desert, from Deir-ez-Zur to the Hauran, where Domèvre had served as soldier and intelligence officer. The latter experiences, though, are filtered mostly through recollection, recounted in the idiom of military intelligence: reports on shifting tribal alliances, battles and tactics, and, not least significantly, rival British inroads into the region.

The second realm of the novel’s plot, on the other hand, is experienced more proximately, beginning with its title: *La Châtelaine du Liban*, or “The Lady [of the Manor] of Lebanon.” It is at a castle in the Lebanese mountains, as well as amidst the urban enticements of Beirut, where Domèvre is seduced by the eponymous femme fatale. The “Lady of Lebanon” is actually a European aristocrat, who fancies herself a successor to the early nineteenth-century Orientalist traveler and adventurer Lady Hester Stanhope. The novel’s plot—and by implication France’s geopolitical status—turns on Domèvre’s inability to resist her exoticized charms, which

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<sup>82</sup> Pierre Benoit, *La Châtelaine du Liban* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1924). Jean-David Mizrahi suggests that Walter is modeled after a Captain Müller in the Armée du Levant. Mizrahi, *Génèse de l’État mandataire: Service des renseignements et bandes armées en Syrie et au Liban dans les années 1920* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2003), 268-269, 278-279.



she has also used to ply his British counterparts, local Arab chieftains, and even the Ottoman military commander of Lebanon during the First World War, the infamous Djemal Pasha.

It is not incidental that the Lady of the title—though in fact the British widow of a Russian count, dressed in Oriental attire—is of *Lebanon*. Her mountain chateau, which she calls *Kalaat-et-Tahara*, or the “Castle of Purity,” is a former stronghold, she informs Domèvre, of Frankish Crusaders, whose legend gave birth to the narrative of age-old Franco-Lebanese bonds. She points out, too, the traces of Orientalist travelers gone by—Lady Hester, Nerval, Lamartine, even Pierre Benoit’s own idol Maurice Barrès—as well as of the French expedition of 1860, memorialized as a mission to protect Lebanese Maronite Christians from Druze Muslim attacks. Whereas Lebanon, then, figures in the novel as the domain of history and myth, of femininity and purity, and Beirut as the site of male revelry and imperial rivalry, Syria functions as a backdrop of colonial violence, the territory of treacherous Bedouins and momentous battles, a region to be contained and controlled from a more pleasantly—albeit still perilously—Orientalized bastion of European authority.

The French victory at Khan Mayselun on July 24, 1920, heralded by Captain Walter’s fictional acolytes, was remembered in Arab nationalist accounts as the death knell of the first independent Arab state, Faysal’s short-lived Kingdom of Syria.<sup>83</sup> It thereby also became an icon of anti-colonial resistance and imperial duplicity. Faysal had sought to negotiate for an autonomous regime, but General Gouraud instead issued an ultimatum, and then dispatched troops to vanquish Faysal’s remaining army and march on Damascus, subjecting all of Greater Syria to the French colonial mandate that had been decreed among European powers at San

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<sup>83</sup> George Antonius, *The Arab Awakening: The Story of the Arab National Movement* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1939).

Remo months previously.<sup>84</sup> Just weeks later, some 75 kilometers west of what would become the Syro-Lebanese border, Gouraud proclaimed from Beirut the formation of another mandate territory: the new, geographically enlarged state of Greater Lebanon. Addressing the “*Grand-Libanais*,” Gouraud praised the state’s founding—under French tutelage and support—as the “consecration of a great and ancient friendship” and the benevolent consequence of France’s commitment to peace after the devastation of the Great War. Greater Lebanon, he asserted, was born out of the “generous blood of France” and the sacrifice of French soldiers—conveniently eliding the deaths of some two hundred fifty thousand Syrians and Lebanese to wartime famine and disease.<sup>85</sup> The two mandates, then, both had their founding moments: the one in violent conquest and occupation, the other in a pledge of autonomy and a promise of protection, a magnanimous reward opposed to a pacified rebellion.

If Mayselun, as a precursor to the Syrian mandate, became a martyr to incipient Arab nationhood, the founding of the Lebanese state under French mandate on September 1, 1920 has been celebrated—at least in certain, Maronite historiographies—as the culmination of a decades-long dream.<sup>86</sup> The new entity fulfilled historic aims of expanding the frontiers of historic Mount Lebanon to encompass Beirut, an extended coastline from Tripoli to Tyre, and the crucial grain-producing Beqa’ Valley. The achievement of the “Lebanese national idea,” as Carol Hakim and others have demonstrated, was not simply a Maronite success story, but rather a contingent product of circumstance and competing political models.<sup>87</sup> Nor was its creation preordained by a legacy of French patronage and protection of Lebanese Christians. The territorial limits of

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<sup>84</sup> Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate*; Khoury, *La France et l’Orient arabe*.

<sup>85</sup> AMAE, Fonds Gouraud, 399 PAAP 61, Minutes, Proclamation du Grand Liban, 1 September 1920.

<sup>86</sup> See Salibi, *House of Many Mansions*; Fawwaz Traboulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed (London: Pluto Press, 2012).

<sup>87</sup> Hakim, *Origins of the Lebanese National Idea*; Kaufman, *Reviving Phoenicia*; Meir Zamir, *The Formation of Modern Lebanon* (London: Croom Helm, 1985).

Mandate Lebanon paradoxically incorporated a larger proportion of Muslim and “minority” populations than those of the prior *mutasarrifiyya*, setting the stage for socially and politically divisive forms of sectarianism.<sup>88</sup> Colonial intervention was inextricably bound up in crafting what Max Weiss has called Lebanon’s “sectarian modernity.”<sup>89</sup> The discourse of a “great and ancient friendship” between France and Lebanon was a vital strand of this imperial web, one that concealed as well as created fissures within the ideological edifice of postwar empire.

The formation of Greater Lebanon entailed not only questions of delineating borders and debating national identity. It was also premised on the *affective* conditions of possibility that marked this not-quite-colonial relationship. Lebanon and Syria—as well as France itself—were embedded in an imperial matrix that cast its reach both beyond the boundaries accorded by the League of Nations and more deeply into realms of sentiment, tracing genealogies of affection and signs of filial devotion. French mandate authority—its ostensibly non-colonial legitimacy already suspect—was superimposed on an even more inchoate domain of *la France du Levant*.<sup>90</sup> This abstract designation imagined a geographically ambiguous, imperially idealized expanse of the Near East, defined by an enduring hegemony of French cultural influence, economic interests, and affective connection. And the Lebanese were deemed the veritable *Français du Levant*. Resolving the tensions within this imperial fantasy mandated more than drawing lines on a map. It also required reconciling an untenable set of propositions: that the Levant of Lebanon and Syria could be at once French and colonial, inhabited by both inferior Arabs and privileged near-Frenchmen, a site of protection as well as pacification.

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<sup>88</sup> Benjamin White, *The Emergence of Minorities in the Middle East: The Politics of Community in French Mandate Syria* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011).

<sup>89</sup> Max Weiss, *In the Shadow of Sectarianism: Law, Shi‘ism, and the Making of Modern Lebanon* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010).

<sup>90</sup> Vincent Cloarec, “La France du Levant ou la spécificité impériale française au début du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle,” *Revue française d’histoire d’outre-mer* 83, no. 313 (1996): 3-32. See also Etienne Lamy, *La France du Levant* (Paris: Plon-Nourrit et Cie, 1900).

The juxtaposition of these two events in the summer of 1920—the battle at Mayselun and the proclamation of Greater Lebanon—offers insight not only into the divergent colonial trajectories of Syria and Lebanon, as well as their underlying mythologies. It also exposes a fundamental division within the French imperial mindset, a dissonance between Orientalist notions of antipathy and allure, Arab enmity and Lebanese amity. This disjuncture was externalized onto an antagonistic, backward, and intractable Syria, and consolidated within a purportedly more civilized Lebanon, considered almost—but not quite—an integral part of France itself. If Syria signified the terrain of Captain Walter’s military expeditions and Domèvre’s intelligence gathering, then the feminized world of “the Lady of Lebanon” included the cosmopolitan pleasures of Beirut as well as the sentimental history of the Mountain. Syria was configured as a terrain of rebellion and discontent, to be pacified through colonial violence and repression. Lebanon was heralded—both before the Great War and upon assumption of the mandate—as a loyal “younger sister” of France, grateful for French intervention, amiably and easily colonized, and compensated with national autonomy and supportive alliance.

The French victory at Mayselun marked not the absolute conquest of Syria, but only the opening salvo of a protracted counter-insurgency campaign. Likewise, the creation of Greater Lebanon neither immediately nor irrevocably established a stable zone of pro-French sympathy. Both imperial formations required ideological and discursive labor, in addition to military and material investment, to maintain their particular status. The work of Michael Provence and Elizabeth Thompson has shown how colonial practices assumed both aggressive disciplinary forms—urban bombardment, summary executions, and the razing of villages—and softer, more “maternal” policies of social welfare.<sup>91</sup> As Thompson emphasizes, Syria and Lebanon must be

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<sup>91</sup> Michael Provence, *The Great Syrian Revolt and the Rise of Arab Nationalism* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005); Thompson, *Colonial Citizens*.

considered within the same framework of imperial governance. Yet the division between the two was ideological as well as political, discursive as well as administrative, and balanced between techniques of divide-and-rule and presuppositions of Orientalist knowledge. Lebanon and Syria were not only colonial states; they were also imperial symbols.

Days before the battle of Mayselun, and just over a month before Gouraud announced the formation of Greater Lebanon, his deputy Robert de Caix gave voice to a common belief in Lebanese exceptionalism. Lebanon, he averred, “rightly deems itself more advanced, more ‘westernized’ than the rest of Syria.”<sup>92</sup> This idea had prevailed at least since the mythologized French intervention of 1860 had isolated the autonomous *mutasarrifiyya* of Mount Lebanon under an informal French protectorate. A conviction in what de Caix referred to as “Lebanon’s traditions of solidarity with France” had been consistently invoked both to justify and to expand economic, religious, and cultural initiatives in the years before the Great War.<sup>93</sup> The relationship between these endeavors and the affective logics of Franco-Lebanese alliance, though, was not as straightforward as contemporaries presumed. Languages of mutual affection could not be harnessed consistently toward colonial aims. When de Caix proclaimed that Lebanon could be “largely Frenchified,” he was reinforcing a fragile imperial ideology.<sup>94</sup> In July 1921, Gouraud likewise declared that Lebanon “continues to be Frenchified much more willingly” and indeed “evolves in a different manner than Muslim Syria.”<sup>95</sup> The processual character of these statements hints at an essential vulnerability: if Lebanon was already robustly French, why did it need further “Frenchification?” More disturbingly, what would happen if it did *not* continue to be Frenchified? Lebanon represented what one French naval officer referred to as an “intellectual

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<sup>92</sup> CADN, Fonds Cabinet politique, 1 SL/1/V 1563, Robert de Caix, Note sur l’organisation de la Syrie sous mandat, 17 July 1920.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> AMAE, Fonds Levant 50 CPCOM 126, Haut Commissariat to MAE, 18 July 1921.

and moral fiefdom”<sup>96</sup>—to say nothing of a political base—within Greater Syria; its ties to France needed to be upheld less to protect Maronite Christians from Arab Muslim aggression than to maintain the foundational hierarchies and civilizing impetus of French colonialism.

At a speech in Lyon in early 1923, after he had returned from his service as High Commissioner, Gouraud recalled the battle at Khan Mayselun as a turning point in France’s approach to its Middle Eastern mandates. Thereafter, he remarked, “far from practicing an imperialist policy of colonization, we applied the mandate before it was even recognized.”<sup>97</sup> What is noteworthy is not only the distinction Gouraud supposes between colonialism and the mandate system, a tension that was persistently contested and negotiated in Geneva, but also what immediately followed Mayselun.<sup>98</sup> In Syria, as the work of Provence and others demonstrates, the conquest of Damascus marked only the beginning of a brutal campaign of counter-insurgency, which violently suppressed revolts and thereby only further fueled anti-colonial sentiment.<sup>99</sup> Lebanon, while not without episodes of unrest, was comparatively more peaceful—and was also protected as such. After several delegates in the Lebanese representative assembly defected to Faisal, Gouraud threatened “terrible reprisals” by aerial bombardment if any French or Christians were “massacred.” In the same breath, he promised France’s support for “the Lebanese homeland,” stressing that its goal was *not* to colonize, yet urging deference to

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<sup>96</sup> CADN, Fonds Cabinet Politique, 1/SL/1/V 1563, Note Commandant Cournoy, 28 April 1921.

<sup>97</sup> AMAE, Fonds Gouraud, 399 PAAP 58, Allocution à Lyon, Banquet Association Industrielle, Commerciale et Agricole, 3 February 1923.

<sup>98</sup> Susan Pedersen, *The Guardians: The League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

<sup>99</sup> James Gelvin, *Divided Loyalties: Nationalism and Mass Politics in Syria at the Close of Empire* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1998); Provence, *Great Syrian Revolt*; Mizrahi, *Génèse de l’Etat mandataire*; Neep, *Occupying Syria under the French Mandate: Insurgency, Space, and State Formation* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Reem Bailony, “Transnational Rebellion: The Syrian Revolt of 1925-1927” (PhD diss., University of California-Los Angeles, 2015).

“generous, active, and civilizing France.”<sup>100</sup> The France that his remarks conjured was at once protective and aggressive, supportive and superior.

Even before and continuing after the proclamation of September 1<sup>st</sup>, Gouraud embarked on a sort of victory tour through Mount Lebanon. In Zahlé in August, he admitted that—like the journalist Maurice Muret—while he had known of “Lebanon’s attachment to France” before he arrived in the country eight months earlier, it was only when he “entered the mountain that [his] heart fully felt what only [he] had only understood intellectually.”<sup>101</sup> His avowal linked the ideological and the affective, bolstering a sense of intimate affinity between France and Lebanon. Press reports of the September 1<sup>st</sup> celebration noted cries of “*Vive la France!*” and observed that Gouraud was welcomed with garlands of flowers and throngs of celebrants. The High Commissioner’s office described how villagers descended from the mountains, quoting one who claimed that the celebration attested to a general spirit of “enthusiasm and attachment to France,” grounded in deeply rooted emotional appreciation.<sup>102</sup> Even a year later, on the anniversary of the founding of Greater Lebanon, the mandate press service underscored the role of “Mother France, who has protected and will always protect” the Lebanese.<sup>103</sup> And the Francophone daily of record in Beirut, *Le Réveil*, invoked this popular reception as evidence of Lebanon’s “genuine support for France’s Mandate,” praising Gouraud as “this glorious arm [a not-so-subtle reference to the general’s loss of a limb at Verdun] and brave heart of France” and pledging “the unbreakable attachment of the Lebanese to France.”<sup>104</sup> This proliferation of

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<sup>100</sup> AMAE, Fonds Gouraud, 399 PAAP 61, Affaires des conseillers administratifs du Liban, undated.

<sup>101</sup> AMAE, Fonds Gouraud, 399 PAAP 61, Discours Gouraud à Zahlé, 3 August 1920.

<sup>102</sup> AMAE, Fonds Gouraud, 399 PAAP 61, Haut Commissariat Secrétaire Général – Presse –Expansion française (Beyrouth), “Autour de la Proclamation du Grand Liban,” 6 September 1920.

<sup>103</sup> CADN, Petit fonds politiques/administratifs, 1/SL/4 2431, “L’anniversaire de la Fête du Grand Liban au Sandjak du Liban Nord et à Akkar,” *Ar-rakib*, 8 September 1921.

<sup>104</sup> AMAE, Fonds Gouraud, 399 PAAP 61, Alexandre Coury, “Le Général Gouraud au Nord du Liban,” *Le Réveil*, 27 September 1921.

affective discourses signified not the stability of sentimental allegiance, but its centrality in preserving a conviction in colonial benevolence.

It is not that the Lebanese were dissatisfied with the decision to allocate an expanded state to French supervision. The people of Mount Lebanon had been figuratively and literally relieved by French and British intervention toward the end of the First World War, after a famine had decimated the region's population. This famine, of course, had been caused not only by environmental catastrophe and Ottoman occupation, but perhaps even more proximately by a French and British blockade of the eastern Mediterranean. As Simon Jackson and Graham Pitts have argued, this wartime experience rendered Lebanese more amenable both to postwar provisioning and, not uncoincidentally, to French colonial authority.<sup>105</sup> Yet France's refusal to intervene throughout the war had also engendered palpable resentment, which did not necessarily dissipate with the founding of Greater Lebanon, nor dissolve into a narrative of pro-French allegiance. The myth of enduring Lebanese loyalty needed to be reconstituted, not only within expanded geographical confines, but also through a revitalized affective discourse, one in which languages of martyrdom could be translated into sentiments of gratitude and devotion.

When Alfred Khoury referred to the “martyr of Lebanon” at the January 1919 *Congrès français de Syrie* in Marseille, he juxtaposed Lebanon's wartime sufferings with praise for France as its “age-old protector.”<sup>106</sup> Three years later, he appealed to High Commissioner Gouraud as “the protector and the father” of Lebanon, explicitly linking the filial and the colonial in language that flattered—but also flattened—a complex relationship.<sup>107</sup> The “Lady of

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<sup>105</sup> Graham Auman Pitts, “Fallow Fields: Famine and the Making of Lebanon” (PhD diss., Georgetown University, 2016); Simon Jackson, “Transformative Relief: Imperial Humanitarianism and Mandatory Development in Syria-Lebanon, 1915–1925,” *Humanity* vol. 8, no. 2 (Summer 2017).

<sup>106</sup> AMAE, Fonds Levant, 50 CPCOM 61, Alfred Coury, “Le Martyre du Liban: Sanctions et réparations,” *Congrès français de Syrie*, 5 January 1919.

<sup>107</sup> AMAE, Fonds Gouraud, 399 PAAP 60, A. Khouri [sic] to Gouraud, 10 December 1922.



Lebanon” would have to be protected, if also mistrusted. The events at Mayselun and in Beirut in the summer of 1920 did more than delineate mandates for colonial control. They also exposed an inherent friction within conceptions of the French presence in Syria and Lebanon. Distinctions of friend and foe shaped imperatives of colonial violence and ideological justification, co-existing not as coherent or complementary facets of empire, but as convenient fictions obscuring a troubled imperial imagination.

*Conclusion: Exposing Colonialism*

Twelve years after the *Congrès français de Syrie*, after the postwar peace talks had allocated Lebanon and Syria to a French mandate, after the French administration had formalized the creation of Greater Lebanon, and after a revolt in rural Syrian provinces flared and was crushed, another, grander colonial conference took place in Paris. At the 1931 Colonial Exposition, Lebanon and Syria still occupied an ambiguously imperial position. The authors of the “French policy in the Levant” memorandum in November 1918 had debated whether the newly liberated Ottoman territories should be considered colonies, provinces of France, or protectorates. A decade after a series of international accords had finalized their status as League of Nations mandates, the organizers of the much-heralded Paris exhibition faced a similar conundrum. To their repeated requests to include Syria and Lebanon in the main exposition, French mandate administrators cautiously responded that this designation risked provoking anti-colonial sensitivities.<sup>108</sup> The rationale of the League of Nations mandate system, after all, was that old colonial models of exploitation and occupation had been superseded by a regime of guidance toward self-governance. How, then, to celebrate the official French role in Syria and

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<sup>108</sup> In the debate over Syria and Lebanon’s participation in an earlier colonial exposition in Marseille, the High Commissioner’s office cited the difficulties posed by the “amour-propre and extreme sensitivity of the Lebanese and Syrian milieux,” as well as their “sharp particularism.” AMAE 50 CPCOM 109, Haut Commissaire to MAE, 3 March 1921.

Lebanon, two realms of affective empire central to a mythology of imperial prestige, yet nominally not under colonial purview? The question exposed the tensions that had from the outset bedeviled the twinned logics of France's informal protectorate over Lebanon and claims to hegemony across Syria. If these two aims could not be reconciled, either ideologically or on the ground, then presenting French intervention in the Near East within a framework of colonial achievement belied the unstable foundation on which *la France du Levant* was based.

The compromise solution for the Paris exposition sought to obscure the ambiguity of the region's particular colonial status through a generalized Orientalist tableau. Mandate officials planned a theme of "ancient Arabia, modern Europe" for the Syrian-Lebanese pavillion, presenting "traditional industries" of the region alongside their "adaptation to modern technique."<sup>109</sup> Among the proposed juxtapositions were "former equipment and modern equipment...old crafts, [and] machines...[a] caravan of camels, [and a] caravan of automobiles."<sup>110</sup> While Europe advanced and modernized the territory, the exhibit implied, indigenous practices remained trapped in tradition. Yet it was also not too long ago that the French silk firm Veuve Guerin et Fils had relied on such a caravan of camels precisely to haul its "modern equipment" up to the mountains to its factory site in Qraiye.<sup>111</sup> The exposition in Vincennes sought to reenact a version of this hybrid experience, deploying the symbol of Orientalism to mark France's advanced status as well as its commitment to achieving higher levels of industry and civilization.

The exposition's Lebanese section likewise sought to distinguish European imperial modernity from colonial backwardness. In so doing, it downplayed Lebanon's particular familial

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<sup>109</sup> CADN, 1 SL/1/V/1572, Haut-Commissariat, Avant Projet pour la participation des Etats du Levant sous Mandat Français à l'Exposition Coloniale de Paris, 1931, 6 April 1929.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>111</sup> See chapter two.

quality in the French imperial imagination in favor of the generic allure of the Levant. Indeed, a diorama for the newly declared (but still colonial) Lebanese republic would feature quintessential elements of the Orientalist tradition: “an old woman reading and smoking, young girls embroidering on a loom...an old man smoking a narghileh, kneeling on cushions.”<sup>112</sup> A “reproduction of a Lebanese café” would reenact traditional cultural practices, from food and drink to music and dance.<sup>113</sup> Attesting to the indistinctiveness of such scenes, the French mandate’s Antiquities Service offered “some very well done native heads in painted plaster” already in its possession.<sup>114</sup> Just as an indiscriminately indigenous Arab figurine would suffice for this simulacrum of the Near East, the idealized exceptionality of French bonds with Lebanon—as well as the political novelty of mandate rule—was subordinated to a tangible depiction of difference. Languages of affection were translated into representations of Oriental essence and manifestations of European colonial hierarchy, in an effort to render the ambiguity of not-quite-colonial Franco-Lebanese relations into a comprehensible object of imperial spectatorship and superiority.

If the Levant mandates did not participate in the metropolitan celebration of empire, however—as remained uncertain up to the months preceding the exposition’s opening—then they would constitute the only region “where French influence is predominant” not to have responded to the invitation.<sup>115</sup> Their absence would assuredly confuse the French public, planners worried, for whom France’s colonies, protectorates, and mandates should be aligned in

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<sup>112</sup> CADN 1 SL/1/V/1568, C.L. Brossé, Inspecteur de la Service des Antiquités, Avant projet pour la participation des Etats du Levant sous Mandat français à l’Exposition coloniale de Paris 1931, 6 April 1929.

<sup>113</sup> CADN 1 SL/1/V/1572, Sous-secrétaire d’Etat des Affaires économiques to Délégué du Haut-Commissaire auprès de la République libanaise, 13 December 1929.

<sup>114</sup> CADN 1 SL/1/V/1568, C.L. Brossé, Inspecteur de la Service des Antiquités, Avant projet pour la participation des Etats du Levant sous Mandat français à l’Exposition coloniale de Paris 1931, 6 April 1929.

<sup>115</sup> AMAE 50 CPCOM 342, Union Economique de Syrie to MAE, 21 January 1929.

testament to imperial glory, if not colonial gratitude.<sup>116</sup> The French Foreign Ministry underscored its particular contribution in and connection to the Levant, emphasizing its obligation to “lay before the civilized world the results of its long, persistent, and selfless action in the Orient.”<sup>117</sup> The purpose, then, was to highlight the “role that the French have played in the Levant through history” as well as the “progress accomplished under France’s authority,” so as to demonstrate—to indigenous inhabitants as well as French viewers—that “France remains loyal to its civilizing tradition.”<sup>118</sup> Fidelity to a legacy of influence and prestige impelled the inclusion of Syria and Lebanon in the 1931 Colonial Exposition, even as the means of conveying these affective achievements were confined to the stock-in-trade of imperial propaganda: Orientalist representations of plaster-cast natives, displays of exotic wares and customs, arranged in one station among many along a tour of empire through the Vincennes woods. In its lack of precision, the replication of a *France du Levant* proved incapable of reproducing the Levant in France. Nor could narratives of particular Franco-Lebanese protection ultimately resolve the contradiction of incorporating a purportedly non-colonial territory into an idealized reenactment of interwar colonialism.

In the brief window between the debates immediately after the Great War and the proclamation of Greater Lebanon on 1 September 1920, the mythology of France’s affective regime in the Levant—grounded in beliefs of Lebanese loyalty but extending ambiguously across Syria—was fractured at the very moment of its colonial consolidation. Tensions between imperial ideology and colonial aspirations rendered the simultaneous projects of protection and prestige equally untenable. Attempts to resolve this tension sought to redouble ideological

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<sup>116</sup> Directeur de l’Office des Etats du Levant sous Mandat français Pierre-Alype to Haut Commissaire, Exposition 1931 – Publications, 22 February 1930.

<sup>117</sup> CADN 1 SL/1/V/1572, MAE to Haut Commissaire Ponsot, 2 February 1929.

<sup>118</sup> CADN 1 SL/1/V/1568, Directeur de l’Office des Etats du Levant sous Mandat français Pierre-Alype to Haut Commissaire, Exposition 1931 – Programme Général, 31 January 1930.

investment in Lebanon as the venerable core of the French Levant, even as commentators, activists, and officials blurred the linguistic if not political delineation between the two, claiming universal affection as well as particular affinities. A glorified Greater Lebanon was at once distinguished from yet embedded within a Syria that French forces sought to colonize and control, militarily as well as discursively. This tactic aimed to preserve French imperial prestige alongside its colonial power by simultaneously eliding and emphasizing the religious aspects of Lebanese particularity: while assurances of France's historic protection of Lebanon co-existed with claims to Muslim affection, Lebanon's status as a Christian stronghold was reaffirmed in juxtaposition to the repression of anti-colonial revolts and notions of Muslim hostility across Greater Syria. A split colonial consciousness isolated Lebanon as a privileged member of the French imperial family, even as both mandate and empire expanded to encompass larger populations of Muslims. The incompatibility of imperial fantasy and colonial ambitions in the Near East, no longer confined to an abstract discursive realm, was built into the very ideological structures of this novel form of colonial rule. The manifestations of empire at the 1931 Colonial Exposition only accentuated the essential incongruity between Lebanon's particular affinity and an impulse toward colonial dominance, rehearsed for public consumption without reference to either Lebanese sisterhood or the violence of Syrian counter-insurgency. Mandate authority, from this perspective, appeared not only politically illegitimate, but also imperially incoherent. Its underlying ambiguity created a French imperial formation unevenly divided between logics of protection and pacification, affective influence and the unsustainable allure of empire.

## CONCLUSION

When Maurice Barrès called France the “protector of Lebanon” in the summer of 1914, he could not have known that a world war, a devastating famine, and a French blockade would render calls for this protective role literal as well as urgent. Instead, France’s fleet remained anchored in the eastern Mediterranean, exacerbating rather than relieving Lebanese distress. As Antoine Eddé pointed out with dismay from Arwad Island, the French seemed to be “abandoning” the very people of Lebanon whom it had pledged to protect. The “Franco-Lebanese love” that Eddé had professed in volunteering to sacrifice his life for “Mother France” appeared not only insufficient to mount a military intervention; by marking the Lebanese as potentially traitorous subjects of the Ottoman Empire, it also endangered their lives and revealed the price of their loyalties. Yet even after the death of nearly a third of Lebanon’s population—and the executions of some two-dozen Lebanese and Syrian notables—a legacy of affection between France and Lebanon lived on. Even—or, perhaps counterintuitively, *especially*—once Lebanon achieved a particular colonial status after the First World War, geographically enlarged and distinguished from neighboring Syria, a narrative of historic Franco-Lebanese bonds justified its exceptional position within the Levant. A discourse of protection cultivated over the preceding decades proved at once durable and malleable, able to be redirected toward distinct ends, but ultimately consolidated as the basis for a unique form of coloniality.

By this unique form of coloniality, I am not referring solely to the mandate system imposed on the former Ottoman territories of the Middle East. Within this new political arrangement, Lebanon’s position marked a rupture as well as a continuity within the French imperial experience. Newly entered into the ranks of France’s expanding empire—and newly aggrandized with expanded boundaries—Lebanon had also long figured as a privileged member

of the metaphorical French imperial family, as a site for self-flattering notions of French maternal benevolence and paternal prestige. Notwithstanding nominal Ottoman sovereignty, French claims echoed across the Mediterranean, creating a self-sustaining discourse of moral if not political authority. The “invisible protectorate” that France claimed after the memorialized intervention of 1860 was neither formal nor, by the outbreak of the Great War, even particularly effective. It was, rather, a product of discursive construction and fantasy, repeated across texts and imagined within an imperial consciousness. This vision presented Lebanon as the symbolic core of an idealized *France du Levant*, a figmentary entity that reflected and inspired dreams of French influence throughout former Ottoman domains.

Lebanon’s particularity in this schema was grounded not simply in religious identity, but in an understanding of history and civilization that emphasized connection to France and elided internal diversity and division. A focus on Christian—and especially Maronite—Lebanon was made to stand in for the region’s complex politics of religion and sect, even as a narrative of sectarianism itself was produced in part through imperial involvement.<sup>1</sup> The imagined French Levant was neither Christian nor Muslim, but a reflection of hierarchies of benevolence and superiority. France figured within this mirage of imperial hubris simultaneously as friend to Christians and as sovereign over Muslims. This dual conviction in turn enabled a divergence in colonial policy: as mandate Lebanon was lauded for its friendship with France, rewarded with expanded frontiers and nominal autonomy, Syria was bombarded into submission, its hostile “banditry” punished and its anti-colonial nationalism rejected.<sup>2</sup> Religion was a product rather than merely a cause of France’s approach to its colonial mandates. The politics of sectarianism

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<sup>1</sup> Ussama Makdisi, *The Culture of Sectarianism: Community, History, and Violence in Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Lebanon* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); Max Weiss, *In the Shadow of Sectarianism: Law, Shi’ism, and the Making of Modern Lebanon* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010).

<sup>2</sup> Michael Provence, *The Great Syrian Revolt and the Rise of Arab Nationalism* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005).

obliged a simpler equation, one that categorized Lebanon as pacified ally and Syria as potentially hostile threat. Crusading language was necessary but not sufficient for a framework of religious confrontation; it also required investment in a discourse of prestige. Protection, in the political sphere of mandate colonialism, mandated aggression as well as affection.

Imperial ideologies of protection between France and Lebanon were advanced not only by celebrated authors like Barrès and Etienne Lamy, and earlier Orientalists like Alphonse de Lamartine and Gérard de Nerval. Politicians like Etienne Flandin, industrialists like Charles Guerin, and historians like François Charles-Roux articulated a sense of Lebanon's particularity within the French collective consciousness. A discourse of affection, however, proved too potent to be confined to elite commentators. Parents of children working in Guerin's factory invoked French civilization to challenge their daughters' abuse, and ordinary Lebanese men and women referenced notions of France's historical prominence to rebut insults or negotiate conflicts. Their own discursive strategies inscribed precepts of French imperial ideology within quotidian contexts of encounter. In literary, political, commercial, and industrial circles, this ideology prescribed an informal empire of interests and influence. Its manipulation through various social and cultural sites of contact, though, demonstrated that the premises of imperial fantasy—that affective bonds engendered gratitude as well as obligation, allegiance as well as esteem—were unstable and subject to negotiation.

For individuals like Marie El Khoury and Duabis Murr—subjected, respectively, to a Frenchman's attack and insults—the notion of French prestige could be invoked as well as repurposed. Appropriate conduct and respectability mattered more in these instances than abstract recitations of France's "age-old interests" and "traditional influence" in Lebanon. For these two individuals—not, by their own account, *protégés* of French justice—neither the legal



system of protection nor France's celebrated "Catholic protectorate" could be counted on to ensure their just treatment.<sup>3</sup> Rather, they appealed to the very standards of civilized behavior that French colonial advocates used to justify imperial hierarchies. Viewed up close and in situ, the values of interests and influence, prestige and protection, appeared less as a powerful currency of empire than as negotiable principles of interaction, imperial languages used to navigate contexts of everyday life. If this dynamic prevailed even before the onset of formal colonial sovereignty, as I have suggested, then the meaning of colonialism may be spread across more sites of encounter than a binary model—colonial or *not* colonial—allows. The not-*quite*-colonial inhaled between these two poles as well as across intimate scenes of contact and conflict, its very abstraction an essential attribute of what, after all, can never quite be pinned down, historically or by those, like Marie El Khoury or Duabis Murr, who experienced its effects.

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From the middle of the nineteenth century, this dissertation has argued, the informal protectorate over Mount Lebanon gave rise to an imperial ideology based on a myth of familial attachment and a conviction in French prestige. Envisioned as a natural sphere of French influence at the heart of an imagined *France du Levant*, this idealized terrain of mutual affection engendered a model of filial devotion and parental responsibility. The Franco-Lebanese relationship thus appeared to transcend colonial hierarchies, its power dynamics anchored in seemingly unimpeachable discourses of sentiment. The notion of a mandate to protect both

³ The studies of Julia Clancy-Smith, Mary Lewis, and Will Hanley have addressed how *protégés* and legal subjects employed the former strategy to navigate their social circumstances. Clancy-Smith, *Mediterraneans: North Africa and Europe in an Age of Migration, c. 1800-1900* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012); Lewis, *Divided Rule: Sovereignty and Empire in French Tunisia, 1881-1938* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013); Hanley, *Identifying with Nationality: Europeans, Ottomans, and Egyptians in Alexandria* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017).

informed and obscured a process of imperial formation, as an ambiguous conception of the French Levant at once took root in and expanded beyond an imagined Lebanese “citadel.”

The history of French involvement in Lebanon was not, as has often been implied, a coherent product of cultural, economic, and geopolitical interests, based on “traditional” channels of exchange. Even where these dynamics appeared to come together most centrally—at, for example, a French silk factory and orphanage complex in the heart of Mount Lebanon—a set of connections did not simply coalesce naturally or symbiotically. Rather, ordinary people were able to rework the meanings of protection, deploying the very ideas and vocabulary used to describe an intimate Franco-Lebanese connection. Languages of prestige and propriety provided the means to negotiate such encounters, advance imperial agendas, or contest France’s benevolent protectorate. These dynamics, international as well as interpersonal, facilitated the transition from France’s “invisible protectorate” over Lebanon to its official colonial mandate, providing insight into how an ideology of protection functioned at the level of the imperial and of the individual imagination.

In the French imperial mindset, logics of affection and protection inflected various perspectives: among politicians and policymakers, journalists and publicists, novelists and Orientalists, merchants and industrialists, and French and Lebanese men and women who encountered one another in contexts of supposed French interests and influence. Analyzing individual sites of interaction, the preceding chapters have demonstrated how a narrative of Franco-Lebanese attachment and imperial logics of protection were embedded and produced through instances of contact even before they were institutionalized through colonial structures.⁴

French and Lebanese alike deployed such protective idioms to diverse ends, from increasing silk

⁴ Elizabeth Thompson thoroughly investigates the latter phase in her seminal *Colonial Citizens*. Thompson, *Colonial Citizens: Republican Rights, Paternal Privilege, and Gender in French Syria and Lebanon* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013).

production to rebutting personal insults, from contesting industrial exploitation to demanding military intervention.

If the First World War marked a rupture in Franco-Lebanese ties, it was not only—or not even necessarily—in inaugurating a new colonial regime under League of Nations auspices. The trauma of war and famine in Lebanon—abetted by a French-led blockade of the eastern Mediterranean—called into question the very meaning of protection, forcing a recalibration of ideas of obligation and gratitude between loyal Lebanese and benevolent French. At the same time, the long-cultivated ambiguity of this protective regime, and of the precise contours of the French Levant, enabled colonial advocates to call for France’s extended presence across the Middle East. When Syrians revolted in the 1920s, their antagonism redoubled the conviction in Lebanon as a sanctified realm of the French imperial imagination, even as France’s response revealed a tendency toward repression rather than protection within the greater Levant. Discourses of ambiguity and particularity facilitated protective logics of sentimental attachment to Lebanon alongside colonial prerogative in Syria.

Ultimately, neither the fantasy of a *France du Levant*, a not-quite-colonial protectorate, nor an affective alliance with Lebanon could surmount the contradictions of their own making. At the very moment of Lebanon’s consolidation as a distinct entity, both within the Middle East and within France’s mandatory empire, the tensions of this ambiguously imperial formation became untenable. The territorially enlarged state of Greater Lebanon was proclaimed—by the French High Commissioner, no less—on September 1, 1920. A Lebanese “republic” was announced six years later, just as anti-colonial rebellion tore through Syria. And in 1931, Paris hosted a grandiose Colonial Exposition, a simulacrum of empire that presented a sanitized arrangement of France’s colonial universe. Syria and Lebanon were awkwardly included but

marginalized, the anti-colonial animosity of the former incongruously juxtaposed with the idealized affection of the latter. The transitional phase culminating in this anxious celebration of empire in the metropole, I suggest, captured the incompatibility of the imperial imagination with a colonial order that insisted on categorizing colonies, protectorates, and mandates. Even Lebanon, as a favored daughter, was unable to pledge colonial fealty to the ostensible benefit of Mother France. Deceptively continuous expressions of Franco-Lebanese affinity belied Lebanon's uneasy integration into the French imperial imagination. A seemingly straightforward alliance of interests and influence obscured the ambiguities of the Franco-Lebanese relationship, grounded in not-quite-colonial premises of affection, protection, and prestige.

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This dissertation has sought to contribute to bridging both temporal as well as spatial divides in historical approaches toward the Middle Eastern mandates: by relating a history across the caesura of the First World War and by at once zeroing in on specific sites of encounter, within the particular region of Beirut and Mount Lebanon, and broadening its perspective to the idea of the unmappable *France du Levant* within the French imperial imagination.<sup>5</sup> While I have argued that the Franco-Lebanese experience during the Great War did mark a rupture to affective ideologies of protection, it also attested to the continuity of a discourse of prestige, which not only endured through the travails of wartime, but also provided the (unstable) foundation for the French mandate over an expanded Greater Lebanon. The scale of a mandate to protect, I have suggested, shifted between this realm of colonial politics and an informal imperative expressed through imperial encounters, from a factory floor to a Frenchman's home, or from the base of wartime operations in the eastern Mediterranean to quotidian conflicts in Mount Lebanon.

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<sup>5</sup> These objectives echo the editors' call in a recent collection for possible directions of future research. Cyrus Schayegh and Andrew Arsan, eds., *The Routledge Handbook of the History of the Middle East Mandates* (New York: Routledge, 2015).

Combined, these shifts of scale and temporal linkages suggest that “the colonial” does not abide by physical or literal boundaries. Its meaning, uncertain and unstable, has proven as boundless as its lingering effects.

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